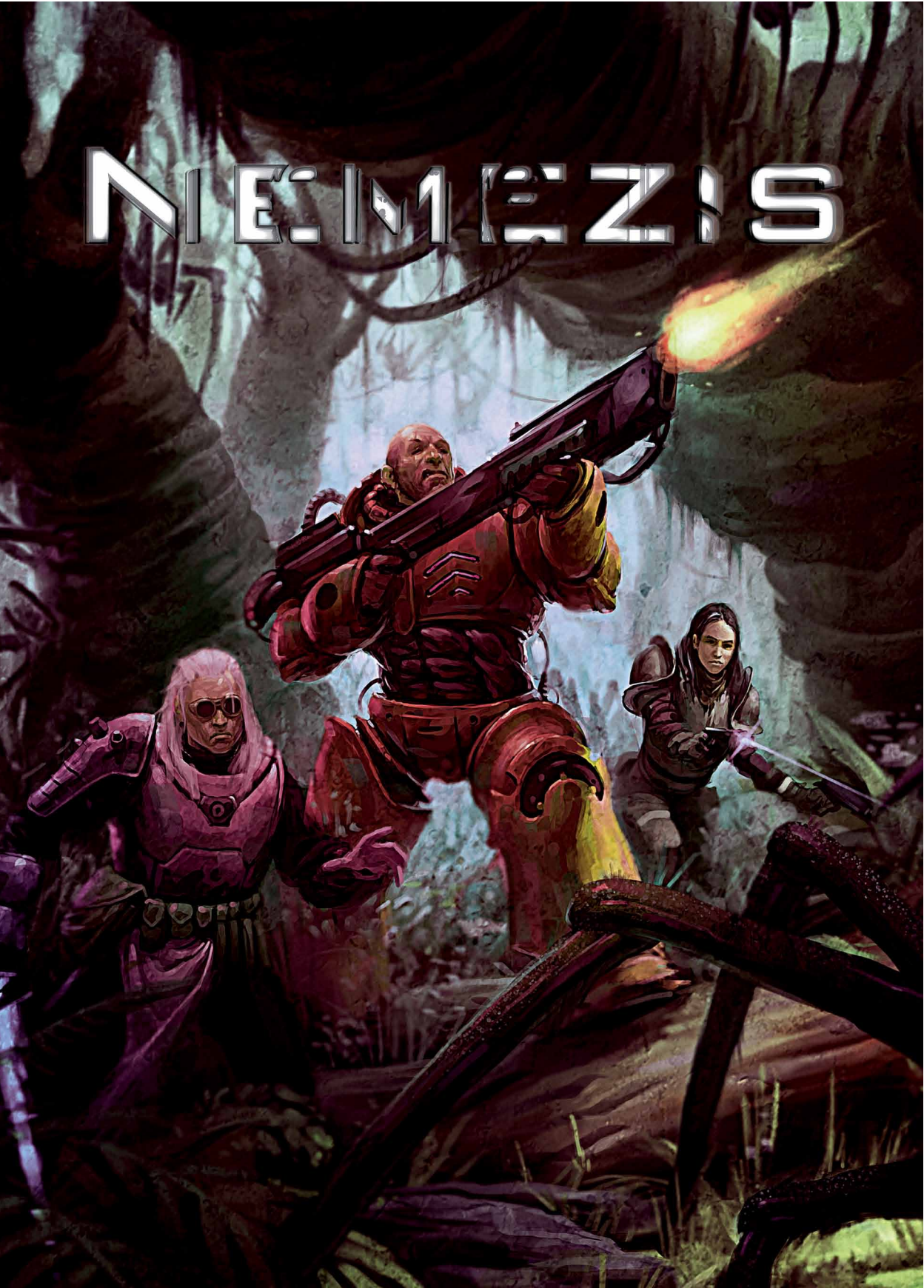


NEMESIS



NEMEZIS

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SPECIAL THANKS TO

MARYSIA, AGNIESZKA, KASIA, JERZY, MARCEL KORYŚ AND IRISH TEAM (MACIEK KURSA, PAULINA NAHAJOWSKA I WALDEK TKACZ) - FOR HELPING A FRIEND IN NEED. AND TO ANDY SLACK - FOR BEING A GOOD FRIEND OF US.

VERY SPECIAL THANKS TO PAWEŁ KUZNICKI, WHO CHANGED DEEP SPACE INTO NEMEZIS.

IN MEMORY OF PROFESSOR ZBIGNIEW MAJKOWSKI.

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CHAPTER 1: **INTRODUCTION**

"My lads go on about how we're living in the End Days, how mankind is on the brink of extinction, and how they would rather live on Earth in ancient times, before space flight. A load of crap, if you ask me. Humans have colonized a quarter of the Galaxy, built cities on thousands of worlds; we've never been as powerful as we are now. No one'd better tell me that we're all gonna get eaten by some kind of space worm."

SERGEANT KATE RUSH, COR ARMY

1. HISTORY

There is a grain of truth in every story. The stories about a dark star, a strange companion of Earth's Sun had been told since the dawn of civilization.

That star was supposed to be the harbinger of some great disaster, the extinction of entire humankind and the destruction of its planet. As the millennia passed, humans forgot about myths and faith, and started to rely on science. While most such tales were lost in the mists of time, the legend about a dark star resurfaced occasionally, inspiring astronomers to theorize about a hypothetical object, called Nemezis – after the ancient goddess of destiny, justice... and revenge. Some scientists claimed that this object would be a brown dwarf, circling the Sun in a far, elliptical orbit. Nemezis would enter the solar system once in millions of years, changing the orbits of comets and planetoids, thus increasing the odds of such an object crashing into the Earth. Despite solid calculations, these theories did not find many supporters, and when the progress of science resulted in the construction of engines allowing humans to travel faster than light, the Nemezis hypothesis was discarded and forgotten.

After many millennia, when mankind had managed to conquer almost the entire Galaxy, Nemezis resurfaced as an object of interest to the scientific community. A certain object, accidentally discovered on the edges of the Solar System, did indeed turn out to be a brown dwarf. After more scrutiny, Nemezis was found to have a companion – a small planet, immediately dubbed Nyx. A small ship, equipped with state-of-art geological equipment, and manned by a group of scientists attempting to survey the planet, was sent to its surface. The results of this research would supposedly give mankind greater insight

into the formation of the Solar System. However, after a few days and the initial experiments, contact with those on Nyx's surface was lost. It's not sure what exactly triggered the disaster, but it's almost certain that these scientists were somehow involved.

A single day later Earth, the cradle of humankind, was destroyed.

Initially, the destruction of Earth was thought to have been caused by some kind of cosmic disaster. Neighboring star systems sent scout ships to investigate – none of them returned. When contact was lost with those systems as well, rumors about an attack by some kind of alien creatures started to circulate. All attempts at contact were unsuccessful, while the unknown enemy seized system after system, star after star. Months came and passed, but humans couldn't find answers to any of their questions: why had the aliens attacked Earth, how numerous were their forces, or even what kind of creatures they were. The first questions were only answered a year after the disaster triggered by mankind's first landing on Nyx. A band of mercenaries surveyed the remnants of the Solar System. They learned that not only had the Earth and other planets been obliterated, but both stars of the system – Sol and Nemesi were gone as well. They found a short video recording in the remnants of a space probe, the only image of the creature sleeping under the surface of Nyx. It was an immense worm, hundreds of miles long; its body was black, swallowing all light and matter.

