

tHE bIG pICTURE

(eDgE Of dArKNesS)

C O N T E N T S

Introduction - Is that a MAC Knife in your pocket....

Canopy - Mysterious resource world

OP's background - Character generation, the consequences

EbCom - The SLA Matrix and Progress

Never mind the pig - Cushai and Nealips (read on McDuff....)

SLA 'sub-companies' - What, who and why....

Finding a job - A devious White and an apocalyptic Yellow

Equipment - Power Whip, Relic Armour and new BOSH

Soft companies - BloodBurn, Exael and Here-Oh

The publishers, writers, editors and cohorts of production staff (me), do not always agree with the views and opinions contained within their publication (schizophrenia rules.....) We didn't do it and we don't know who did, we weren't even there at the time; it's not our fault and we can't be held responsible for anything. All SLA Industries trademarks and copyrights are used without permission, and such use should not imply endorsement by SLA Industries (we're not worthy....).

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We love getting stuff about Progress, we are in dire need of artwork, and will try to include

anything we think sensible (or have room for) in **The Big Picture**.

There are no subscription rates as it is doubtful as to how long we will be in production. If you want to support us, **buy it**; tell your friends to buy it. Tell your local shop/club to stock it.

All cheques for stuff from us should be made payable to M. Bantleman, NOT Chocolate Frog.

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Unless specifically credited to an author, all material in The Big Picture is written by Max Bantleman.

B a c k C o v e r

Progress is movement.

Stay still and you stagnate.

Death overtakes you in a tidal wave.

Go with the flow.

Mr. Slayer keeps us afloat.

Without him we would soon drown.

in an ocean of mediocre chaos.

Sink or swim?

2 0 0 1 – P D F C o n v e r s i o n

The seventh issue of tHE bIG pICTURE was produced just after GenCon 1996.

It was the last issue to include the involvement of Sarah Harris, and she is still missed ☺

Contribution from Vincent Mottier, good stuff Vincent.

Issue seven came out at the same time I got an e-mail address, and started an on and off relationship with the SLA-I. I'm still not convinced that the only place for 'unofficial' SLA material is the web / net, and I'm sure some of my feelings bled through in to TBP.

Issue seven also has one of my top three pieces: CyNet and the Tomb, the Mort Matrix.

Max Bantleman, 2001.

INTRODUCTION

Issue seven? Wow! This is further than Flames of Albion got! Must be doing something right.

The Big Picture costs £3 direct from us (inc. P&P), all six back issues are available for the same laughably low price. Please pay by postal order or cheque made payable to M. Bantleman.

Well, what's been happening? Let's see....

Euro Gen-Con '96 has been and gone with the usual showing from games companies eager to stir up some interest in their products (not).

Max and Glenn went; saw that, did this, wore the tee-shirt and got far too drunk for anyone's good.

So why isn't Max writing this? Well, basically, he can't think of anything to say about it, (*my head still hurts....*) apart from thanking those that played the demo game and those that dug deep for **The Big Picture**.

(*well there is more, but I need to have therapy to get my memory back before I can accurately comment on anything.*)

We were going to make a serious effort to get issue seven out in time for Gen-Con, but it never quite happened, never mind. Apparently, issue eight will be an altogether speedier affair, appearing by Christmas.

The demo games went well, although Max's efforts to 'wing it' in a couple of them nearly went pear shaped. (80% casualty rate? And one 0%! What were you guys doing!)

Anyway.

We now have an Email address!! Utterly unbelievable!

(*I'm still in shock and have my doubts as to whether it is all worth it....*)

Email for **tHE bIG pICTURE** can be sent to:

bantleman@demon.co.uk

The discussions about the validity of the net for SLA stuff goes on, being fuelled by the additions of stuff from the original writers. Freddy, Anne, Jared, uncle tom cobbly and all,

can all be found chipping in their views on the SLA web.

Snippets of background appear to be eating away at 'the truth'. I wonder who will be the first to empty the can?

Regular readers of **The Big Picture** will already be well aware of Max's suspicions (*nicely put, subtle....*) over the usefulness of the Internet as far as breathing life in to SLA goes.

Not everyone has the time, or the inclination, to keep up with the latest developments, which can only be found on the net. The vast majority of SLA gamers, both GM's and players alike, would prefer it if there was more support material in the form of published stuff, like sourcebooks and scenarios, campaigns or expansions. As Jageeda are obviously going to take some time finding their feet and so will not be producing any of this stuff for quite a while, one of the logical ways for SLA fans to keep in touch and keep SLA breathing, is through the net.

All well and good. But (says Max) there is no need for the net to be the only place where the expansion and revival of SLA Industries can take place. And the problem seems to be that most net users are content to limit their support of SLA Industries to posting on the net.

It is true that we hardly get anything sent to us by net users, and yes, we do have less than a handful of buyers from the net, but I am more optimistic than Max. I believe this will change as 'official' stuff becomes more akin to rocking horse pooh.

So, prove me right. Write something for **The Big Picture**, send it in and while you're at it, tell us what you think about SLA Industries, has it got a future, and if so, in what form?

As an aside, one of the ideas I am working on is commissioned pieces. That is, if you run SLA Industries but are a bit pushed for either ideas or time, why not give me the bones of a scenario/bpn and let me write it for you. Write to me at **The Big Picture** address for further details.

Carnage seems to have taken on a life of it's own, with Max using it as his tag for demo and participation games; watch out for them at

conventions, shows and shops. If you want them to run a participation game at a con or shop, drop us a line for further details.

We have had almost no response to our request for artwork, which is hardly surprising as we cannot pay for anything (yet....). The few artists we have spoken to have been helpful and encouraging, maybe in the near future we will have more exciting looking issues, but for now 'text only' rules.

Speaking of rules (*very tenuous*), we will continue to answer any rules questions you may have, but we must stress (again) that we have nothing to do with anyone 'official', and our opinions are just that; opinions

Now on to a slightly sadder subject.

This will be the last issue of **The Big Picture** I will be involved with. From here on in Max is on his own. Be nice to him. Sometimes he is almost human (*...must have been asleep....*) and he deserves your continued support and help in making **The Big Picture** even more of a success.

I will be contributing via Max's Email address, and hopefully I will still be producing the odd supplement or ten.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those who have sent me 'stuff' over the past two years, especially those who have helped me develop my ideas through playing and (mainly) constructive criticism through the post.

To all those who are concerned about issues of 'stealing' stuff for The Big Picture; if you are not big hearted enough to let us 'borrow' artwork, then you do not deserve the support and work we have put in over the past two years. So there.

This issue of **The Big Picture** has been brought to you by the letter "9" and the number "M".
Test For Echo (S-S-S-S).

(eDgE Of dArKNesS)

Living Colour recorded one of my favourite songs of all time; from their 'Time's Up' album:

This Is The Life (V. Reid).

In another life
you might have been a genius
In another life
you might have been a star
In another life
you face might have been perfect
In another life
you'd drive a better car

In another life
all your jokes are funny
In another life
your heart is free from fear
In another life
you make a lot of money
In another life
everything is clear

In another life
you're always the hero
In another life
you always win the game
In another life
no one ever cheats you
In another life
You never have to change

In another life
your friends never desert you
In another life
You never have to cry
In another life
no one ever hurts you
In another life
your loved-ones never die

But this is the life you have
this is the life

In another life
you're always the victim
In another life
you're always the thief
In another life
you are always lonely
In another life
there is no relief

In your real life
treat it like it's special
In your real life
try to be more kind
In your real life
Think of those that love you
In this real life
try to be less blind

This is the life you have

CANOPY

Inspired By Tony Maguire

Canopy has been inspired by Tony Maguire, who originally mentioned the idea to me back in April (I think), and thanks must go to him for giving me free reign with his original concept. I have tried to move it away from a conflict based background piece, and the BPN ideas at the end are meant to concentrate on exploration.

To citizens of Mort the concept and existence of Canopy seems like a dream paradise, a cross between a theme park and an 'old world paradise'. The darker secrets behind SLA's support and exploitation of the world have been hinted at, the details are left for you to fit to your own Progress environment.

In filling out Canopy I have drawn on many sources of 'inspiration' and I make no apology for any similarities between Canopy and any one of a thousand similar worlds (*that's telling them*).

"Canopy exists despite all of the worst excesses of SLA and those who work for her. An unspoiled pool of loveliness and hope in the desert of the technocracy that is the World of Progress."

Malice, Necanthrope, Octagon, Mort 800 SD.

"I have only been to canopy once. I am still haunted by the dreams, even as I am sustained by the memories that cleanse my mind as I wade through the filth of Mort."

Ben Fisher, Third Eye News, excerpt from un-broadcast biography, Mort 900 SD.

Canopy lies deep in the fourth sector of the Hyld System. It is classed as a resource world and access is governed by SLA Industries. Clearance for entry to Canopy must come from Head Office, and often takes the form of a Platinum BPN. The SCL required for clearance is 6, it is rumoured Mr. Slayer personally selects candidates for BPN's to Canopy, each Operative chosen is required to make themselves available for a Psyche evaluation. There have been reports of these evaluations being carried out at squad level by Intruder.

Operatives below SCL 6 chosen for BPN's on Canopy should be afraid, very afraid....

All reports sent from Canopy are screened by a SLA monitoring station that sits on the only moon Jaya. Reports are censored and edited by Head Office before they reach Mort.

DarkNight have never visited Canopy, there is, and never has been, any recorded incident of terrorism on the planet.

In 600 SD. Thresher managed to land a craft on Jaya, in an attempt to gain control over access to Canopy. There are no records of the conflict, and no recorded survivors on either side. Directly after the Thresher incident, there was a marked decline in Thresher activity throughout the World of Progress.

Planetary Stats.

++ All Planetary stats. are sealed access. ++

It is known that Canopy is in a binary star system. It has one moon, Jaya, which is bigger than Mort. Reports of the exact size of Canopy vary from 600,000 km diameter to over 1,000,000 km.

There are no apparent oceans on Canopy. From space the planet is fiery red and orange, swirling masses of cloud obscure any view of the planet's surface. The colouring of the atmosphere has never been explained. Rumours abound about an 'Ebb net' that encircles the planet and keeps out prying eyes. From the surface of Canopy the sky appears pale blue, and at night is filled with millions of stars. Jaya is only visible once a month, and then only for two or three days. It's proximity to Canopy means that the moon appears large on the horizon, where it sits and broods for the whole period of it's sighting.

"Well I don't know. Seemed like we were going in nose down and heavy. Fell out of fold like a stone in to water, hit the outer atmosphere like a blunt knife. Navigator and Pilot just seemed to curl up, I saw the swirling blood red clouds torn to let us through, the heat should of melted us. Tumbling out of control, thrown around like a bubble in a bath. Then I see the canopy, lush green carpet is all you see. The Pilot and Navigator are hitting switches and pulling levers so fast I thought they had gone quite mad. How we made it I'll never know. Like riding a sponge over a water fall."

Hildi Jarsson, SCL 6 Engineer, Mort 900 SD.

"Jaya is sacred. Tied to Canopy by threads that protect as well as bind. Jaya will not let those who would desecrate Canopy approach."

J'kn Tchr, Shaktar Operative, Bone Rollers, Mort 898 SD.

The planet Canopy has no 'oceans' or seas as we know them, although 20% of the planets surface is covered with water in the form of swamps and bayous. The millions of rivers that criss cross the planet mostly lead in to lakes or disappear under ground. The largest concentration of lakes is in the Northern hemisphere, with the south being decidedly drier.

The river Nameth in the north runs for nine hundred kilometers, varying in width from six hundred meters to three kilometers. It springs from the rising Moar hills and runs down through the Kerr valley until it empties in to the Frawesh lake in the Keel Basin. The Nameth twists and turns, falling through six sets of major falls before reaching the Frawesh.

The weather on Canopy has no real seasons, and remains hot and temperate throughout the course of the year. The only real change is in the amount of rainfall, which is heaviest at the beginning of the year.

Rainfall tends to come under two distinct headings; drizzle and downpour. Many areas are covered by constant drizzle, light rain that falls for many weeks at a time, soaking everything and seeping in to every nook and cranny. Such rain usually occurs during the coolest months, it falls from thin clouds that sit low in the sky, blotting out any brilliance from the suns. Drizzle often acts as relief for areas previously scorched by heatwaves.

Downpours occur during the hotter months, coming much like a monsoon. Huge cloud banks build up quickly, usually over night, then disgorge their contents during the morning. Downpours are sudden and violent, often accompanied by fierce thunder storms and much lightning. It is not unknown for twenty centimeters to fall in one hour. Downpours are usually preceded by eerie silence and a distinct lack on animal activity.

"Rain. You think it rains a lot on Mort? Think again. Once you've been caught out in a downpour you wont blink at a Downtown flashflood. The drizzle is somehow worse. More incessant than Mort, finer, more irritating. Water proof my ass! Everything gets wet, and stays wet. You want to see equipment just give up the ghost? Welcome to Canopy."

Lisa 'tidy' Yont, SCL 5 'Technician', Canopy 900 SD. (Permanent Op.)

The whole of the surface of Canopy is covered with trees. Every conceivable variety exists here and whole regions of the planet are defined by the dominant tree species.

The Northern Hemisphere tends to be dominated by the smaller trees, the tallest of which reaches no more than one hundred and fifty meters. Usually it is the pines that reach these heights, though it is not unknown for some of the older deciduous trees, especially the New Oak, to match them in height. The Northern forests are thick with bushes and shrubs among the undergrowth, with spectacular ranges of ferns.

The Southern forests are true rain forests, and it is here that the canopy is thickest and highest. The tallest of Canopy's trees, the Ridge Cone is found only in the southern realms, it reaches diameters of one hundred meters and heights of up to a thousand meters.

The forest floor in the southern hemisphere is choked with smaller trees and vines.

"The clue's in the name, right? Canopy, get it? Like the whole planet is one huge forest. Yeah, well. Trees are everything on Canopy, they supply everything and they are everywhere. Personally I think 'Canopy' was too subtle. Should have named the planet 'one big fucking tree', then people would have got it, right?"

Susan 'forester' Beam, SCL 4 Technician, Canopy 900 SD.

"The forests of the F'qhrn on Kn'nth come close, but seem minute in comparison. Millions, upon million of trees fill every corner of Canopy. Each teems with life and is heavy with fruit or seed. It is truly overwhelming. You think you know what the colour green is until you visit Canopy. Green takes on a whole new perspective, your life becomes one long

exploration of the colour green. I know how stupid it sounds, but once you have been there, then we can talk."

Tide, SCL 7 Ebon Operative, Fox, Mort 898 SD.

Life On Canopy

The profusion of life on Canopy suggests an indigenous evolutionary process that has not been 'tampered' with. The vast selection of life forms is consistent with the environment and no attempt has ever been made to either irradiate or introduce new species. SLA Industries prime concern with Canopy is not to upset the Eco system and they take any threat to the balance of nature very seriously indeed.

The amount of different life forms present on Canopy are too numerous to mention. It is impossible to give an accurate impression of the abundance of life, you have to visit the planet to get any idea of the richness of life on Canopy.

Millions of species of insect fly, crawl, burrow and swim all over every square centimeter of the planet. They form the basis of the food chain and their importance is fully appreciated by SLA. Many insects are venomous, carrying lethal doses of poison within their brightly coloured bodies. Everything grows bigger, brighter and faster on Canopy. Butterflies the size of cats with wingspans of two meters are common, as are smaller varieties a centimeter long. Flies, wasps, bees, hornets, gnats, mosquitoes and every other species that 'buzzes', all grow to sizes that would give a Shaktar cause for concern. The Fidgit Gnat deserves special mention as it grows up to six centimeters long and has a fatal poison lodged in it's blue tail, one sting is enough to kill a grown man within two minutes.

Beetles, ants, spiders, worms, grubs and all manner of crawling thing can be found infesting the forest floor wherever you go. From the giant soldier ants of Fern Belt, which grow to lengths of eight centimeters and hunt in swarms of up to a million, to the bird eating Orange Tree Spider. Ship Beetles, black as night and as large as dogs, scuttle around in the undergrowth, living side by side with the Belt Caterpillar, which feeds on eggs, ants or any smaller insect (growing up to two meters long

and weighing up to thirty kilos, most other insects are classed as 'smaller').

The lakes rivers and swamps teem with all kinds of fish and eels. In the north can be found the elusive Keel Dolphins and the ferocious Ripper Fish, which grow up to a meter long and hunt in shoals of up to a thousand, seeking out any moving thing in the river.

Lizards and snakes are common, with thousands of varieties being found all over Canopy. As a general rule, the smaller the snake, the more poisonous it will be, and yellow snakes are the deadliest. Lizards and frogs tend to be quite small though the giant Intruder Lizard of the southern Red Pine region is an exception, growing as large as a horse, weighing anything up to two tons, it feeds on smaller lizards, fish and fruit and is generally harmless. Many frogs and lizards emit poisonous slime to cover their skin, making them deadly to the touch. Such animals are typically marked with red, orange or yellow flashes.

Birds and bats can swarm over every tree and cave, feeding on insects, fruit, small mammals and blood. Hawks, Eagles, Falcons and a hundred variety of scavengers prey on anything that moves and is small enough to carry off. Hunting takes place at dawn and dusk, with night time reserved for owls and bats. Their are only eight species of blood sucking bat, though many more are Carrien scavengers, feeding on rotting flesh left by other carnivores.

Primates range all over Canopy, varying in size, intelligence and diet from region to region. The tiny Cap Monkey of the northern Snake River Region grow no taller than fifty centimeters and feed exclusively on the berries and leaves of the Mucha Tree. Near the southern pole can be found the huge White Haired Apes of the Vine Bowl, weighing up to two tones and standing up to three meters tall. They feed on the stems of the Tube Grass and the fruit of the Glama Tree.

Sloths live along side the primates, being the most elusive and strangest creatures of this prolific group.

Among the feline group of creatures are the Bush Tiger, the Slash cat and the Freen. Felines range in size from domestic cat to three meters

to the shoulder. They share the forests with the Bears and Boars who occasionally form part of their diet.

Wild Pigs, Bald Gote, Shawn Deer and Bern Dogs can be found all over Canopy. The Bald Gote will feed on anything and they seem immune to all but the deadliest of poisons, which make them sick for a few days. Their stupidity is legendary, as is their stubborn nature.

Shawn Deer are small, shy animals, with hearing and speed to match a Wraith Raider, they vary in colour from region to region and have the ability to change their fur to match their surroundings.

"Well whoever named it a 'gnat' must have been a damn sight bigger than me. More like a flying dog! Put a swarm of these babies in one of the 'Sectors and bye-bye Carriens!'"

Luther Arwk, SCL 8 Operative, Thunder, Mort 900 SD.

"Unbelievable. Birds and insects the like of which you can only imagine. And only then if you've spent a night on Alice. If you're not careful the beauty of it all can distract you from it's deadly nature. Exquisite Death I've heard it called, and from a Shaktar that's no small compliment."

Jeff 'tiger' Wells, SCL 5 Operative, Wire World, Mort 898 SD.

"The noise is like a wave, like the sounds of an ocean, relentlessly washing over you until you don't notice it. Drowning in sound until you sleep and breath with the noise. Insects chittering, birds singing and screeching, monkeys and lizards howling and the odd roar from deep in the jungle. Rain drums and drips, then a storm breaks and thunder and lightning rip through the air with deafening ferocity. In the three weeks I was there, there was never a minute of silence. When I got back to Mort, took me two days to adjust to the 'quiet' of Central. That should tell you all you need to know."

Rake Gozin, Technician, Mort 900 SD.

"I have not enough words in my mind to begin to tell you of the life on Canopy. Everything

exists in harmony, each small part essential to the vast whole. Finely balanced and abundant. The sense of being an intruder is complete, you become aware of every action, every effect you have on your surround. Cut the grass and affect the universe indeed."

Torque, Ebon, Mort 899 SD.

N a t i v e s

"As we all know, there are no *indigenous* peoples on Canopy. The only three alien races to survive the Conflict Wars were the Wraith Raiders, Shaktar and Ebons. Who these people are and when SLA planted them here is not known to me, and if you don't know, then be sure you don't *need* to know."

Ashrin Muravi, Lecturer in Bio-Mechanics, Meny, 900 SD.

"Leave them alone and they will leave you alone. You need only know that they are there. Not why, when or how they got there."

Taken from the 'Interaction' instructions issued to all SLA Personnel entering Canopy.

Canopy does have a native population, a race that call themselves the Sholin. Interaction between Sholin and SLA Op's. is strongly discouraged, and there are no official library files on these people. All information an Operative may gather would be rumour, gossip and folk lore, of which there is no shortage.

Sholin are built like very fit humans, they vary in size from one to three meters tall, with the Southern Sholin being the tallest. They have dark brown or black hair, usually worn short or shaven. Sholin have copper coloured skin and green eyes. The most alien feature of Sholin are their hands and feet, each of which has four digits (including thumb).

The Sholin have no regard for clothes, wearing skins only in ceremonies. Sholin have a passion for body painting and tattooing, with markings varying from region to region. Some prefer coloured paints while others cover themselves with swirling black tattoos.

The Sholin live in tribal and family groups, numbering anywhere up to a thousand. Their preferred dwellings are tree houses built high in the branches of the canopy. Sholin are

primarily vegetarians, though they do eat meats on ceremonial occasions, such as births and deaths. They can be loosely labelled as hunter gatherers, no Sholin is foolish enough to attempt to farm on Canopy, though the Sham'bath people of the Northern Tree Lake do work fish farms at the base of their trees.

Sholin houses are made from stripped wood and woven skins, based around natural platforms in the canopy. They utilise small cooking and tool fires and have stores of fresh water for bathing and cleaning. To off-worlders, Sholin houses are almost invisible from the forest floor, even when they are literally over-head.

Sholin have their own language, known as 'Shala', it is relatively easy to learn though finding someone willing to teach you is a different matter.

Sholin are shy and reclusive, and will make every effort to avoid contact with off-worlders.

The Sholin lead a simple and straight forward life, surviving and thriving in a world they are an integral part of. They have no desire to embrace any aspects of progress, such as technology, and they seem immune to the diseases of greed and malice that currently infect the world of Progress.

"Sholin are weird. Living in trees, eating berries, no TV. and no desire to make money. Are these dudes for real or what?"

Lim Tan, Technician, Canopy 900 SD.

"We knew they were following us, occasional glimpses and noises from over-head. I don't think I heard them speak, though they made some 'animal' noises we took to be communication. They made no attempt to contact us, they offered neither help nor hindrance. They stayed with us for about eight clicks then vanished."

Shorlarin, SCL 5 Operative, Junk, Mort 900 SD.

"Leave them alone. They want nothing to do with you, and it would be unwise to try to contact them. They have their own lives to lead, as do you. Concentrate on your assignment and do not be tempted to get too curious. Sholin

will let you know when they need to have dealings with you, and they never will."

Zim, Training Staff, Canopy Technical Corps, Canopy 899 SD.

SLA Industries And Canopy

Folding in to the Hyld System will get you killed, or worse, bring you to the attention of Head Office. There is absolutely no access to Canopy without the knowledge and permission of Head Office.