It was called the Devourer of Worlds.

Awakened from an eons-long dream, this god started a dark crusade. As an act of its will, it called forth the Horde, a race of mindless, vile beings, completely subject to its demands; and set it on a completely unprepared humanity. The Horde knew no mercy. The beasts killed everyone:

men, women, children and the elderly, the sick and the dying. In just a few years billions died, and thousands of solar systems were plundered. Small planetary fleets couldn't measure up to void krakens, star vipers, and living ships of Horde's fleet. Everything seemed lost forever, and the legends about a dark star, a harbinger of doom, were told once again.

But recently, something has changed. For the first time, mankind has defeated the servants of the Devourer of Worlds. Today, the Horde still wins most of the battles, but the fate of mankind is not yet set in stone. People are seriously considering the unification of the Galaxy, and even an alliance against the dark gods. Already small alliances are forming, between up to dozen or so systems. Unfortunately, personal happiness is still often put ahead of the survival of mankind. The day of the unification of mankind under one creed is yet to come.

2. THE GALAXY

Millennia have passed since the age of the first interstellar journeys. Tens of thousands of worlds have been colonized. Technology allowed for terraforming many worlds with potential, allowing them to support life. The terraforming process was slow, but no one was in a particular hurry. For millennia, the worst threat to mankind was mankind itself.

Nations were born and died out. Wars – for living space, for money or for freedom – still happened. Though millions suffered, billions could live in peace and wealth. Regardless of your ideals and beliefs, you could find a place for yourself, somewhere out there in the universe. War became a weapon of last resort, used when all the other possibilities had been exhausted. In the course of the expansion, the hot hearts of humans cooled down, tempered by wisdom, patience and serenity.

A century ago, the estimated number of inhabited planets was in the tens of thousands. On twice as many, mankind had established outposts, colonies, or terraforming stations. But since the



awakening of the Devourer, that number has sharply decreased. Each year, a couple of systems are destroyed, and hideous beasts attack dozens of others. If the Horde isn't stopped, humanity will be extinct in a thousand years.

And yet, a lot of people don't care about the servants of the dark gods. Looking at other worlds fighting for survival, they shrug and say '*Why should I care?*' In the far corners of the Milky Way the Horde, the dark cults, and

the gods they worshipped are considered a tall tale. Most people don't care about the deaths of numerous stars, and they won't care – until the Horde appears in their system. Even then, most of them would rather flee than fight. After all, you just need a little money to escape far away, into another corner of the Galaxy, where the servants of the Devourer will not appear today or in a hundred years, and the Horde will be dangerous simply to future generations.

If you travelled between the worlds, you'd encounter both hope and despair. There are thousands of worlds worshipping *Pleasure* and as many that worship *Money*. But we should perhaps focus on the systems on the front line, where mankind struggles for survival. The heroes of our tales will decide the fate of planets. Their souls will be forged in the heat of battle, in the hellfire of the war with the Horde. They will be generals in the war with gods.

3. THREE WORLDS

Let's zoom in, to the three planets of a binary system known as Horizon. The worlds are called Ash, Bariz and Cor. They're exceptional for many reasons, but the most important is the close presence of the Horde. This system is the site of the Battle of Cor, fought between the human army and the servants of the Void Worm here twenty years ago. Even though the immense living fleet of monsters was vanquished, the remnants of the Horde managed to infect Cor. Once considered one of the most beautiful planets in the Galaxy, this world became a battlefield. From then on many lives have been lost, but humans aren't quitting – Cor is the first place in recorded history where mankind has defeated these monsters in open war. Though it might seem that defeat is inevitable, the fate of Horizon is not yet sealed.

ASH

Ash was once an inhospitable world, covered in ice, ravaged by wind and snowstorms. Hundreds

of years of terraforming warmed the planet and made it more inviting to humans. Initially, the planet was inhabited by a few thousand people, but over the course of a single decade it increased a hundredfold. Megacorporations, tempted by the planet's natural resources, started to build industrial and mining plants, and invited important personalities to the planet: from scientists and engineers to entertainers for the workers. In time, the planet became famous for its machines, vehicles and cybernetics. It was the headquarters of Infinity, a powerful geneteck corporation, very influential in many star systems.

A couple of decades ago, everything went to hell. The terraforming machines, still working on improving the natural conditions on Ash, started to malfunction for unknown reasons. Initially, this was considered another minor snag, but as more and more devices started to fail, the inhabitants of Ash understood that the problem was much more serious than they had thought. The scientists tried to repair the machines, but the basics of the technology behind the terraformers were long forgotten, and the planetary government couldn't afford to import new ones. Only the corporations had the means to save the planet; but the CEOs and boards of the companies decided that moving production elsewhere would be a better investment than buying more terraformers, which might break down as well. And the attack by the Horde and the invasion of Cor were the last straw – most of the larger corporations pulled all their resources from Ash.

The planet is dying. The damaged terraformers still manage to slow down the inevitable, but they will never manage to completely stop the return of the glaciers. In twenty or thirty years the planet will be too cold to sustain life even in the heated cities. Most of the settlements are already empty. Ash is now inhabited by around fifty million people – less than a tenth of its previous population. Most of the remaining corporations have been bought out by Infinity. Today, only three forces control Ash – Infinity, the Syndicate

(a powerful criminal empire, currently divided into many factions), and the government.

BARIZ

This was the first planet colonized in the Horizon system. Ash and Cor orbit the larger star, while Bariz circles around the smaller one. At first sight, the planet seems like an oasis of peace. The descendants of the first colonists live in giant mansion-cities, hundreds of miles across, hovering over the surface of the planet. The noble families of the planet never surrendered the right to own land, and have managed to keep their fortunes intact - until now. The nobles took care not to build factories or other manufacturing plants, thus preserving the natural beauty of the world. Together with the ordinary people they live in the cities hovering over mountains, rivers and forests of the planet, and their chief task seems to be multiplying their money. In their spare time they create works of art, and meditate upon the nature of the Universe, and the place of gods and the Horde in the order of things.

This is only a thin veneer. Under the surface, Bariz is a jungle. Only a thin line separates the common people from the intrigues, covert wars and conspiracies crafted by planetary factions. Under the veneer of etiquette and diplomacy, silent wars are being waged, with giant estates, the lives of millions or even the fate of planets at stake. In these battles, swords and pistols are used only as weapons of last resort - usually as a way of resolving matters of honor between ladies or gentlemen. Usually, conflicts are solved by quick wits, sharp minds, and precisely placed threats. The soldiers of Bariz are diplomats, spies, and psionists.

While the Horizon system is on the brink of collapse, with Cor being slowly devoured by the Horde and Ash freezing,

the people of Bariz do nothing. The show goes on, until the band stops playing - and it will play until the planet's orbit is visited by the powerful void krakens. Who cares about monsters? Bariz is already full of monsters in human skins.

COR

Thirty years ago Cor was a popular vacation planet, fashionable among the elite of neighboring star systems. Thousands of people came to Cor's resorts to enjoy the warm climate, dive into the depths of ocean, and rest on its many beaches. And when the Horde arrived, this dream burst like a soap bubble.