SLA Industries has constructed a number of cities on Canopy, each within a sealed dome and each with an identical layout and level of facilities. These cities are known as 'pods', and are numbered one to one hundred. Each pod has a population of between 100,000 and 1,000,000. The pods are designed to be self sufficient, needing no interaction with the outside world. Food is shipped in once every three months, though water is taken from the atmosphere via catch nets, waste is recycled in house, with nothing being passed in to the Canopy Eco system.

Within the confines of each pod you would hardly know you were not on Mort, except for the lack of rain. All the comforts of Mort are to be found here, without the numerous hazards. Postings to Canopy are offered as a reward to loyal employees, and each selection is screened by Stygmartyr, some say by Mr. Slayer himself.

No one is allowed to leave the pods unless they have a Technician escort and a valid BPN. Personnel found to have violated this rule are shipped back to Mort for an interview with Internal Affairs. All travel outside the pods is on foot, with expeditions lasting anything up to three months.

For the record, Canopy has Resource World status, though no records show any imports or exports from the planet. All dealings go via Head Office and no other SLA Industries department has any say in the comings and goings on Canopy.

Canopy Kills

Seeking the truth about Canopy is a dangerous business, one that is liable to get you killed.... or worse....

You are going to have to decide what SLA Industries is using Canopy for, or what they are hiding there. We have given some suggestions, use whatever you want, or dump them all.

A New Race

The Sholin are a race left over from the Conflict Wars. SLA is trying to develop an aspect of their nature they can use. At the moment, Sholin cannot inter-breed with any other race, and attempts to cross their DNA in laboratories have resulted in failure. Sholin removed from Canopy die within twenty four hours of a wasting disease of the mind and spirit, they literally 'will' themselves to death.

The aspect of the Sholin that SLA want access to is their immunity to the Ebb.

Sholin are completely resistant to all Ebb abilities. Offensive (i.e. intrusive) abilities simply pass through them as though they were not there.

The Ebb force is channeled through their bodies and 'gated' to an unknown source. The worrying thing is; where is this source, and what happens when the Ebb forces contained there are full to overflowing?

Ebons cannot read anything from Sholin and they literally 'feel' as if Sholin do not exist.

'Farming' Canopy

Many of the plants and animals of Canopy yield substances valuable to SLA Industries. These are used as the base for medicines and weapons. The Sholin are used as gatherers and farmers, who know where each plant/animal can be found, and how best to obtain it without destroying the balance on Canopy.

Gateway

Canopy has a number of 'gateways', wormholes that lead to other planets of the same nature. Alternately, Canopy has access to White Earth, either through gates or an internal sink hole.

It's Alive

Canopy is literally alive. The planet is a form of 'body' for an intelligence that uses all of the

creatures and plants on it as part of it's 'mind'. SLA Industries wants to explore this fully before making a decision as to whether the being should be allowed to live, or should be destroyed.

The Sholin form part of it's collective conscience, they are linked to every other living thing on the planet, as well as being able to 'read' Ebb patterns from minerals and the atmosphere.

The Sholin have access to phenomenally powerful Ebb like abilities through the 'will of Canopy'. Maybe SLA are slightly powerless in this beings presence.

Slayers Sanctuary

Some say My Slayer is 'plugged in' to the world of Progress in ways we cannot even begin to understand, that all of the goings on are known to him, that there is a constant bombardment from billions of minds thrashing in to his head every second of every waking day.

Some say Canopy is the only place in the known universe where he can escape the minds of billions of his citizens. But of course, if this is the case, while Mr. Slayer is on Canopy, he is completely unaware of the goings on in Progress. Surely this could never be allowed....

BPN's

As BPN's to Canopy are all Platinum, we have offered one for each of the ideas previously mentioned. If you've gone your own way, making up a BPN should be easy....

A New Race

SLA Industries occasionally pushes at the Sholin resistance, trying to uncover weaknesses, or trying to uncover Ebons with a talent for breaking in to the Sholin resistance. For whatever reason, the Operatives have been chosen because Head office feels they may have a chance to explore the Sholin resistance to the Ebb.

The Operatives will be sent to Canopy to recover some fruit or animal, or maybe conduct a survey, during which they will be brought in to contact with Sholin (just to see what happens). The Technician escorting them will inevitably be a Necanthrope (cloaked).

'Farming' Canopy

One of the Operatives really does have an affinity for something on Canopy, either through their DNA makeup or the Psyche, either way they will be sent to Canopy to retrieve it. This can take the form of ingestion and carriage without the Operatives knowledge, or it may be more direct, such as physical retrieval of a substance or object. The retrieval of a Sholin sacred object could prove interesting.

Gateway

SLA Industries knows the gateway is there, but are not exactly sure where it goes, or how to trace a way back. A squad may be assigned to seek out a location on Canopy, and then tracked to wherever it gates them to. They may be chipped for closer monitoring, or they may take a 'tracker' Technician with them.

It's Alive

Head Office has decided to introduce the Operatives in to the matrix of Canopy to influence some decision or action. This may take the form of a physical action on the planet, or it may be that the Op's very presence will be enough to achieve what Mr. Slayer wants.

Slayers Sanctuary

Some say this is going too far....
Some say Mr. Slayer never leaves Mort, some say He is everywhere. But why would he want the Op's with him on Canopy....?

As an alternative, you could do what we did at Gen-Con '96, drop a team of Op's on Canopy by mistake. Their Foldship was destroyed by Thresher while on it's way to the Stone Rim Colonies, they managed to escape along with a Shaktar in an escape pod. Then all they had to do was figure out where they were, and how to get back to civilisation. Of course, SLA were not thrilled that they had crashed a Foldship in to the system, or that they had blundered in to a sealed environment. Seems like they could do nothing right....

(Thanks again to Tony, and apologies if it is not what he had in mind. I wanted to produce a whole supplement, but Max....)
(*oh yeah, blame me....*)

OPERATIVE BACKGROUND

So, you have SLA Industries. You have a good idea about where you want your games to go. All you need now are some players. And all they need are some characters.

Generation seems straightforward enough, if a little basic. Then you have the introductions and 'getting to know you' bit. Once they are all acquainted, off you go. Lots of fun, adventure and really wild things.

Then comes the hard bit. What happens in-between BPN's? What is Progress all about? Where do the Operatives fit in to all this?

Ah. Well.

Operatives are going to turn out to be more than slaves to SLA Industries. They will have agenda's of their own. Characters soon take on more than the air of their training packages, they are more than a bundle of stats., good ones anyway.

And here's where you are going to have to be careful. The off hand stuff figured out during generation is going to have to be explained. Taken Bad Housing? So where do you actually live, and what's so bad about it? Level eight phobia of mirrors? So what? How's this going to affect your life, never mind how you got it!?

Bloody characters. More trouble than they're worth.

After the first few sessions there comes a point where the GM starts to use the players to develop their own world. No GM can possibly do it all, and players are only too willing to help, if you let them.

It would be stupid to pretend SLA Industries was any different to other RPG's in a lot of ways, and the need for depth to a character is universal to all RPG's (except maybe.... no, I can't....).

The world of Progress is a very personal place, usually the GM has a vision all his own, with definitive ideas about all major concerns within his game environment. There does not seem to be too much room for the players to develop their own ideas about the world in which they live.

And this is where we separate the good GM's from the *really* good ones. Good GM's let the players think they're in control, they give them some say in how the world works, taking on board suggestions and developing their world accordingly. *Really* good GM's feed on the players in a vampire like manner, using their own ideas to fuel their world while all the while pushing the players to take it to newer, more fulfilling heights.

Feed off them; feed them. So simple it's scary.

Players need background for their characters, and you need to develop Progress. And if a player thinks he doesn't need a solid background for his character, you can soon show him otherwise. Any player will soon get fed up of the GM dishing them out connections with their past, especially as they have no control over it

Lets throw in some examples to show you what I'm prattling on about.

Our sample player has figured his Stormer character is pretty hard, and so he takes the Disadvantage : Bad Housing (Rank 5). A Stormer should have no problems living in Upper Downtown, right? So the Disadvantage seems to have simply allowed the player more development points.

Now the GM must take the disadvantage in to consideration when he develops the character. Sure the Stormer may be left alone by the inhabitants, most of whom rightly figure that taking on a Stormer is a bit above them. But what about when he's not home? A Slops apartment just waiting to be robbed. Or flooded, or blown up, or filled with squatters, or infested with vermin, or....

So, does this Stormer carry all his gear with him, where does he keep his back-up stuff, at his apartment right? A good GM will let the Stormer feel the threat of his disadvantage as much as demonstrate it.

Phobias are another sticky issue, some players see them as a simple means to an end; they need more points, so they take on a few phobias. Manna from heaven.

Any player who thinks that a Rank 5 Linophobia (String) "shouldn't be a problem" has no concept of what SLA Industries is all about, and obviously knows nothing of GM's.

Characters with linophobia will be faced with NPC's wearing string vests, using 'net guns' that ensnare with string, victims on BPN's will be found strangled with string. After a while it will be the concept and mental imagery of string that will become a problem, things that bind, entwine, tie or have long molecule chains will abound. Phobias are serious things, and any GM who does not use them to fill out his game is missing something.

What about other background? Advantages for example. Well. How generous do you feel?

We use advantages as a chance for players to develop Progress in a positive way that will benefit them.

Good Sleeper is a fine example. Ask anyone who has been in the forces, or read any literature about warfare or conflict, and the two predominant wishes of any troops are enough to eat and enough sleep. Op's who can sleep for the right amount of time, under adverse conditions, will be less lightly to suffer fatigue, which will in turn affect things like Conc and Dia. They will be less crabby, and more positive and optimistic, attracting more helpful attention.

Minor Friend. Such are the things good characters are made of. Where, when and how did they meet this friend? To what degree is the friendship genuine and two way? There is usually enough background in any friend or good contact for at least three BPN's or adventures.

Hobbies offer the same chance for development, as they imply history through practice and acquired experience. Get the player to tell you when they got interested in their hobby, and why, and how this affects their characters life.

Great example from one of our campaigns, a Shaktar with Sewing (Level 6). Krn'trq has always been interested in the metaphysical side of weaving, embroiding and knots. His fascination grew as he developed and learned new aspects of the Honour Code. Sewing represents a mending and binding of body and spirit. All of Krn'tq's friends wear braids or patches woven by the Shaktar. Krn'tq is developing knowledge and understanding of thread and it's uses akin to Holmes' knowledge of cigar ash. To some this may seem

unnecessary, clouding the issue of survival in progress, but to the player it is an essential part of the 'grounding' of Krn'tq. Each GM will recognise the importance of any aspect of the character to the player behind it.

Most GM's will have no problem with players developing aspects of their world, as long as they are consistent and in keeping with the characters background. The character generation suddenly becomes important as a base for background, not just for what the stats are.

Skills can also be used to determine background, and to hint at the future development of characters. Got the (seemingly) obligatory Gymnastics? Where did you learn it? Who taught you? Do you still train and practice outside the combat arena? Who are your fellow pupils, mentors and role models? Do you have any special combat moves worked out?

Streetwise? Any special area, like Downtown? Where did you train? How many 'street' contacts do you have? How do you keep your training up to date, where do you hang out and with whom? How much of your 'street cred' is myth, and how much reality? Do you spend most of your spare time prowling areas for information and deals?

When designing BPN's or tailoring them to fit your particular group of characters, try using a technique brought to the fore by Pendragon. Pick one aspect of each character that you will feature during the BPN, either a stat., trait or background, then go in to the BPN with this in mind. Place points in the BPN where you will concentrate on the aspect you have highlighted. After the BPN reward characters for how well they performed on this aspect, they need not know why they got the 'extra' points, or they may have points deducted. As you get to know the players better, and they their characters, you can focus more and more on aspects of the characters and how they work in Progress. All this will be done in conjunction with your own development of Progress independent of the players, rounding of your campaign world in to something the players can identify with.

It is often a good idea to stress during generation the importance of background and the consequences of various choices. As an

alternative, you may let the players 'set aside' a certain amount of development points to be spent later in their characters life. Not everyone has a fixed idea of how they want their character to develop, and many new players will have no idea about choices for background as they have absolutely no knowledge of the relevant background, i.e. Progress. Only allow points to be set aside for Hobbies or Advantages/Disadvantages. Points gained from Disadvantages should be translated in to Experience Points to be allocated as usual.

Every SLA Industries GM is different. Using the players to help develop Progress will either be a major or minor part of your game, depending how you structure your games. It is very tempting to keep it all under control, giving them all the detail they need from your own fevered imagination. But it is more fun to let them help you. Hard to believe I know. I mean the thought of a player with a useful idea just makes me cringe.

As with everything, a little trial and error will be involved. The world of Progress is a terrible, dark, oppressive place and any breaks the players get will be like rays of light through the gloom. Be kind. Give the players a chance to belong, to affect the world in which they live. Getting them involved to a greater degree will not only ease your work load, but may lead to explorations you could not have previously imagined.

SLA INDUSTRIES EBCOM

SLA Industries was born from the vision of one man. Mr. Slayer. After the Conflict Wars, which Slayer had brought to an end through his saturation of the market with his product, SLA Industries was ready to move in and take complete control.

After establishing communications links throughout the fledgling World of Progress, Slayer turned his attention to the management of information. Progress was awash with information, and Slayer knew information was power, control of information was vital.

In 26 SD. SLA Industries took direct control of all 'on line' information gathering and management systems, expanding over the next six years to bring every single user within their scrutiny. No one accessed anything without SLA Industries knowing about it.

SLA Industries set up the Mort Matrix in 230 SD. unifying remnants of hundreds of departmental systems under one 'net'. The implementation, maintenance and upgrading of the Matrix was the responsibility of Station Analysis.

"After the Conflict Wars civilisation died. Power passed to the only 'man' who could handle it. Slayer. Technology faltered, broke down almost. SLA Industries took complete control. Information is power. SLA Industries took control of all information management. You think power comes from the nozzle of a gun? Information runs the World of Progress, not guns. Power comes from the use of information, control comes from the rationing of information. Guns kill. Information gets whole societies killed, whole planets destroyed. You are a fool if you fail to understand this. Information is everything."

Honi Tumek, Station Analysis 'code breaker', Mort 700 SD.

The system used by SLA grew exponentially, a gargantuan web embracing every source within the SLA Industries infrastructure. It became apparent, mainly to the operators in Head Office, that the whole system was in danger of collapsing. It was simply too big. Nothing had ever been expected to work at this level, the fact that it did was testament to the skills and determination of the 'tekies' at Central.

Mr. Slayer addressed the problem himself, initiating a new project known as 'PAX'. It was tied closely to Dark Lament and rumours flew of the direct involvement of Senti in some kind of artificial intelligence experiment.

PAX was underway, secretly working to it's own shadowy agenda, neither helped nor hindered by those running the matrix.

With the growth of the new matrix came the birth of a sinister new Soft Company. Neither DarkNight, Thresher or any one of the other 'majors' could be associated with it, it came from within, born from the suspicion and

shadows of SLA itself. DoomSayer first appeared in the matrix in 232 SD., crashing the internal security system of Masque Masters, a SLA subsidiary dealing in IC software. Their intrusions and strikes became more and more daring and effective.

DoomSayer were predicting the growth, then collapse of the matrix, which they saw as a 'being' taking on a life of it's own, something outside the original vision of Mr. Slayer, and something over which he had little, or no control.

By the year 400 SD. the matrix was fulfilling all of the darkest prophecies of the 'DoomSayers'.

It had indeed appeared to acquire a degree of sentience, and was becoming troublesome to all but the highest level Operatives.

"The matrix became something akin to an independent intelligence. It made decisions outside it's operating parameters. Programs would not run, whole chunks of operating procedure were being re-written. The initiation of an internal security protocol, not installed from the outside, but 'grown' by the matrix itself, marked the beginning of the end. It was just a matter of time before the matrix was killed."

Leo Hansen, Head Office Operator, Mort, 500 SD.

In 499 SD. the matrix shut down all power to sector 367 in Suburbia, redirecting all available resources to 'restructuring' it's own power grid. The citizens of sector 367 were subject to the ravages of the Downtown sector they bordered, and a night of chaos claimed over twenty thousand lives and left thirty percent of sector 367 re-classified as a restricted area.

PAX moved in. The winter of 499 SD. saw the transformation of the matrix.

In 500 SD control passed to PAX, effectively part of Dept. of Ebb, and indirectly to Dark Lament. A new company was formed to specialise in the care of the Matrix; EbCom was born.

EbCom is a wholly owned subsidiary of SLA Industries, reporting directly to Dept. Ebb, and is answerable to Dept. Station Analysis and Internal Affairs. Head Office have ultimate control over EbCom, and all EbCom employees must go through an Operative Psyche test

before they can be assigned to EbCom, employees are given an SCL of 10 for clearance purposes, civilian or not.

E b C o m

EbCom CEO: Natasia Daer.
Corporate Chairman: William Tull
Dept. Liaison EO: Nel Manson
EbCom Security Chief: Dasage
Maintenance Dept. Head: Lucas Sheel.

Every Mort Sector has an EbCom Head Office, structured much like a Shiver HQ, each is headed by a Commander, with numerous sub-levels of command beneath them. EbCom currently employ somewhere between one and two million people.

The Mort Matrix

The Mort Matrix operates on two different and distinct levels, though ninety nine per cent of users are only aware of one level; the CyNet.

All prophecies and predictions for the structure, layout and ethereal nature of the Matrix have come true. It is indeed a form of 'cyber world', applying it's own laws of creation, existence and interaction. users can jack in and use their bodies own electrical aura and brain waves to control their movement in the Matrix. Users are physically able to interact with components of the Matrix, such as information streams, storage houses, libraries and IC. Indeed, a virtual world much like that envisaged by the 'old world' tekies.

The need for the Matrix to exist in this form was partly driven by the Fourth Law of Prophecy: Prophecies tend to be self fulfilling. People expected the Matrix to take this form, they had been fed images and stories about it for so long that it took shape without their realising it. Mr. Slayer uses peoples expectations to control their actions; those that use the Matrix have defined it's existence, they have built it with their preconceptions and those that come after them simply add to the layers of conformity. Matrix users take the form of digital constructs, never really in any danger, never really in complete existence. Their use of the matrix is restricted to the surface, they go in, get what

they want then simply melt away, leaving no trace of ever having been there.

"Matrix exploration can be fulfilling, if at times dangerous. CyNet made the world of the web, but it is the uses who work and play in it. We make it what it is, our thoughts and actions shape it's destiny. Some people say no two users see the matrix in the same way. CyNet let us have the world we want."

Laser, CyNet Surfer, Mort, 800 SD.

"Colours. Colours and sounds. Wipe your mind of every perception, this is real. Direct to your cortex, no interference from the outside world. Exist in CyNet and you are truly aware. Illusion my ass. Keep the real world for people who can't handle jacking in."

'Scooter', Surfer, Mort 700 SD.

Corporations, sub-departments and subsidiaries all store information in the Matrix. SLA Industries demands all departments be 'on line', with complete access available every minute of every day.

The Matrix is not just accessed by users, Surfers and Pirates float in, steal what they can, then shimmer away.

Surfers seem to be younger employees, maybe stealing information as much for fun as profit. Their raids are slick, quick and rarely result in any casualties, either to the Matrix or to the IC guardians. They rely on speed, surprise and style.

Pirates most often represent Soft Company users, they blast in with powerful counter IC constructs, often crashing systems before they plunder them. Pirates tend to operate from hacked terminals, while Surfers use their own machines. Pirates have been known to steal from other users as well as corporate files, often raiding a users own files while they are roaming the Matrix looking for whatever files they are after. Surfers regard other users as 'snails', rarely bothering to trouble those they encounter, except maybe passing insults or infecting them with harmless, but embarrassing viruses. Surfers and Pirates hate each other with an intense fury, each will go out of their way to hinder the other in any encounters. Surfers have been known to boost IC Guardians,

jeopardizing their own escape, in an attempt to block a Pirate raid.

The Matrix is a bustling, hyper-charged environment, filled with constructs and bit streams, every niche of the Matrix construct is used twenty four hours a day. It has been likened to an over populated city, where everyone is unable to stand still for fear of sinking in to the ground. This city of virtual existence is universally referred to as CyNet, spoken about as if it was as real as Uptown or Downtown, with locations as fixed and as dangerous. The Matrix is the planet, and CyNet is the civilisation.

"Move round the CyNet like a fish. Swim with the flow, dart from one stream to another, keep it moving. get in and get out. Keep business simple. The faster you move the better your chances of survival. I seen snails swallowed by IC before they knew they were in danger, ground just opened and they were gone. Gotta keep moving."

Cecil B, Pirate Freelance, Mort 701 SD.

But there is another side to the Matrix. Another 'planet' where there is no CyNet. This is the truth behind the Matrix, the terrible secret guarded by EbCom; the reason for their being.

In 499 SD. when PAX moved in to take control of the Matrix, CyNet had acquired a degree of sentience. This was what Senti had expected, and she used this to feed the new aspect of the Matrix she was about to create.

There are no records of the process used by Senti to create the shadow world to CyNet.

Whispered rumours speak of DeathWake, of Ebb abilities such as Reality Folding used in ways no Necanthrope could have imagined. Senti twisted the tortured mind of CyNet, with it's newly acquired consciousness, in to an alternate realm of Ebb flow and emotional transmission.

CyNet spawned the parallel operating environment of the Tomb.

Like CyNet, the Tomb links billions of terminals and stores unimaginable amounts of information, carrying transactions at speeds that shame the dreams of the most lunatic tekies.

But unlike CyNet, the Tomb is a real place. A 'dimension' of the cyber space that is CyNet in the same way that White Earth is a dimension of the World of Progress.

Users must be transported in to the world of the Tomb, and only those with the ability to utilise the Ebb can enter. Here in lies one of the greatest paradox's in the World of Progress. Only Ebons can use the greatest 'machine' ever built and conceived.

Ebons do not interact well with complex technology, there is simply nothing to interact with, no emotion, no feelings of any kind. To get round this, the Tomb has been allowed to keep the degree of it's sentience ripped from CyNet. Accessing the Tomb is like walking through the mind of a wired maniac on Alice.

"The Tomb is real. I don't know how it can exist, it really should not be. A world shaped by torture, pain, fear, paranoia and thwarted hopes. A realm of emotional chaos, twisting, changing, melting and reforming, spewing up new constructs and shaping new worlds. Allegory, allusion and simile feed the beings who reside here, they are formed from the ideas they represent in the minds of those behind the Tomb. IC takes the shape of Demons more terrible than anything I can imagine, data is in books and scrolls, or stored in the fruit of wonderful trees, guarded by serpents. Without a guide you cannot hope to survive. if you're lucky you'll go insane, if not.... "

Ruse, Necanthrope, Mort 850 SD.

CyNet and the Tomb are two sides of the same multi-dimensional coin. Users can pass from CyNet to the Tomb, but not back again. Access to the Tomb can also be made from 'ports', direct physical interfaces, usually found in SLA Dept. buildings or in booths in the Pit.

EbCom perfected the means to let non-Ebb users access the tomb in 700 SD.

Underneath the glittering glass, steel and concrete arcology that is the Head Quarters of EbCom, lies the terrible focus of the success of EbCom.