The resorts emptied, corporate support evaporated like a morning mist, and the bank accounts of those companies who had invested money in Cor's tourist industry were emptied and closed. The planet was left to die. The only people concerned with the fate of the planet were the ones who observed the battle between the Horde and the human ships from the surface - the inhabitants of Cor. In the minds of the rest of the mankind the world became simply "yet another planet conquered by the Horde". But the Cor Army did not intend to surrender easily. All available forces were mobilized. Powerful fortifications were erected and the few cities still inhabited were turned into strongholds; from the furthest



corners of the Galaxy came people who dared to fight with the spawn of the Devourer. And furthermore, *Emperor Tenji*, one of the oldest monastic starships, where cyborgs were trained and produced, arrived at the planet's orbit. This was to be a full-scale war.

The fight has now been going on for over twenty years. The Horde managed to conquer almost one-third of planet's surface, and they move forward every day. The rate of advance is so slow, however, that many human commanders consider attacking. Rumors say that only a small fraction of the human soldiers are sent to the front line. Almost a quarter million soldiers are defending some unidentified object. Some people claim that it's the Great Pyramid of

Black Iron – the tomb of one of the great gods of darkness. Two hundred and fifty thousand reserve troops is not all; on board the *Emperor Tenji* there are at least few hundred cyborgs. A single word would be enough to let them loose and send the Horde back to whatever Hell it crawled from. For some reason, however, the commanders are afraid to use this force. Rumor has it that Cor was infected not only by the Horde, but by Lij, the goddess known as Poisoner of Technology.



4. CONFLICTS

Nemesis is all about conflict. Regardless of whether your character is the head of a noble family dealing with the plots and intrigues swarming on Bariz, a brave soldier of Cor fighting monsters, or the boss of a Syndicate faction wanting to gain greater power – you will be forced to fight in the name of the things you hold dear. You will have to fight and kill the people standing in your way. A character living a quiet, simple life does not belong in *Nemesis* – no one will be interested in their story. The best stories are about people determined enough to risk their lives, and ready to sacrifice everything to achieve success.

TECHNOLOGY

Technology is the key factor in determining lifestyle. The means of transportation, communication, the structure of governments and society – all depend directly on the available technology. On many planets its spoils are just part of the background, and ordinary people don't know about its existence and the extent of its influence on their lives. Medical breakthroughs eliminating genetic flaws, terraformers making uninhabitable planets available to humans, or FTL engines that make space travel possible – these are just three examples of the inventions that completely changed the human race.

CYBERNETICS

Occasionally the replacement of natural limbs and organs by artificial components becomes a trend in most systems with access to this technology, usually once in a generation. But when the fashion passes, there comes a period of ostracism for the users of the implants. Churches, sects, and natural-human movements have clashed with the companies manufacturing, producing and installing cybernetic implants since the introduction of this technology. Nonetheless, these are fringe groups – an average person won't think twice

about seeing someone with a composite arm or steel eyes.

Cybernetics come in two broad kinds – civilian and military. The first are fairly limited, not only in terms of the firepower implanted in the device, but also in regards to performance and capabilities – for instance the strength of their artificial muscles. Governments want to protect society against the threat of criminals using the newest discoveries of technology against it. Of course, military cybernetics is still available on the black market, but its rarity and price are enough of a limitation.

CYBORGS

The first attempts to create 'real' cyborgs – with completely artificial bodies – were a complete failure. All the people who turned flesh and blood to composites and metal sooner or later turned insane. Some gave in to a homicidal rage, killing all the people unlucky enough to stand in their way, and others killed themselves or tried to destroy their mechanical bodies. After years of experimentation and research it became obvious that the problem was not in the technology but in the human psyche. Being a cyborg is a terrible fate – they don't feel many of the simple human pleasures, their freedom is very limited and their life is one of endless service. Only people with exceptionally strong willpower, who have undergone special training, are able to retain their sanity after a full body conversion. Today, when someone wants to serve their country or organization as a cyborg, they're sent to one of the monastic ships – huge vessels, mental academies, scientific facilities and exotic monasteries all rolled into one. The monks shape the beliefs of the future cyborgs, teaching them that in order to achieve true happiness, one must forsake all desires. Some volunteers need years to understand this; it might take others an entire lifetime. Most of them quit after few months of training.

Of course, you can still find facilities where anyone with enough cash can get turned into a cyborg without any training at all. There are

people who don't want to hear about what's going to happen to a soldier's mind after a few months of battle – all that matters is his efficiency in defeating enemies. And besides, the average life expectancy of a front-line soldier on Cor is around three months.

CYBORGS

YOU CAN'T REALLY CALL CYBORGS HUMAN. THEY ARE BEINGS WHO LIVE TO OBEY THE ORDERS, DEVOID OF NORMAL HUMAN DESIRES AND EMOTIONS. THEY SHOW NO MERCY – BUT THEY ALSO DON'T TAKE REVENGE FOR THEIR SUFFERING. A CYBORG WILL NOT HELP A WOUNDED ALLY, BUT THEY WILL NOT FINISH OFF A DYING ENEMY EITHER. IT'S BEST TO REGARD THEM AS THINKING MACHINES.

NANOTECHNOLOGY

Among all the branches of science, nanotechnology is the most controversial – but it's key to the survival of the modern society. Programming mistakes, incompetence and simple human stupidity have caused hundreds of accidents involving nanobots. Nanoids used as weapons (especially in the hands of terrorists) have resulted in hundreds of thousands of victims. A simple mention of 'nanoids' is enough to terrify almost anyone. Even today, when the risk of nanoid mutation or programming errors has been eliminated, and nanotech is never

used on the battlefield, the technology is still a source of fear.

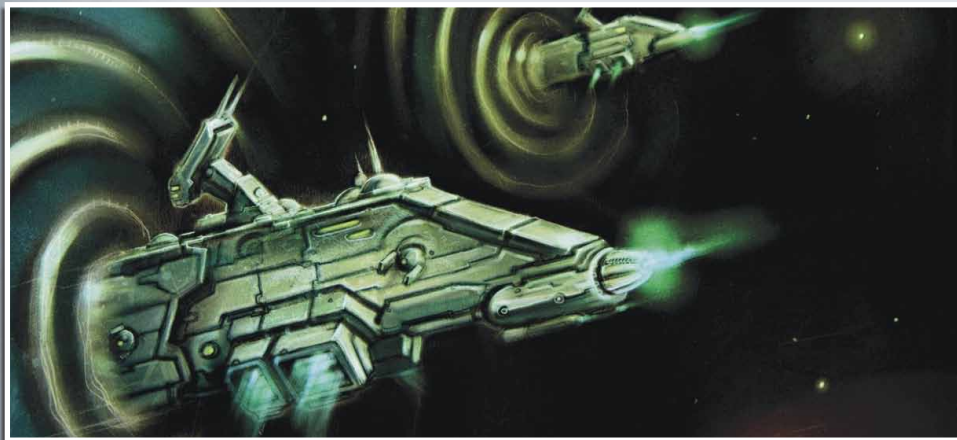
Nanotech is commonly available today, but it's used only when there are no other alternatives. Some of its many uses are interfacing the control systems of implants with the human nervous system, advanced medicine, and the repair and maintenance of terraformers and spaceship engines.

NANOTECH AND THE HORDE

ALTHOUGH MOST OF TODAY'S NANOTECH COULDN'T BE USED TO KILL ANOTHER PERSON (DUE TO PROGRAMMED LIMITATIONS, DIFFICULTIES IN OBTAINING SUFFICIENTLY ADVANCED TECHNOLOGY, AND NANO-VACCINES PROTECTING THE RECIPIENTS), MANY PEOPLE ARE CONTEMPLATING ITS USE AGAINST THE HORDE.

GENENGINEERING

The technology allowing for the genetic engineering of living organisms and the improvement of human capabilities has been known for ages. Initially it was reserved for the military and settlers colonizing new worlds, but when mankind left the Earth it became available to the common people. Minor modifications, like erasing hereditary diseases or minor flaws, are performed free of charge in most of hospitals. Usually, an average citizen refrains from larger-scale alterations. The reasons are twofold – the high price of such



modifications, and the risk of complications, possibly resulting in unwanted mutation or even death. Even though the risk is relatively small, and the rewards substantial, fear drives people to seek alternative solutions, like cybernetics.

SPACE TRAVEL

Only a handful of people can understand the theory behind interstellar travel. Even fewer know how the Faster-Than-Light engines actually work. But after the basic training, anyone can work the navigational computer and push the hyperdrive button.

The key parameter of the drive is its *class*, described by a number. Initially it was a multiplier, describing how many times faster than light the ship travelled. Today, it describes the number of light-years travelled per standard hour. The newest engines in civilian ships have a class ranging from 10 to 100. The exact class of military vessels is not publicly known, but it's likely to be at least twice as high.

Modern engines are, however, extremely expensive, even for the elite. If an ordinary person has a starship, it might have an engine that is decades, or even centuries old – with a single-digit hyperdrive class. Even though they are slow and require countless repairs, these are much cheaper. There are whole social groups living on board such ships – independent merchants, mercenaries, bounty hunters. They move from system to system to find a new job, fame, or fortune or to escape from some dark past chasing them.

NOVA DRIVE

THE TECHNICIANS AND STAR PILOTS TELL TALES ABOUT THE NOVA DRIVE, USING A COMPLETELY DIFFERENT PRINCIPLE OF FTL TRAVEL, ALLOWING FOR FASTER TRAVEL BETWEEN STAR SYSTEMS. ALLEGEDLY THEY WOULD HAVE A HYPERDRIVE CLASS OF FEW TENS OF THOUSANDS.

TERRAFORMING

Mankind has always dreamt of settling distant worlds in space – and changing them so that they would be habitable. When mankind reached the stars, it became clear that terraforming the first planets was only a matter of time. The first terraforming engines were very inefficient – the time to alter the atmosphere alone was measured in hundreds of years. Luckily, further improvements and the nanotechnological revolution shortened this period to a few decades.

The terraforming engines used today are huge, and resemble factories or automated complexes. They must not only alter, but also maintain the climate to keep it identical or close to Earth's. The damage or destruction of terraformers is a great threat – in most cases the environment returns to its state before the arrival of humans.

TERRAFORMING VS GENGINEERING

TERRAFORMING DOES NOT ALWAYS RESULT IN EARTH-LIKE CONDITIONS. OCCASIONALLY IT'S VERY DIFFICULT OR FLAT-OUT IMPOSSIBLE. THE INHABITANTS OF MANY PLANETS DECIDED TO UNDERGO GENETIC MODIFICATIONS, PREFERRING TO CHANGE THEIR BODIES RATHER THAN WAIT HUNDREDS OF YEARS TO SEE THEIR WORLD PERFECTLY TRANSFORMED.

5. PSIONICS

In the ancient past when men had just started their journey to the stars, the first human able to move objects with his mind alone appeared. Initially mocked and called a charlatan, in the course of his long life he managed to discover hundreds of people like himself. Their work allowed them to create the basis of a new science, no longer regarded as a hoax, but a well-known fact.

Yet, psionics is still regarded as something exotic. Despite centuries of research devoted to its secrets, it's still not really understood. People with a psionic talent still have no idea exactly how they change reality, but they manage to master their skills nonetheless. Hundreds of schools,

foundations, organizations or religious sects deal in mastering existing psionic disciplines. Each year more powers, or new applications for existing ones, are discovered.

However, control over psionic powers involves great risk. Even the most talented and experienced psionics have occasionally lost control over their abilities. Sometimes this involves only minor side effects, but it can also lead to great disasters and the deaths of dozens of innocents. That's why psis are surrounded by fear rather than respect.

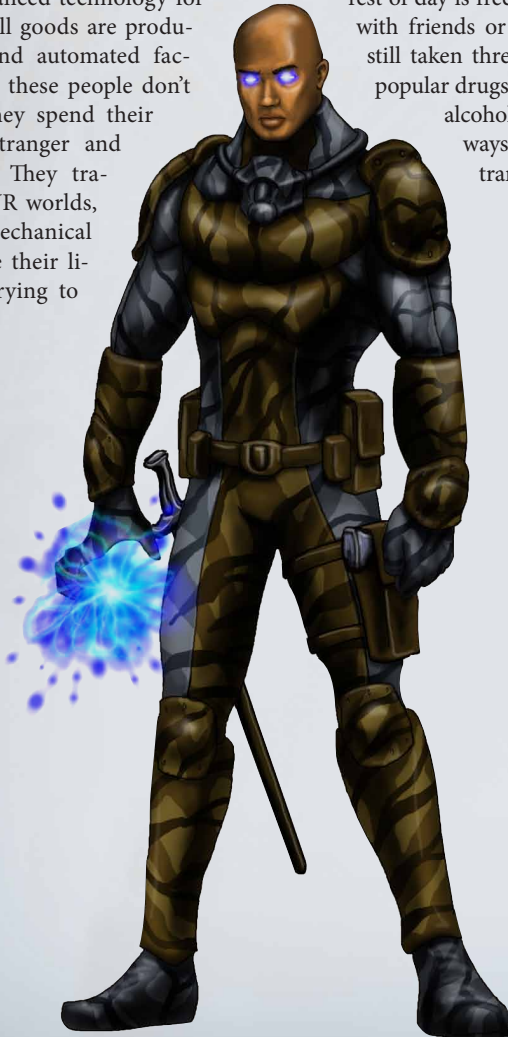
6. DAILY LIFE

The human lifestyle is usually determined by the technology available. Some worlds boast access to advanced technology for everyone, since all goods are produced by robots and automated factories. And since these people don't have to work, they spend their time pursuing stranger and stranger desires. They traverse countless VR worlds, jump between mechanical bodies, or devote their lives to science, trying to

find a purpose in life, or at least stave off the omnipresent boredom.

Other systems use technology from before the age of space travel – and sometimes even more primitive, straight from the Middle Ages. This can be caused by wars or the beliefs of the inhabitants' ancestors. Some planets are deliberately kept primitive by their rulers, who want to keep the masses as easily controlled slaves – the elite lives in isolation and use top-of-the-line devices, bought with the goods produced by the ignorant masses.

Worlds with exceptionally advanced or primitive technology are very rare. The lifestyle of the vast majority of planets does not really differ from the early 21st century. One third of a day is taken up by work, one third by sleep and the rest of day is free to use for hobbies, meetings with friends or family, or sports. Meals are still taken three times a day, and the most popular drugs are usually coffee, tobacco or alcohol. Life has changed in many ways – but it's not a revolutionary transformation.





CHAPTER 2: **THE HERO**

"PEOPLE CLAIM THAT LONG AGO, IN THE GOOD OLD DAYS, MANKIND DIDN'T NEED HEROES. THAT LIFE WAS SAFER, SIMPLER. IN A WORD - A PARADISE. AND EVERYTHING'S SUPPOSED TO HAVE CHANGED WHEN THE FIRST SHIP LANDED ON NYX'S SURFACE. YESSIR, THE GODS ARE AN EXCELLENT EXPLANATION FOR ALL THE CRAP THAT HAPPENS, FROM CIVIL WARS THROUGH TAXES TO INDIGESTION. OH SURE, THE GODS ARE A THREAT - THE THREAT IN FACT, AND THEY REALLY COULD BRING ABOUT THE EXTINCTION OF MANKIND; BUT TALKING HOW GREAT THINGS WERE IN THE PAST IS AN OUTRIGHT SIGN OF A DELUDED MIND. FROM THE VERY BEGINNING, THE GREATEST ENEMY OF HUMANITY WAS HUMANITY ITSELF."