For every access point for non Ebons, there is an Ebon head, stripped of all contact with the outside world, preserved in a ceramic tank, fed

by fluids from Dark Lament and powered by Glyph Pillars at each corner.

These Ebons have been wired in to the Tomb, each has the ability to Reality Fold up to level twenty, and each has sacrificed their physical form to allow the Tomb to become what it is.

Ebons imprisoned in this way can never progress along their chosen path, they are doomed to suffer the torments of the machine like intelligence of the Tomb. Their only hope is that one day Mr. Slayer will free them, that they will one day be released in to the oblivion of The White. And yet each must come here willingly, and must choose to remain.

Non Ebb users are taken in to the Tomb by an Ebon 'guardian'. This guardian will remain with them until they have concluded their business, it will act as guide, protector and host for the duration of the non Ebons visit. use of the tomb is in fact a form of possession.

Users pay a price for their use of the Tomb. They are free to roam areas of the Matrix closed to CyNet users, they may even cross over in to CyNet space, to get past particularly vicious IC. Ebon guardians know of ports between the two cyber realms. But once you are in the Tomb, you are in 'real' space. Death here is death. The Ebon guardians are, to all intents and purposes, immortal. Those they possess and transport are not. If you are foolish enough to take on IC beyond your capability in the Tomb, the IC construct can literally drain your soul, stealing the 'spark' from your body by dragging all the innate Flux from you.

"Twist your mind inside out with Alice, Drum and WhiteHeat, push yourself to the point of death through sheer exhaustion, then strip every nerve in your body with a dull knife, plug yourself in to the main power supply of Mort Central and you get some idea of what it feels like to give your 'flux self' over to your Ebon guardian. I seriously suggest you don't ever do it."

LightFoot, Ebon Operative with FreakHunt, Mort 801 SD.

Today, the Tomb and CyNet are the only two cyber realms of any note or worth. Virtual space within the SLA Industries World of Progress that is patrolled and policed no less vigorously than the 'real' world of Mort. And

like the world around it, CyNet has it's Soft Companies as well as those that would steal from it. The Tomb has no such problems. It is a place so terrible, both in physicality and emotional oppression, that few risk intruding in to it's tortured mind.

CyNet And The Tomb In Game Terms

Every player will have their own vision of the Matrix, each will be fuelled by images and ideas from a thousand books and films, ranging from Shadowrun to Neuromancer. The Mort Matrix conforms to all of these ideas, providing a place for virtual reality and cyber space, where Tron walks along side Johnny Mnemonic.

The Tomb is SLA Industries' own creation. It exists only to serve the Big Picture, Mr. Slayer controls all within the Tomb through his faithful Ebon servants, and a few heretical Necanthropes.

Sure you can surf the net in Progress, run the Matrix and do all the 'normal' stuff of prophesied cyber existence.

But walk through the realms of the Tomb and you enter another *mind*. As real as Mort, as deadly as Dante, as fantastic as Wonderland. A living world, the Tomb is another sentient in a tortured sleep.

'Jacking-in' should never be the same again.

NEVER MIND THE PIG

CUSHAI

Cushai first appeared on Mort in 850 SD., rumour tells of how they were brought from a now destroyed resource World in the C-S5 Sector.

Cushai are bi-pedal saurian omnivores that bear a striking resemblance to midget T-rex, the major difference is their developed front limbs, which have four digits including a thumb.

Cushai have shown no trace intelligence above bestial, they have been known to use crude tools to extract food from crevices, though they have never used tools as weapons.

Stats.	Min.	Max.	Norm.
STR	4	8	5
DEX	3	11	6
DIA	0	1	0
CONC	0	2	0
HITS	8	20	12
Weight	30kg	100kg	60kg
Height	1M	2M	1.5M

Weapon	PEN	DMG	AD
--------	-----	-----	----

Skills	Rank
--------	------

Detect	6
Hide	5
Run	8
Climb	4
Swim	6
Unarmed (Bit)	10
Dodge	8

Cushai roam the drains and sewers of Downtown, and some have been seen in the basements of Malls in Suburbia.

Cushai will eat anything and will always try to kill fresh meat before they begin scavenging. They prefer to remain alone for their short lives, if two meet the younger will always back down. They mate once every two years, the female is solely responsible for the care of the eggs and the young.

It has recently become fashionable to have Cushai caged, and some of the larger corporations are looking in to ways of using them as watchdogs, mimicking the 'Gators' of Artery.

The Great Round-Up

Cushai are rare, sightings suggest they number in the thousands. Someone is rounding up the Cushai.

They are being captured and stored in one of the lower Downtown sections, bordering the wall with one of the Cannibal Sectors.

Who is doing this, and why they should be going to all this trouble is a mystery. Maybe someone knows something about Cushai the rest of us don't. Rumours are rife (of course); are they being cross-bread, are they being 'trained', or experimented on in some other way?

NEALIPS (pain caps)

Nealips (pronounced *Knee-a-lips*) are fungal forms that grow over any surface wet enough to feed their insatiable appetite for trace elements and minerals. Nealips take on the shape of huge fungal spores, looking much like gigantic mushrooms. Their pale brown caps and slate grey stalks grow low and thick to the surface they cling to, rarely reaching up more than a meter. The largest reported diameter of a Nealip canopy is four meters. The stalks, or stems reach girths of up to two meters in diameter, their rough bark like surface is surprisingly tough and hard to penetrate.

The centre of the cap emits a foul smelling liquid which perfectly emulates the stench of rotting flesh. The Nealip is a carnivorous plant which attracts small scavengers on to the surface of it's cap, then plunges them deep within the body of it's stem where they are stunned and digested. The centre of the cap opens like a trap door, dropping the prey in to the 'stomach' chamber of the fungus, where the unfortunate meal is attacked by anaesthetic spores which render it unconscious. Struggling within the stomach stimulates the release of every increasing amounts of poison. Once the prey is immobilised, the digestion begins, with complete liquefaction (*not sure about that one*) taking place within 1 hour per kilo body weight of prey.

Casual contact (i.e. falling in then escaping) with the stomach causes severe burning to any exposed skin, and 1-4 points of AD. Skin burnt by Nealip stomach acid itches like fire until the muscle beneath it is removed.

Nealips were developed by Dark Lament. They are 'Ebb resilient', turning away the flow of the Ebb, discharging signals of despair and chaos in to the Ebon mind. The original concept of their creation was as a weapon to be used in the lower reaches of Downtown, where the feral Ebon population is constantly on the increase. Nealips were to be nurtured and released by the million, their spore would infect and cover every dark crevice with fungal horror, driving feral Ebons towards the upper reaches of downtown, where they could be more easily tracked and terminated.

When Nealips reach maturity, usually after they have been actively feeding for two or three months, they will release their spores. The

spores are created in the stomach and belched out through the cap, which bloats then bursts at the slightest touch, throwing the billions of fungal spores to whatever wind there is. Ebons caught in the fungal spore burst of a Nealip are immediately subject to a rank eight psychoses which they will take to their grave (or in to the White).

What They Wont Tell You

Nealips are cursed with a primitive form of sentience, they are also capable of a minimal amount of movement. The bottom of their stalk develops a pad much like the 'foot' of a snail, with which they may move up to 1m per day. Their primitive awareness allows them some control over their attraction and selection of prey. Nealips can sense an Ebons presence the same way a shark can smell blood. It is every Nealips purpose in life to bring pain to Ebons, they will always release at an optimum time, and if possible will seek to ensnare Ebons within a 'blanket' of spore release, often co-ordinated by several Nealips in a single location.

Dried Nealips may be eaten and smoked by non-Ebons, producing a mildly stimulating effect akin to Alice™.

(Beware of the flowers 'cos I'm sure they're gonna get you, yeah.)

COMPANY STRUCTURE

Much is made of the fact that SLA Industries is the largest, most dominant force in the World of Progress, and rightly so. SLA Industries is all pervasive, all consuming; reigning supreme over their kingdom and all within it.

But let's not forget where SLA Industries came from or what drives it.

It is a business, with Mr. Slayer at it's head as it's vision and will. But it is a business. So, if SLA Industries is a 'company', and it owns and controls it all, what does that leave for the rest of the World of Progress? Is there only SLA Industries and Soft Companies? Can there really be no room for any other type of business?

Well. That depends on how you see SLA Industries.

SLA Industries knows the value of competition, Mr. Slayer is the consummate businessman, with the ultimate business strategy based on the fact that he can shut down any of the competition any time he wants.

All companies that are not Soft Companies are part of the SLA web; sub-companies, wholly owned subsidiaries and licensees, all go to make up the 'competition'.

Various degrees of competition are tolerated, even encouraged, as long as SLA Industries gets their slice and does not lose any over all control of any market. SLA Industries is the driving force behind the whole of Progress, and they never let anyone forget it.

We have given a rough guide to some of the types of company that exist in our world of Progress, hopefully they will help you with yours.

Sub – Companies

Sub Companies are funded, staffed and run by SLA employees, usually from one of the larger Departments. They have set budgets and market goals. Sub Companies usually act as 'umbrella' organisations for several Subsidiaries.

Example: Multi Job Lacerates (MJL). MJL were established shortly after the Conflict Wars came to an end, making them one of the oldest Sub Companies in existence. They were born from the Ministry of War in 26 SD., with their Power Disc and Power Claymore at the forefront of their assault on the close combat weapons market. They have grown to gargantuan proportions, having production and testing facilities on many worlds throughout Progress.

MJL are the major shareholder in several other companies such as Defense Systems Inc., BodyBlow, Home Watch Inc., Auto Accessories and Slice 300. There have been numerous rumours of the selling off of the license for the Power Claymore to Slice 300, who have recently released a much larger version of the much loved Claymore;

Slice 300 : S3-2H-PC

Type: Two Handed Power Claymore

Length: 2M
 Weight: 9 kg (*see below)
 Damage: 8
 PEN: 5
 Armour Damage: 4

*S3 comes with a 2,000 hour power pack in the handle. The weapon is heavy enough to incur a penalty for users with STR below 7, -1 to hit per point below 7, and -1 DMG. Restrictions apply on carrying the S3 in public, and use is subject to space restrictions.

Wholly Owned Subsidiaries

These are companies that are completely owned by SLA Industries, though they are staffed by and driven by 'non department' personnel. Wholly Owned Subsidiaries often sprout from Sub Companies who have a product or development idea that does not fit within their immediate market profile. Wholly Owned Subsidiaries are allowed a certain amount of freedom to compete with both their parent company and other SLA companies. Their over-all business strategy is largely (but not completely) determined for them by their holding company or sometimes by a SLA department directly.

Example: `MagnaForce were formed in 800 SD. by Lay Low. MagnaForce are controlled by SLA Industries, who have a 60% shareholding, while Lay Low have 20%, with the remaining 10% owned by the board of MagnaForce. Lay Low were spawned from a division of Dark Lament, who produced a material now known as StretchBack™ as a result in tests for a new Ebb Medikit. The material proved so successful that Dark Lament formed Lay Low to produce and market it. Lay Low specialise in furniture, made exclusively of StretchBack™. One of the directors of Lay Low, Sierra Samson, formed MagnaForce, with the blessing of SLA via Dark Lament, in order to explore the 'security' applications of StretchBack™. MagnaForce market home defense 'weapons' that utilise the smothering quality of liquid StretchBack™. Intruder alarms are connected to 'SprayStations' which cover the victim with StretchBack™, immobilising (and sometimes suffocating) them until Shivers can get there. StretchBack™

The liquid is fired with a 'skill roll' modified by the quality of the system utilising it, ranging from 1 (30c) to 9 (1,000c). Once the StretchBack™ hits it's target, the victim must make a DEX roll, as a skill, difficulty rating 8. Success means they have a minimal covering, affecting their movement and skill rolls on a 1-6 penalty range. Failure means they are soaked, having a difficulty modifier of 12 to all actions, they also have a chance of suffocating; minus their PHYS from 20, the resulting number has to be exceeded on a D10 to avoid suffocation, failure means they die in PHYS minutes. The art to staying alive in StretchBack™ is to remain perfectly still, as struggling speeds up it's suffocating qualities.