FATHER FABIO CAPELLA, PRIEST OF THE UNIFICATION CHURCH

The best starting point in creating your character is working out his description. Below you'll find some sample concepts – you can pick one of them or tweak it so that it fits your expectations.

AGENT

Your employers took care to ensure their representatives had adequate education, training and equipment, appropriate to the importance of their job. Your body and mind are products of a perfect combination of genetech and cybernetics.

But there's no such thing as a free biomod. Your job is your whole life. You don't have a family or friends, and maybe only one or two accidental companions. You constantly travel from planet to planet, spying on enemies of the corporation or government you serve. You steal technologies, kidnap scientists, and rescue the assets of your benefactors. And you know that a life of an agent is intense – but short. You sometimes wonder what your superiors would do if you just quit. Rumors say that the most senior agents are allowed to live – but most of the deserters are gone. Forever.

ASPIRING NOBLE

One wave of a hand can send thousands to their deaths. One word can change the fate of millions. It could seem that's just an act of a man's will – but the nobles are no ordinary humans. While mortal, they have all that's required to gain immortality. You will become one of them someday.

Still, you need to work hard to take over the family estate or corporation you work in. But your day will come, and you're already preparing for it. You're gaining experience, money and allies.

While you find powerful friends you also encounter great enemies. If you don't have what it takes, enemy soldiers will enslave or eradicate your people. If you do, you will laugh as they fall.

BOUNTY HUNTER

The police is corrupt, underpaid and underequipped, and only a real chump would work for them. That's why no one is surprised that they're usually helpless against the real criminals. An average cop is no match for the Mob – most pro hitmen are veterans, ex-soldiers tired of fighting for someone else's ideals. The crime bosses are protected by lawyers, bodyguards or agents. The assassins are armed with military cyberware stolen from army warehouses. In a world where law has become just an empty word, only you can bring the guilty to justice and make them pay. For a price, of course.

To survive, you need to be smart. A ton of heavy equipment is not enough to catch a guy with a few thousand bucks' bounty on his head. What you need is intel – and you get it thanks to lies and threats, blackmail and bribes. When you know the location and defenses of your target, you can prepare your plan and gather the necessary equipment. Then, you'll hunt.

CLAN WARRIOR

You are the pride of your race. A chosen one, a member of a clan known for centuries as fearless warriors. A savage beast, born to kill. Now you've received a real energy weapon, and you've been admitted to the ranks of the clan warriors, an elite group feared thorough the entire Galaxy. Your ancestors have been called "the best soldiers in the history of mankind", and they were brilliant tacticians, cold-blooded

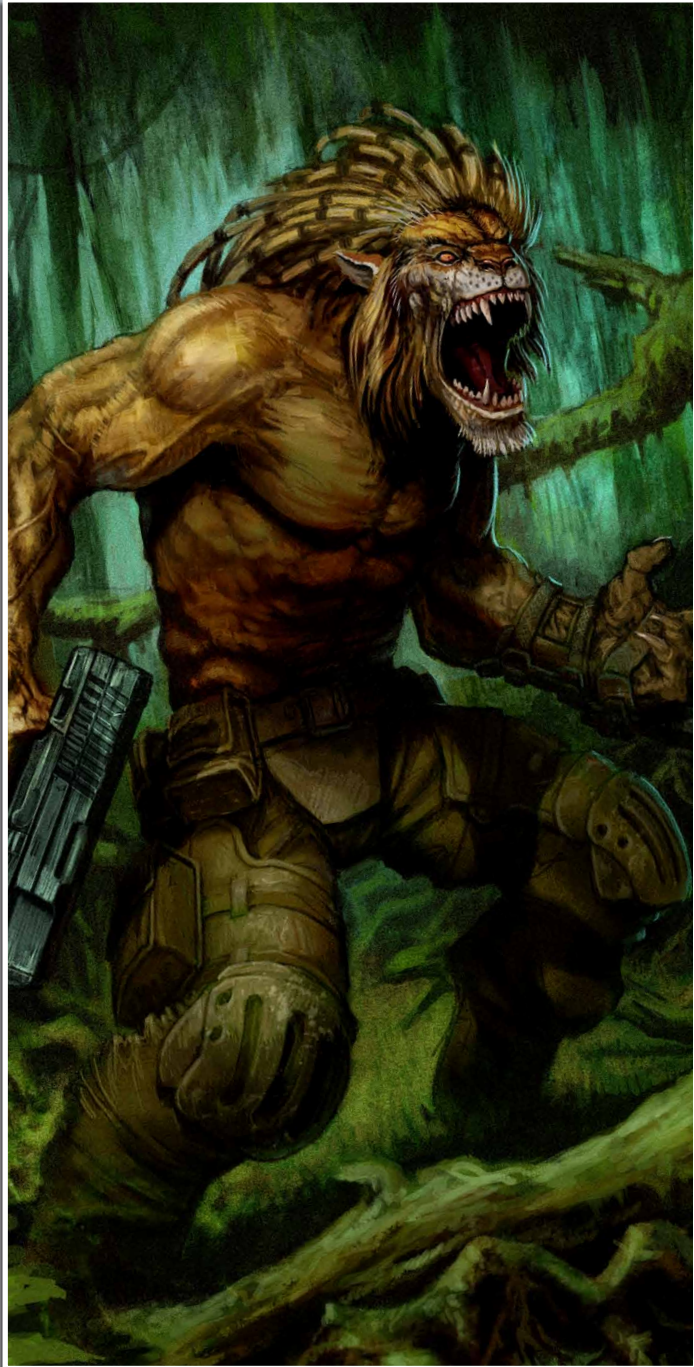
officers, and fearless fighters full of rage and vinegar. The age of civil wars ended long ago, but that doesn't mean the Galaxy doesn't need the services of your race.

You are not a hypocrite – you know that you weren't bred to create art or build cities. Your destiny is combat, and you have all the traits of the perfect soldier – bravery, loyalty, the ability to focus on the task at hand, and – if necessary – the ability to unleash the beast and attack all the fools daring to stand in your way. These might include the enemies of your race or clan, vile beasts, or the cultists of dark gods or anyone who earned the enmity of your employers. It's not that important who you're fighting – as long as the battle is a challenge and the pay is good.

DELVER

The mysteries of the ancient races inhabiting the Galaxy before the birth of human civilization are still waiting to be discovered. You've devoted your life to uncovering the secrets of the dark gods and the race who managed to defeat them millions of years ago. Who were they? How did they do it? What weapons did they use? Did they die out, or maybe we just haven't encountered them yet? There are hundreds of questions without answers, answers which could one day save the human race. That's why you do everything possible to learn the truth.

Some people call you a fanatic, a lunatic, a dreamer or a utopian. They don't believe that questing for the secrets of the past could influence our future. And they continue disparaging you - even when they see the power of the technology based on the scraps of knowledge you gathered on your travels. You are sure that they will believe you eventually – the discovery of the truth is only a matter of time. And that's how you are going to



save the human race. If people like you are gone, no one will be able to stop the coming wave of Darkness.