L i c e n s e e s

Licensees are companies that have bought production rights to a product owned by SLA Industries, they produce 'copies' with their own brand name, usually mimicking the original. Anyone can apply to form a licensed company, all you need is the down payment and the security (via collateral) to ensure the successful release of the product you wish to license. Most Licensees produce and market their product, though some are merely fronts for organised crime, being used to 'clean' moneys from more dubious operations.

Example: The Pacifier Baton, made and marketed by GASH is enjoying a resurgence in popularity and use. GASH have recently agreed a deal with Pacifico Clubs Inc. who are now producing their own 'version' of the Pacifier; the Pacifico Baton.

The Pacifico Baton is made from a carbon fiber hybrid material, incorporating Pacifico's own patented 'Hypo-Steel' compound. The baton is designed to extend and retract, forming either a short club or a riot stick. A small internal power pack delivers a 'micro-shock' designed to numb localised areas without causing real damage. The Power Pack lasts for 500 hours and costs 2c to replace.

Weapon	DMG	PEN	AD	COS	WT
				T	
Pacifico	4	0	1	40c	1kg

Pacifico Clubs Inc. are currently operating from Upper Downtown, where they are selling their product by the bucket load. Their CEO,

Amanda Chamberlain, plans to float the company at the end of the year, going in search of bigger products to license.

Independents

Independents are companies that have some direct share holding from SLA Industries, though they are not tied to a Dept., sub-company or single product.

Often Independents are formed by SLA employees who have an idea they cannot pursue within their chosen vocation, they approach SLA Industries for backing and go it alone

To be classed as an Independent a company must have no more than 40% of their shares held by SLA Industries.

It has been known for SLA Industries to hold 90% shares, through third parties and 'grey' holding companies. The employees of Independents are thought of as 'civilians' even though their company may in fact be partly owned by SLA Industries.

Example: AlertWare is a small Independent company formed in 899 SD. by Crystal Thiers, an ex-employee of the Dept. of Sanitation. Ms. Thiers was an administration worker for StormCover, a clean up subsidiary of the Dept.. StormCover specialised in the sealing and clearing of 'storm drains' in Upper Downtown. One of the pieces of equipment used regularly by StormCover Op's was a small motion tracker with an audio alert, these would be placed on drain covers to alert the operatives to their opening while in the area. Ms. Thiers applied the small devices to the civilian market, making them smaller and more robust, with a larger range of emission. Renamed the AlertAware, the small device found it's way in to many civilian homes, fitted to doors and windows. AlertWare are currently working on a version for vehicles. The key to the success of Ms Thiers and her newly founded company is the simplicity of the product. Nothing fancy, just cheap and functional, the AlertAware costs 40u and is designed to be throw away, lasting up to 6000 hours.

There are numerous rumours surrounding Ms Thiers and her ability to raise the capital needed to set up AlertAware, though where she got the money and the resources from is a secret known only to her.

Freetraders

This is as close to being a Soft Company as it gets. Freetraders do not make anything, they produce nothing and they hold no company shares. Freetraders are middle men, those that buy and sell other people's products, often including a number of 'illegal' lines produced by Softies. A few Freetraders are dedicated to one or more market, but most will deal in anything from weapons to pots and pans, taking in anything in-between, from clothes to pets.

Example: Any one of a thousand stall holders in any market in Downtown or Suburbia. A few have shops, but most operate from the backs of vans.

FINDING A JOB: BPN'S

Two interesting BPN's, both inspired by the 'free form' games run at Euro Gen-Con. Thanks to those who took part, and sorry about the casualty rates, but hey, nobody said it was going to be easy. Oh all right, they did. But they lied. OK.

SCL : 9

Contact Department Of : Environment

Training Package Recommended :

Any / Investigation

Colour Code : White

Summary : Operatives needed to uncover the identity of a Stalker who is threatening the life of a Dept. employee. May lead to further employment by Dept. on other, related White. Apply to Mrs. Hiliary Catchpole, 0112 98344 901 for full briefing and contract details.

Coverage : Station Analysis

Consolidated Bonus Scheme : 10c per day, plus bonus scheme.

Payment : Per Operative.

Once the Operatives contact Mrs. Catchpole they will be asked to sign both a disclaimer and a contract. The disclaimer absolves the Dept. Environment of any responsibility for the Operatives while they are on the BPN, the contract ties them to the Dept. as far as rights to

interviews and revenue from spin off goes. Both are standard contracts, though their inclusion for the BPN may alert the Op's that someone expects more trouble than Mrs. Catchpole is letting on.

Mrs. Catchpole gives the Operatives the following information;

One of the Dept. Environment's employees, a Ms. Mirriam Slight, has received threatening phone calls and believes she is the target of a Stalker.

The Operatives are expected to stay with Ms Slight for the duration of the investigation, which must uncover the Stalker.

How the Op's achieve their objective is up to them, there must be minimum disruption to Ms Slight's life, and the Dept. will offer only minimal assistance. The Op's will not be able to gain access to any information otherwise available to them, there will be no dispensations from the Dept.

If the Operatives manage to get on Mrs. Catchpole's good side, either through skill or guile, she may reveal that the Stalker is believed to work within the Dept. and that they are thought to be a DarkNight agent.

What's Going On

The real purpose of the BPN is as stated, to prevent a Stalker from killing Ms Slight.

What no one is telling the Op's is that Ms Slight has an 'admirer', one Edgar Burrows, who is the Chief exec. of a Ministry of War sub-company, Storm Watch.

Edgar Burrows is madly in love with Ms Slight, and he pays for her Uptown apartment and gives her an allowance of 200c per week. Both Ms Slight and Edgar will be very secretive of their relationship, though Mirriam will be unable to avoid showing off her lifestyle and hinting at her lover's importance in the Ministry.

Mirriam's apartment is in sector 501 of Uptown, only a few blocks away from the Ministry of War's main offices, which is where the core of Storm Watch are based. The apartment is obviously way above the means of Mirriam, and the other occupants of the

apartment block will all be SCL 4 or higher (Mirriam is SCL 7).

Edgar Burrows is a Thresher Insurgent Operative. Thresher Insurgents are very, very rare. They have been trained by both Thresher and usually SLA Industries. Edgar is no exception. He runs Storm Watch with ruthless efficiency, tracking down DarkNight agents with a fierce passion and a remarkable success rate.

One of the twists in the BPN comes in the form of Ms Mirriam Slight's butler. He is Jonathan Depp, in his late twenties, he appears to be the epitome of the 'seen and not heard' brand of home help. Jonathan has been with Mirriam ever since she first started seeing Edgar about a year ago, he was hand picked by Edgar to see to her well being. Jonathan has become something of a father figure for Mirriam, who trusts him completely.

Jonathan is an Operative, he is working a Platinum from Head Office. His brief is to get close to Edgar, to monitor him and then to terminate him when he is told. Use the human NPC stats. from Karma, replacing Good Luck and Allergy - Fur with Paranoia 7, increase Martial Arts to 9, and Pistol to 8. Remove Business Admin., Photography and Forensics.

DarkNight have been trying to win over Edgar Burrows for some time. They know he is sympathetic to Thresher, though they think he is simply a paid 'insider', they do not realise he is an insurgent. After many attempts to sweet talk Edgar, DarkNight have decided to try another tack. They have targeted Mirriam for execution, hoping to get to Edgar through her.

The Stalker is a DarkNight Convert working for the Dept. Environment as an office boy. Harlon Bule, the DarkNight convert, will be hard to catch, and harder to stop. He has access to Mirriam during her working day, if after three days he has not managed to hit Mirriam, he will become desperate, making a foolishly brazen attempt to get her while at work.

If the Op's stop Harlon they may have a slim chance of finding out what is going on.

Questioning Edgar will get them nowhere, he is a trained liar and psychologist, he will probably manage to get something out of the Operative questioning him that they would rather have

left buried. If Edgar is close to being uncovered he will flee in to Downtown.

Edgar really does love Mirriam and he will do everything to protect her. If he has to flee he will do all in his power to take her with him.

If the Op's manage to thwart DarkNight in their attempt to kill Mirriam, DarkNight may decide to put on a show of strength, both for SLA and Edgar, launching a full assault on Mirriam and the Operatives. They will either attack the building Mirriam is in, or will ambush the Op's and Mirriam on the road.

Options for this BPN include making Mirriam or Edgar an addict, maybe Mirriam to Personal Interest and Edgar to Bass or Bone.

Having Jonathan close by in the apartment when DarkNight make their move may force him to reveal his true identity, maybe he decides that Mirriam has become expendable and tries to kill her himself, perhaps framing one of the Op's.

White's are supposed to be hard. Stop whining.

SCL : 10

Contact Department Of : Retrieval

Training Package Recommended : Any

Colour Code : Yellow

Summary : SCAF Shiver unit downed in Downtown Sector 480. Recovery of black box. Bonus for extra equipment recovered. Contact Huey Wilson, Dept. Retrieval 002 613 449887.

Coverage : Station Analysis

Consolidated Bonus Scheme : 100c per day, plus graded recovery bonus.

Payment : Per Operative.

Huey Wilson will give the Op's all relevant information in the form of a file with the following details;

Downtown Sector 480 has the highest ceiling of any Downtown sector, part of it being a natural cavern and part being the wasteland of supports for a chemical plant on the level above.

Sector 480 does not border any of the Sectors though there is a high Carrien population, mainly from the storm drains and run off canals

that lead to Cannibal Sector Two, eighteen levels beneath sector 480.

Black Order are the favoured Soft company, with DarkNight running a poor second. Operatives are regularly sniped at and no vehicle should ever be left unattended. The Operative body count for last month topped two hundred.

The three main gangs in 480 are the Deepers, the MainLiners and the Crowns. Each gang has a membership of between one and three thousand, each has a well defined turf and war between the gangs is rare. Indeed, they seem amongst the most co-operative gangs on Mort (at least as far as other gangs go).

Shivers stopped patrolling 480 two months ago, Monarch have not dared venture there for a little over a year. It is known that there are forty seven 'sleeper' Shiver units currently operational in 480, non can be relied on to come to the aid of Op's in trouble. In fact, Shivers in 480 see Operatives in only a slightly better light than do the citizens.

The downed SCAF unit comprised of two FEN 4998's, each with a single pilot. Both Pilots are assumed dead, their heli-bikes are known to have landed on auto and are thought to be almost completely intact.

Two days ago a Power Reaper was purchased by an undercover Op from a market deep in 480, it has since been identified as coming from one of the SCAF heli-bikes.

Internal Affairs have recently given the green light to Operation MilkMan, a huge scale sweep and clear maneuver, to be undertaken by six Dispersal and Eight D.A.C. squads. The operation is scheduled for three days time. Any Operative caught in the sector during MilkMan must clearly identify themselves, or be held responsible for the consequences of their actions.

What's Going On

Cloak have information that Black Order are going to attempt to literally bring the roof down. There are plans to demolish the chemical plant above 480, releasing millions of gallons of toxic waste in to the sector, 'cleansing' it

once and for all. The chemical plant is owned and run by Pharm Corp., a sub-company of TX Pharmaceuticals, which is owned by Karma.

Cloak have co-ordinated the sleeper Shiver units to track down all likely meeting points for Black Order demolition teams and Operation MilkMan is designed to hit these points. Of course, there will be other casualties as the Shivers go about their duty, and a few undercover termination's will be carried out.