GIGOLO

You're not exceptionally strong, tough or brave. You have never really seen the appeal of war or star travel. You are smart, but not patient enough to become a scientist. What you like is a comfortable life, especially at someone else's expense. Luckily for you, the past millennia have done nothing to change human nature. Rich ladies still desire compliments from handsome men, they dream about exotic lovers, and they are willing to cheat on their partners at a

single nod from their dream prince. And the naïve male heirs aren't much better.

You are charming enough to seduce almost anyone – from the young daughter of an impoverished baron, ready to steal family heirlooms for her lover, to a frigid CEO, able to transfer some company shares to a devoted admirer. Ultimately, every one of your victims ends up with nothing, while you win everything.

INDEPENDENT TRADER

A lot of people want to make it on their own as a merchant. That's the life -

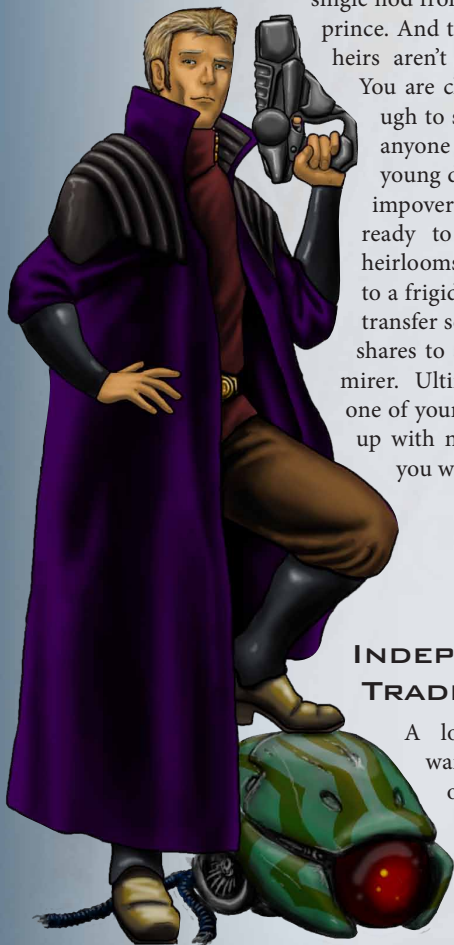
your own starship, travelling between planets, haggling with other merchants in exotic starports full of strange wares, meeting new kinds of humans, romancing the wives of important people... But few people know what the life of a merchant is really like. It's hastily calculating hyperjump parameters in the last minutes before pirates loot your ship. It's endless arguments with bureaucrats over taxes, tariffs, repairs to your junky ship and with your crew over their pay. It's hours spent poring over databases, so as not to fly corn to a farm world or mutagenics to a planet overrun by a cult of Pure Humanity. Sure, it's a life of adventure. But it's nothing like the romantic image of a new, free and independent Renaissance man.

And you wouldn't change it for anything, even if they paid you for lying on the beach and drinking cocktails. Mostly because the ladies really do love an off-worlder.

LAWMAN

People without morals are like jackals, preying on the helpless to exploit their weaknesses. They're ruthless, and won't hesitate to perform any crime, even the most debased. They're as evil as the vile beasts created to destroy humanity. As a law officer, you defend people that aren't brave or strong enough to fight evil. You can easily measure up with ordinary thugs – they will work off their debt to society during long years spent in penal colonies or work camps. The more dangerous criminals you shoot on sight. Yes, you sometimes cross the borders between law and your own beliefs, but you know that you're doing the right thing. Justice is not always a matter of laws.

Besides, life's never fair. Your enemies are at a great advantage – they use modern technology, are often supported by the corrupted government, and on top of that, they don't have to play by the rules. To win you must use every available resource – even if it does mean making you more alike the men you hunt.



OFFICER

Real war is not moving pawns on the chessboard, or marking down the losses. Battle isn't something as ridiculous as a "clash of two minds" like chess or go. It's a nightmare, the horror of combat, the clash of millions of people whose greatest need is simply to survive. Left to themselves, they'll die. They need someone like you – someone who not only fights but also helps them to fight better. Charismatic enough to keep people calm. Smart enough to guess the enemy's plans. Clever enough not to fall into their traps, and to trick them instead.

You dimly remember the day when you left officer school. You were young, inexperienced, and like your mates you couldn't wait to take command over your first squad. You were so naïve – the army wouldn't give actual field command of a unit to a bunch of kids. First, you had to serve as a regular trooper for two more years. After these two years only seven of your classmates had managed to survive – and today, you're the only one alive.

MNEMONIC COURIER

A long time ago, you decided to delete some of your memories and replace them with artificial ones. Family, childhood, adolescence, first love – all are forgotten concepts to you. You won't recall them again, no matter how hard you try. Your head is filled with alien memories – induced by the mnemobank, an ingenious device thanks to which you can become a specialist in any field. Astronavigation, piloting military vehicles, advances in science or even martial arts – all you need is a chip with memories of a specialist.

The mnemobank is not just a toy. Your job is to store important memories; records of the assassinations of important people or the secrets of the Galaxy's best and brightest scientists. Sometimes you only need to store it, but often you need to travel thousands of light years to get to court and present key evidence. The work of a mnemonic courier is very profitable, but also extremely dangerous. No, not just because the enemies of your employers are ready to blast your head together



with the mnemobank memories. The real dangers are the memory chips themselves. You never know if you'll find a course in piloting, the memory of a serial killer which could change you into a butcher killing the poor, or even a "dead chip" containing the memories of a dying person – that could even stop your heart.

MERCENARY

You remember your life before joining up. Eternal squalor, poor prospects for the future, and a large chance of ending up in the gutter – like the half the citizens of your city, one of hundreds of metropolises on your home planet. You didn't have anything: food, medicine, fuel, schools. The only way to get away from it all was to enlist.

Recruitment took place every few years. Only the young could join up, so you're happy you we-

ren't too old or too young and managed to get your gun and uniform. But after a few years, you had a bad day and were thrown out of your unit. And that probably saved your life, since later you learned that your unit was wiped out. Later, you met a man in a bar, who told you about big money, easy missions and beautiful women... And when you woke up with a massive hangover it turned out that you were a soldier again – this time, a merc. You've used plasma weapons, energy shields, FTL ships or tactical armor to attack enemy formations and slowly destroy their most powerful forces, allowing the boys in uniform to shoot at survivors. You earned enough to buy yourself out, and thanks to connections (and, let's be frank, looting) you managed to get some nifty equipment. Now, you're doing the same thing – but without those pesky commanders taking their cut. It's a good retirement plan – if you live long enough.

PSYCHIC COORDINATOR

Modern battlefield does not tolerate misunderstandings, failures to communicate, panic, or disobedience. Yet, the soldiers are only human, and they're prone to miscalculation, fear of the inhuman enemy – or even lack of faith in the high command. Your task is to eradicate their doubts and force them to concentrate on their orders. You're a soldier, a morale specialist and an officer, all rolled into one. You have combat experience, but also a psionic gift, allowing you to control the emotions of others. Fear, rage, doubt, euphoria – you can summon or eradicate them with your mere thoughts.

Once the likes of you were called commissars – now you'd rather be called a psychic coordinator. You know that even when you leave the army, you'll have no problems finding a job. Every ruler needs a shepherd for his people.

PSYCHIC COP

No one is innocent. The streets are full of potential murderers, rapists, thieves, frauds, perverts and heretics. So far you don't have the right to get them all, so for now you're just looking, examining, peeking inside their heads. You collect notes and photos – you have at least few hundred (and that's being lenient) files on potential criminals.

Your job is very unrewarding. People don't trust cops that could read their thoughts and learn their deepest secrets. The fact that you can sense their fear, and that you know what they're guilty of, is enough to make them break down. Most of them start crying in interrogations, faltering, promising to repent. But the hard cases, the serious criminals, turn aggressive. Only a handful of exceptional people could withstand interrogation – but eventually everyone will show their true colors. Interrogations are the easiest part of your job. The real challenge is hunting for other psionics, people who know how to defend themselves against mind probes, and who can burn the mind of an ordinary man leaving no traces of their mental crimes. Even if they are masters of their trade, eventually you'll find them. You can find anyone.

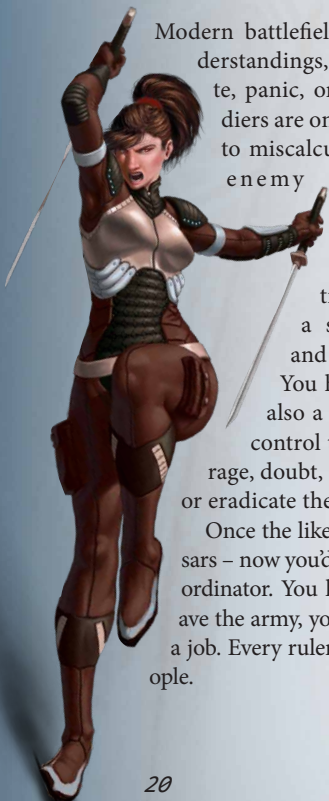
PSYCHIC SWORDMASTER

Control.

Discipline.

Concentration.

Mastering the art of fencing requires many years of hard work – endless exercise, days filled with training, perfecting both mind and soul. There are only a few people like you. Most of them resign, or don't even survive the training, due to their weak will or small talent. You survived. You became a psionic swordmaster, the harbinger of death, a monster, able to defeat a squad of elite soldiers. The likes of you are bogeymen for aristocrats' kids. And with good reason – even though you usually defend them, serving as a champion of the nobility in the great game of power, you could easily be an assassin. You might become an emotionless killer, able to move past any



defenses, kill the best guardians, immune to begging, blackmail or bribery.

You are not immortal. The reason for your strength is not just your mastery of the blade and psionic talent, but also the aura of fear surrounding the very title of psionic swordmaster. This fear cowers your enemies and makes them as harmless as babies.

SCOUT

In the ancient times being a scout was an honor. A small ship, some equipment, and some very sketchy maps were all that they received on their missions. They discovered habitable planets, blazed trails in hyperspace and marked extremely dangerous planets and regions of void. Many of them died, usually thanks to malfunctioning equipment, loss of supplies or engine damage – but they managed to guide the humankind to stars.

Today, scouts are often considered unnecessary. The main trade routes are well-marked, humans live on thousands of worlds, and they don't lack for resources or places to live. Yet, somehow, a scout can still find work. Often the employers are corporations looking for new sources of resources, when the old mines run out. Another important job is tracing new routes through the regions of Galaxy infested by the Horde. Being a scout may no longer be an honor, but it's still a good job.

SMUGGLER

Galaxy is full of people who would've died if not for smugglers. The law of most planets is very strict for the addicts, deviants or other weirdos who use your services – or rather want to use them, because you can be very picky when choosing your employers. Most smugglers have no such qualms, they'll transport anything just for gain. You're different – you don't carry slaves, weapons of mass destruction, or hard drugs. You also steer clear of religious fanatics.

Your job is dangerous enough as it is, without shit like that. You're a target for cops, armies,

government or corporate agents, fanatics or the mob. You can be screwed by your employers, their rivals or your own rivals. If something goes wrong, no one will help you out – at least not for free. The only good thing is that it's actually hard to annoy anyone really powerful. You'd have to transport *really* hot stuff for the rulers to notice you at all. Sadly, if you want to earn enough for living, fuel and repairs, you do have to transport "hot stuff".

STREET RAT

There are thousands of the likes of you in every starport. The dejected, the homeless, those with no family support and no rights – all you had were your own wits. The world did not cut you any slack, unlike the aristocrats' kids – the underworld has its own laws, and the most important one is "*the smart ones stay alive*". You can work at any kind of job – any job you can find, and if times get tough you break into houses or steal from people. You need to be careful though – if you fail, you won't just risk meeting cops and security, but slavers, mobsters, or worst of all – hunters from medical corporations looking for young, fit people with working organs, which could save the lives of many a billionaire's child.

From time to time, one of the likes of you manages to go beyond the street. A regular job is rare, however – it's easier to get into the army or the Syndicate, or start working as crew on some independent freighter. Every starport kid hopes that one day they meet a captain needing a smart helper. You have the street smarts, you have the courage, and now you only need a stroke of luck.

VOID TROOPER

Your homeworld is lost. You've seen with your own eyes how the monstrosities of the Horde conquered the planet on which you were born. You've lost everything – friends, family, your home. The constant war has convinced you that all is lost. Maybe the ultimate defeat won't arrive in the next few years, but sooner or later

humanity will become an extinct species, and the stars will go out, swallowed by the Devourer of Worlds. Of course, you won't live long enough to see that last battle – maybe your children won't see it in their lifetimes. You didn't escape from the Horde to weep over the fate of mankind, but to live your life. The Galaxy might be dying, but it's still full of rich people willing to pay for the services of professionals like you.

So you serve those who can pay you – sometimes as a bodyguard, sometimes as a drill sergeant. Usually, your orders are more interesting – from sabotage, through kidnapping to assassinations.

1. CHARACTER CREATION

Creating a new hero follows the rules from *Savage Worlds* core book.

RACE

The first step is the selection or creation of your hero's race. Humans have inhabited the Galaxy for millennia, and thanks to advanced technology they have managed to transform their bodies. Here, you will determine what special traits emerged in the populace of your home planet. You must pick a race from the list in the next section.

2. TRAITS

Every character starts with a d4 in each of his five Attributes: Agility, Smarts, Spirit, Strength, and Vigor. You then have 5 points to distribute among them as you choose. Raising an attribute costs 1 point per die type. You can't raise an attribute above d12, unless you possess a racial ability that allows you to do so.

You also have 15 points to buy your skills. Raising a skill by a die type costs 1 point as long as it's no higher than the attribute it's linked to. Above the attribute limit, raising a skill costs 2 points.

Remember that like Attributes, you can't raise a skill level above d12. *Nemesis* uses all skills described in *Savage Worlds* core book – **except for Boating**. If necessary, replace this with Agility.

Finally, determine derived statistics.

Charisma is 0, unless modified by Edges or Hindrances.

Parry is equal 2+ half your Fighting.

Pace is 6" for an average human.

Toughness equals 2+half your Vigor.

3. EDGES AND HINDRANCES

The third step is picking the strengths and weaknesses of your character. If your character has the Talented racial trait, he or she can pick one free Edge.

You can pick 2 Minor Hindrances, worth 1 point each, and 1 Major Hindrance, worth 2 points. You can also pick more Hindrances if you think that your character concept requires them, but you won't get points for these.