The Dept. Retrieval is being blamed by Cloak for letting so much hardware accumulate in 480, Cloak feel that Dept. Retrieval has not done enough to track down and recover much of the property stolen from dead Op's in the past three months. The SCAF heli-bikes are the last straw. With these in the hands of Black Order, speed is paramount.

What's To Do

The Op's will obviously have their own ideas about the best way to tackle this one. Oh, OK, they wont. But you must let them think they have great ideas just waiting to succeed.

Careful investigation and interrogation will reveal that all gangs and Soft Companies in the area are aware of MilkMan and plan to be somewhere else when it goes down.

Both the heli-bikes are indeed in the hands of Black Order, who are fitting them out to take suicide bombers on ramming raids deep into the chemical plants sub-structure.

Citizens of Sector 480 do not like Operatives, they like the way the Soft Companies handle things on the streets, and they certainly do not miss the Shivers. Everyone will be hostile and unhelpful, some going as far as to openly condemn Operatives and SLA Industries.

The Sleeper Shiver units will not want any contact with Op's, any that are forced to meet with Op's will be sullen and curt, not giving away anything useful. It is obvious that the Sleepers know of MilkMan, and each has a bolt hole to escape to.

The wasteland directly beneath the chemical plant is a derelict warehouse district infested with Carrien. It is here that Black Order have their sector Head Quarters, and here is where the heli-bikes are being re-fitted.

Whatever the Op's do, they will be dogged by a feeling of hostility and suspicion, with danger

seeming to be real and apparent around every corner, in every shadow.

The Op's will feel cut off and utterly alone in their representation of SLA Industries. Nobody will help them and nobody cares if they live or die, except most want them dead.

There is no easy way for the Op's to handle this one. Use this as an opportunity to really ram home the message that they are small cogs in a very big machine. They may well decide to just 'ride out' the BPN, doing very little until MilkMan, then using the operation as an excuse for their own failure.

The climax should obviously be Black Order launching their assault on the chemical plant, rockets, bombs, suicide squads and all.

Having millions upon millions of gallons of highly toxic liquid rain down on sector 480 will obviously upset SLA Industries, and any Op's known to be in the area will have been expected to at least try and stop this from happening.

Oh yeah, the heli-bikes. Well, you may want to give the Op's a minuscule chance of retrieving them, but we suggest not.

Use this BPN to thoroughly demoralise your Operatives. A harsh lesson that will stand them in good stead during their up and coming (illustrious/short) careers.

EQUIPMENT

POWER WHIP

Written by:
Vincent Mottier

Thanks to Vincent for this little beauty, we have 'tinkered' with it a bit (for the better we hope). And we would just like to say that Vincent's grasp of English is about a million times better than our grasp of Swiss-ese (or French). Vive la dentiste.

The Powered Retractable Whip is produced by Multi Job Lacerates, though there is some

dispute between them and MAC over the original concept, and hence patent.

The grip has been designed for MJL by Karma, and consists of a bio-glove that melds to the users hand, making the whip easier to hold and harder to lose when a hit is made.

Bio Glove

P.V.	I.D.	repair cost per I.D.
2	8	10c

The Bio Glove comes in any one of a thousand colours and is designed to 'fade' to white as the power level of the whip drops.

The actual 'tail' of the whip is made from titane wires woven with carbon fiber, the surface of the tail is coated with ceramic micro-plates (the tail is 5mm thick). The tail has the flexibility and fluidity of a liquid, while delivering the sting of cold steel.

"MAC gave up on the powered whip in the winter of 987 SD., too much money was being wasted on developing the coating. The whip was too fragile, tests showed it was good for maybe two hundred strikes. MJL had a compound developed for their U-Blade which was going nowhere. Two months later the Powered Whip went in to field trial. So far there is little or no sign of the Powered whip hitting big on the Black Market, it would seem to be just too specialised."

Julie Lambert, MJL Technician quoted in Op. Info. Magazine, 901 SD., Mort.

Game System Stuff

Multi-Job Lacerates Retractable Powered Whip

(MJL 786.03 RPW)

Type: Power Whip

Length: 20cm (Tail; 30cm to 2.5m)

Damage: 3 (plus *special; see below)

Penetration: 0

Armour Damage: 0

Weight: 0.8 kg

Cost: 200c

Black Market Cost: 3,000u

Skill for Use: Flexible Weapon (DEX based rather than STR based).

The Power Whip uses a battery pack, supplying a 1,500 hour use. The power pack gives the Power whip it's oscillating core as well as it's 'jolt' capability.

*Special: If the user of the Whip scores a hit on 20+, they may choose to wrap the whip around the area hit and make a 'slash' attack in the next round, instead of a normal attack. The slash works on opposing STR rolls (as a skill), with the highest score winning. if the Whip wins this attack, it delivers a DMG 6, PEN 4, AD 2 attack automatically.

The 'jolt' may be used if a successful hit is scored on 20+, as the whip has wrapped itself around a part of the target and touched itself to complete the circuit. The jolt is equivalent to 7,000 volts and can paralyse a victim for up to two minutes. It can also adversely affect the operation of powered armour, shorting out circuits in the target area. Each jolt uses 15% of the batteries power supply.

NB: The Power Whip cannot deliver a jolt the same turn as a slash attack.

The Power whip can also be used to 'grab' things, both from peoples hands and from stationary positions. A successful attack must be made, targeting the object (relevant modifiers apply). If a successful hit is scored, the wielder of the Whip makes a DEX roll (as a skill) at a difficulty rating determined by the GM, success means they have the object.

Example: Liarra the Wraith Raider targets the CAF weapon in the DarkNight operatives hand (-5 for size of target, -3 for movement of target). She rolls 19, with her skill of 9 this gives her a success of 20. A DEX roll at difficulty 8 (mean GM), she rolls 15, added to her DEX 10, gives her a success of 17. She wraps the Whip around the gun. The GM makes Liarra roll an opposed STR roll to pull the gun from the DarkNight operatives hand. At this point Liarra turns her attention to the GM....

There are rumours of Dark Lament's involvement with MJL, apparently they are collaborating on a version of the Powered Whip designed for Ebons. Presumably the Whip would be used to deliver a targeted Ebb assault, maybe a senses based attack.

The Powered Whip has so far proved most popular with Ebons and Wraith Raiders; Ebons for it's non-lethal nature and it's ability to disarm, Wraith Raiders for it's flexibility and 'fun' factor.

Frothers and BrainWasters are also waking up to the Whip's possibilities.

(Oh goodie....)

RELIC ARMOUR

Relic Armour is the generic term given to Power Suits produced by Soft Companies in the dim and distant past. These companies produced their wares exclusively for use on War Worlds, and sold to the highest bidder. All but a few of these companies have faded in to the obscurity of time, but a few have achieved immortality through the legacy of their work. Companies such as Killa Chassis, with their legendary MkII Retribution and MkIII Sinner suits still live in the minds of the public, and their suits are still turning up in good working order.

From the smoking rubble and flames of Hed comes another name to be added to this elite; DethBond, immortalised through their Heresy Power Suit.

Game System Stuff

DethBond were a splinter group of Thresher Incorporated. In the short time they were in existence they managed to make enemies of both SLA Industries and the Thresher. They finally disappeared from recorded history in 600 SD. being wiped out in the Blue Light offensive on Hed in the same year.

DethBond developed the Heresy Suit in 597 SD. and perfected in by 599 SD. Unfortunately they could not establish themselves on any major resource or industrial worlds, and their capacity to produce the suit was extremely limited. It is estimated that no more than eight thousand were ever made, and SLA Industries can only account for seven thousand of these being destroyed.

Heresy suits are most often brought to Mort by War Criminals, though a couple have been found in old hangers deep in Cannibal Sector Three, suggesting that DethBond were once present on Mort, though what their plans were, none can say.

All files and information relating to DethBond are classified SCL 4, and all are flagged by Head Office. Anyone inquiring too deeply in to the past of DethBond will inevitably come to the attention of both Cloak and Internal Affairs.

H e r e s y

The Heresy suit is very similar in appearance to the TH. 0004 'First Step' PPA suit still used by Thresher today.

It is based around the KAD - C technology so beloved of Thresher. The surface of the Heresy suit is 'bubbled' to maximise the spread of kinetic force from in-coming rounds, this coupled with the fully concealed power pack and closed helmet give the Heresy an eerie, alien quality.

The heresy suit is fully contained, allowing the wearer to remain sealed in for up to three days before the water filtration plant and atmosphere filters need to be 'purged' by emptying the suit. All fluids produced by the wearer are recycled within the suit, with minimal environmental impact. The Heresy suit comes with an on board intravenous system, which can be easily adapted to take a number of dietary requirements.

The Heresy suit was designed to fulfil both a 'deep strike' and a sleeper role, it is best suited to terms of prolonged use and does not take well to being frequently removed.

The 'jump' capability of the heresy has been stolen from Killa Chassis' Retribution suit; the wearer has a jump range of 20m in any one direction at a speed of 30km/h, a six second cool down period between jumps is needed, each jump uses 02% of the suits remaining power supply.

H e r e s y - S p e c i f i c a t i o n s

Classification: DethBond MkIV, Powered Personal Armour Chassis, 'Heresy'.

Cost: (Black Market Only) 80,000u.

P.V.	Head	Torso	Arms	Legs
12	20	100	60	80

Modifiers: +1 STR, +1 DEX, *Special

*Special: See Below.

The Truth Of DethBond

DethBond were born from the womb of Thresher Incorporated, their birth was both painful and unexpected. Once in existence they quickly became something of a Nemesis for the Thresher, the worst sort of enemy; one that knows your weaknesses from the inside.

So little is known of the exact make up of DethBond, including who exactly was behind it all, that many have come to suspect the company never really separated from Thresher, but was somehow perversely entangled with it right to the bitter end.

The Truth of DethBond is known only to a handful, and can never be released to any but the faithful within SLA; typically SCL 4 and above.

DethBond perfected the technique of 'bonding', abandoned as inhuman by Thresher, and never really taken seriously by SLA. The species DethBond chose were the Thrax, and the Heresy suit is both their legacy and their heritage.

The Thrax were stripped of their higher intellect and their muscle tissue grafted in to the Suit, being coded genetically with the suits functions and performance parameters. Thrax were once found all over sector 640, on more than eight worlds. Their reptilian form and primitive intellect made them prime targets for bonding, their DNA was simple and their lack of language meant their brains were not clouded with the complicated 'clutter' of more developed species.

Once a Thrax was 'separated', their muscle tissue was incorporated in to the lining of a heresy suit, while their brain patterns were downloaded in to the Heresy CPU.

Once the wearer of the Heresy suit was familiar with it's operations, they could be bonded with the Thrax.

Neural stimulation from the wearers brain would be used to power the muscle tissue of the Thrax, who's own intellect was essentially the operating program of the suit. The wearer and the suit gradually assimilate, becoming a hybrid Thrax. Once this is achieved the Heresy user gains +4 DEX and +5 STR, they make no PHYS rolls while bonded and lose -4 CONC.

Users of the Heresy suit are often unaware of the bonding, the gradual bonding of muscle and nerve is achieved with the aid of a secreted anaesthetic, which may induce psychoses in some users.

A successful DIA roll will tell the wearer that something is going on. Though they may be physically unable to stop the process once they find out about it.

Once bonding is complete the wearer will resist any attempt to remove them from the suit. If they are forcibly torn from the Heresy suit, the Thrax is killed and the suit becomes effectively useless, being merely a shell of a power suit.

Thrax may lay 'dormant' in a sealed suit for up to six hundred years.

BOSH DT2 BLADE

"The BOSH Blade didn't just grow up, it graduated in to another class. Full report pending."

A. Kramer, Corporate Division, Mort 901 SD.

The BOSH SLA Blade is fast becoming a laughing stock, produced by a company with "no need to worry about things that threaten other design teams such as cash flow, sales, etc.", it seems a half hearted attempt to enter in to the close combat market.

The DT2 Blade is designed to redress this problem. The DT2 can be thrown, but is best used in close.

The DT2 is made from a Plasti-steel compound akin to ceramics, it's honeycombed molecules are 'filled' with gas giving it strength and rigidity. If a DT2 breaks, it shatters violently, causing damage to it's wielder and the target.

BOSH DT2 Blade

	DM	PEN	AD	Cost	Wght
	G				
DT2	2	1	1	60c	0.5kg

A 'brute' version of the DT2 is also available, larger and sturdier, it resembles a short sword rather than a knife. It is not weighted for throwing and shatters with more severe consequences.

DT2 'Brute'

	DM	PEN	AD	Cost	Wght
	G				
DT2	3	2	1	90c	0.8kg

Black Market costs for the DT2 are; 1,000u and 1,800u.

The shattering of either blade causes a wound to the wielder, and a wound to the target if a successful hit was scored. DT2 Blades shatter if a natural '01' is rolled for the attack.

SOFT COMPANIES

BLOODBURN PHARMACEUTICALS

Company adage: "Only BloodBurn is worth the risk."

BloodBurn are an overnight success story fresh from the murky depths of Downtown. They have burst on to the market like a firestorm, sweeping three competitors into oblivion, both with their irresistible product and their violent 'marketing' strategy.

"Yeah BloodBurn are bad news. No respect y'know? They think they are something special, like we aint seen a million of 'em come and go. Good shit though, that's the worst of it, it's just good shit."

Ermin, unemployed 'citizen', Sector 322, Downtown Mort 901 SD.

In the space of a month, BloodBurn have managed to make enemies of most of the other Soft Companies in Sector 322, as well as having three BPN's issued against them.

Their street-cred is enormous, and many seek to be associated with them, even if they know nothing about them.

Generally speaking, BloodBurn are a whispered name, if your rep. on the street is high enough, you may find them, if not, dream on.

Frothers are showing a definite tendency towards BloodBurn products.

Neither of the other 'big three' Soft Companies, i.e. DarkNight, Thresher or Black Order, have so far been associated with BloodBurn.

The Thresher are known to have killed six BloodBurn employees in a raid on a Downtown market three days ago.

The 'person in the street's' perception of BloodBurn is very muddled. Most welcome them as a necessary evil, while others realise the danger in yet more unstable combat and recreational drugs hitting the streets.

At the moment BloodBurn have two products which far out-sell anything else they produce; BloodBane (combat) and Bone (recreational).

Game System Stuff

BloodBurn currently have one hundred and forty seven employees, eight of whom are bio-chemists.

The head of BloodBurn is a figure known only as 'Aunty Jane', rumour has it she is a Frother of at least SCL 5. BloodBurn regularly hire Props to assist them in 'marketing'; that is hitting the opposition.

BloodBurn are based in a small disused warehouse situated in Downtown sector 322, just a stones throw away from one of the inner perimeter walls of Cannibal Sector Three.

Most BloodBurn products can be bought from reliable street or Clan contacts, but only after they have checked you out.

BloodBurn have access (via a 'hacked' Exael link) to live Shiver and Operative open broadcasts, so they are extremely hard to pin down and they can perform quick, reliable checks through the same link.

SLA Industries is slow to appreciate the potential threat from BloodBurn, and they realise that there is no real danger posed by BloodBurn, just another yapping dog at the heels of the giant.

The Thresher seem to have a personal score to settle with BloodBurn, and if they get the chance they may launch a strike on the warehouse in Downtown.

BloodBane - Combat Drug

BloodBane is a direct copy of the Pod Pharmaceutical drug Vio-Let. BloodBurn have basically refined it and added a strain of Bass originally rejected by Karma during the early development of the drug. This would imply that Auntie Jane has access to some pretty hefty SLA contacts, or was once high within Karma herself.

BloodBane

Game Effects: +3 to STR for half hour, no PHYS rolls for half hour.

Addiction Modifier: -2 PHYS, per 2 doses.

Detox. Effects: -1 STR, -1 DEX, permanent.

Addiction: 2 per day.

Cost: 80u.

Bone - Recreational Drug

Bone was developed by Karma as a supplement to Personal Interest. Where Personal Interest gave you the inclination and imagination, Bone gave you the stamina to 'not disappoint'.

Unfortunately, Bone was discovered to have a singularly unpleasant side effect; sometimes it wouldn't wear off. Such trivial details have not stopped BloodBurn from pirating the drug, nor does it seem much of a deterrent for the thousands now addicted.

Bone

*Game Effects: +2 to PHYS for one hour.

Addiction Modifier: -1 PHYS, per 2 doses.

Detox. Effects: -1 STR, -1 DEX, -1 COOL, -2 CONC, permanent.

Addiction: 1 per day.

Cost: 40u.

*Bone takes three phases to 'kick in', after this the user will feel the relentless need to have sexual intercourse. The user will be in a constant state of 'arousal' and readiness. Failure to 'do the dirty' while on Bone results in the Detox effects kicking in, it seems to effect different people to differing degrees, with some needing as many eight orgasmic experiences to avoid Detox.

Both BloodBane and Bone are on the SLA restricted substance list, those found in possession are liable to an SCL decrease and a hefty fine.

EXAEL

Corps 'sign off': "Slayer don't surf. His loss, our gain."

The Exael logo of a 'jacked in' smiley can be found all over Mort, increasingly in The Pit and on the walls of Suburbia.

Exael (pronounced X-a-Yell) seem to have come up along side the legitimate SLA Matrix company CyNet, and it is openly accepted that Exael was formed by CyNet employees.

One of Exael's strengths lies in the fact that they did not stand still, after they formed, they went on to the streets to recruit new talent.

It is common knowledge that Exael are made up of feral Ebons and disgruntled 'tekies' from many 'legitimate' SLA companies. Exael have even managed to win over a few DarkNight and Thresher agents.

Word is that Exael are growing stronger by the day, and that they have almost as much influence in the matrix as legitimate users, maybe more.

It is certainly true that Exael viruses have been responsible for more disasters than anyone else's.

A lot of street gangs and other 'gangster' types are using Exael to both store their records in the Matrix, and to raid the matrix of any undesirable files. The price for Exael's services is rising by the week.

Game System Stuff

Exael have three hundred 'employees', or Surfers, as they are more commonly known. Twenty of these are amongst the top one hundred Matrix Users on Mort today.

Exael access the matrix through a thousand private address as well as numerous shop, public and SLA sites. They always sign in with the 'Slayer don't surf' logo, almost in a defiant gesture daring to be caught. Their masking IC programs are second to none, allowing them up to four minutes clear operating time within the Matrix.

The service Exael sell is simple. They will go in, get what you want and get out. The larger the stuff you want altered or removed, the more they charge. A simple run may cost 500u, while

a longer, more dangerous expedition can cost up to 25,000u.

Exael do not discriminate in their choice of customer, working for Soft Companies, Operatives as well as street gangs, Props and anyone who can afford them.

Members of Exael are not known to each other, each employee is part of a team controlled by a Dude. Dudes know each member of their eight man team intimately, they see to their needs and send them clients.

A sideline for Exael is the selling of data slugs allowing others to access the Matrix. Essentially, the slugs act as carriers and masks. As long as the user has a basic knowledge of how to use the Matrix, the slugs can help them. Each slug is designed to work from a basic Oyster, though more elaborate 'rides' can be bought, needing more sophisticated machines.

H I d d e n A g e n d a

Exael are controlled by a group of individuals who give new meaning to the term fanatical. The whole driving force behind the company and the reason for it's existence, is something called 'Fireball'.

The two heads of Exael are both co-designers of the CyNet, both are presumed dead, and both rank in the top ten Matrix Users. Upon their departure from SLA Industries, both partners vowed to erase the abomination that was to become CyNet. To this end, they work and build. Slowly accumulating the information they need, both through their own runs and from those they work for, nothing is done without consideration of Fireball.

When enough access codes and gates have been opened, and when the time is right, Exael plans to wipe CyNet from the face of the Matrix, leaving a yawning chasm in it's place, which will swallow SLA Industries.

The means to achieve this is being gathered through the Ebon involvement with Exael. At the given time, every Ebon will be logged on, and each will activate their gating abilities. In conjunction with this, raids on data cells will empty vast amounts of system information in to one massive pool. The pool will then be

'drained' in to the Tomb, dragging most of the operational systems of CyNet with it.

The projected effects of this crash show that no user in the system at the time will be capable of surviving, this includes Exael members. Each will pay the price for their dedication, being doomed to a terrible death in the Tomb.

Forecasts from Exael's two heads show that the Matrix will be out of action for at least eighteen minutes, and even when it is brought back on line, the information dumped in the Tomb will have been absorbed in to the 'landscape', and will be irrecoverable.

Casual users of Exael will (of course) not be aware of the grand designs of the Soft Company, and no one but the inner circle of the upper tiers of control are aware of Fireball.

Skirmishers in the Matrix between Exael users and carriers will be brief, and usually there will be no physical damage. Exael, like all 'Surfers', hate Pirates, and there may be some attempt to locate them on Mort to raid their facility while they are jacked in. These raids will be the only type of physical combat entered in to by Exael members, and will usually be carried out by Props or other grateful clients.

A good way to introduce Exael in to your game is to have them raid one of the Operatives accounts, or maybe crash a system while it is being used, leaving only their logo sliding slowly from the screen.

Numerous BPN's will be running, mainly whites, though there may be a Silver sponsored by Third Eye, maybe to expose a renowned black spot in the Matrix, of course the Operatives would have to enter the CyNet Matrix, and maybe they don't think they will look good digitised....

Ebon Operatives should be especially drawn to Exael, to whom it would be especially dangerous.

H E R E – O H

Here-Oh are an overnight Soft Company. Nobody knows where they came from or why they exist, which they didn't the day before yesterday.

They produce vid-discs, audio discs and posters, as well as T-shirts and other 'soft wear'.

Here-Oh concentrate on one 'hero' at a time, dedicating all of their production facilities at once to one source. They are a small, nuisance company, who flagrantly abuse both TM and ©, which is why they have come to the attention of some minor SLA sub-Department.

Game System Stuff

Here-Oh target a 'celebrity' until they die, or are dropped in to obscurity. Their publicity campaigns on behalf of their chosen 'target' involve TV break ins, posters, sponsorship with props and more. They often pick up on Contract Killers and notorious DarkNight or Thresher Op's, this forces SLA to act, giving Her-Oh a new target for their attention.

Here-Oh have thirty eight employees, all of whom live in Suburbia and work for SLA sub-companies. They have no affiliation to any other Soft Company and will fight to retain their independence. The head of Here-Oh is Mathew Fredriksson, an employee of LightSauce, a division of dept. Entertainment responsible for game shows and talent contests.

Her-Oh will (of course) target one of the characters as their next 'icon', bringing much unwanted attention. Her-Oh have a way of digging things up from the past that most would want left buried.

Issue 7 saw TBP getting well and truly in to it's stride. I'd forgotten how much was actually in it. Marvellous.

The cover picture (the female Necanthrope, MRB pp 259) has just got to be T-shirt fodder, with a cool slogan....

The nicking of Nightfall artwork was limited to covers. The lack of response regarding getting articles or artwork was becoming a real concern, but I was still brimming with SLA stuff, so I figured just keep going and others will join in eventually.... I'm still waiting ☺

Max Bantleman, 2001.