For 2 Points you can:

- » **Raise an attribute one die type.**
- » **Choose an Edge.**

For 1 Point you can:

- » **Gain another skill point (max d12).**
- » **Gain an additional \$500.**

Later in this chapter you'll find a selection of new Edges and Hindrances available for *Nemesis* characters.

4. GEAR

The fourth step is shopping. You start the game with the clothes on your back, a backpack, and \$500 which you can spend to buy starting gear. If you so wish, you can receive a Jack – an implant allowing you to communicate wirelessly with the planetary network. The list of equipment available in *Nemesis* is found in Chapter 3 of this book.

5. BACKGROUND

Now that you have your character sheet filled in, it's time to fill in the blanks and write up the character's history. Think about what made him abandon a boring, safe life on his home planet. What's his motivation to act, what are his goals? Talk it through with the Game Master and the other players so that you can create a sensible group, ready for whatever adventures the GM might throw at you.

2. RACE CREATION

The conquest of the Milky Way took millennia, and humanity managed to settle thousands of star systems. Some planets tempted the settlers with friendly climates. Others were subject to a slow terraforming process. Some, very different from Earth and considered 'un-terraformable', became homes to small groups of colonists servicing automated industrial complexes. The first settlers of the Galaxy lived in very hard conditions. Some worlds were subject to extreme temperatures, and would not allow Earth life to develop properly. Others had radically different atmospheres – both in regard to composition and pressure. Settlers could be killed by gravity, solar radiation, or even local flora and fauna. Luckily, the development of technology allowed for another solution: the settlers could adjust the planets to better fit the human needs, or they could adjust their own bodies to the conditions. Thanks to genetic engineering life became easier, but genome manipulation came at a price – the controlled evolution of organisms resulted in unexpected mutations and side effects. It created new human subspecies, often very distinctive ones, and the definition of the human species was changed forever.

The modern world somewhat resembles the dreams of ancient science-fiction writers. The Galaxy is inhabited by thousands of strange human races. Some differ from the others only cosmetically, by skin color or texture, or the shape of the face. Sometimes other, more serious changes emerge: height, shape of limbs, favored environ-

ment, longevity or even the means of reproduction. All of such offshoots are still considered humans, even though the genetic code of some races is so different that they can't have children with inhabitants of other planets.



ASHITE

The inhabitants of Ash are tough, calm people, who adjusted to the hard conditions they live in. At the first sight they seem cold and uncaring, but that's just the mask they wear in public life. They're preoccupied with too many things to allow themselves to be congenial.

Racial Traits

No Need for Sleep: Your character does not receive any penalties for lack of sleep, but still must rest to recover. You need 4 hours of peaceful rest instead of 6 hours of sleep, but you are free to divide these 4 hours into any number of rest periods, as long as they're no shorter than 15 minutes. During this rest you are fully conscious but you can also dream if you wish.

Cold Tolerance: You receive +2 to all Vigor rolls made to resist low temperatures.



BARIZIAN

There is no such thing as an “average” Barizian. Practically every one of them has undertaken some genetic modification, adjusting their body to their line of work. Only children and people with low-paid jobs have the basic genotype. The statistics below describe the basic genetic stock of the Barizian lower classes.

Racial Traits

Steel Mind: Barizians receive the Arcane Resistance Edge.

I Am From Bariz: Regardless of their social station, all the inhabitants of Bariz consider themselves above the common rabble. They start the game with a Quirk – specifically Barizian conceit, always shown to others.

Cold Heart:
+2 to resist Tests of Will.



BESTIAL

The character's race is famed for its descent from the legendary *Homo Monstrum* – warriors who transformed their bodies into killing machines. They also modified their appearance to resemble wild beasts rather than humans.

Racial Traits

Claws: You receive +2 to all Climbing rolls. You also can use your claws in combat, dealing St+d4 damage, and you're never considered unarmed.

Made for Fighting, Not Thinking: Your starting Smarts is d4, and you can't increase it until you reach Veteran Rank.

Beast Senses: You receive a +2 bonus to Tracking and Notice rolls. You also possess low-light vision and ignore penalties for Dim and Dark lighting.

Bloodlust: You also inherited the bad traits of animals. You can't control your brutality and are always Bloodthirsty.

Gene Pool (pick one)

Tiger: Tigers are true masters of combat. They start the game with Agility d6 and Fighting or Shooting at d6.

Lion: These crossbreeds of lions and humans are larger than ordinary people, with Size +1 and initial Strength of d6.

Wolf: The bestials derived from wolves are faster and more agile than ordinary humans. Their Pace is 8 and initial Agility is d6.

Bear: Incredibly strong and large. Their initial Size is +1 and Strength d8. However, they're not as quick as other races – during character creation their Agility is d4 and it can be only increased when leveling up.

TIGER CLANS

THE FIRST INTER-SYSTEM ALLIANCES WERE CREATED HUNDREDS OF YEARS AGO, WHEN MANKIND REACHED THE BORDERS OF THE GALAXY, SETTLING COLONIES ON WORLDS FAR AWAY FROM THE SOLAR SYSTEM. NO ONE WAS DELUDED ABOUT THE FUTURE – THE FIRST INTERSTELLAR WAR WAS ONLY A MATTER OF TIME. EVERYONE TRIED TO DISCOVER NEW WAYS TO DEFEND THEMSELVES. THAT'S WHEN THE FIRST TIGER CLANS WERE CREATED – ELITE MERCENARIES TROOPS WHO CONSIDERED WAR THE PINNACLE OF ALL ARTS. THEY MODIFIED THEIR GENES TO INCREASE THEIR BATTLE PROWESS. TRANSFORMED THEIR MINDS TO ERASE ALL TRACES OF FEAR AND MERCY, REPLACING THEM WITH BLOODLUST AND RAGE. WHEN THE FIRST CONFLICTS ERUPTED, THE TIGER CLANS WERE READY TO FIGHT. FOR THE CENTURIES THEY WERE THE BEST SOLDIERS KNOWN TO MANKIND. MERCILESS, SAVAGE MONSTERS... BUT MONSTERS WHO WON WARS. THE END OF THE GLORIOUS AGE OF THE TIGER CLANS CAME WITH THE INTRODUCTION OF CYBORGS TO THE BATTLEFIELD. TODAY, THEY'RE FREAKS, EXAMPLES OF HOW THE MISUSE OF GENETECH CAN TRANSFORM PEOPLE INTO MONSTERS. NO ONE IS STUPID ENOUGH TO SAY THAT TO THEIR FACES.





CORITES

Corisians (another name for Corites) are close to their human ancestors. They are a pinnacle of adaptation and survival. Most of them were evacuated after the Horde attack, but a few of them still live in the last inhabited towns, or are the staff or owners of the exclusive hotels on that planet.

Racial Traits

Bonus Edge: Corisians start play with one free Edge of their choice. The character must meet the requirements of the Edge as usual.

FURY

A few hundred years ago the ancestors of the Furies weren't much different from ordinary people. They were a nation of merchants, living on a planet devoid of natural resources lying at the intersection of important trade routes. When new routes were plotted, their motherland lost influence and the stream of money dried up.

With the only options being a slow downfall or being forced to resettle, the future Furies decided to risk – they hired the most skilled genetechologists of their generation to create a designer virus, that was supposed to transform the minds and appearance of their people. Something went wrong – the virus mutated, and killed most of the population instead of transforming them.

Today, the Furies are famed as the best soldiers in the Galaxy. The deadly beauty of their bodies and their quick reactions are legendary. It's said that if you look into eyes of a Fury all you'll see is your own death.

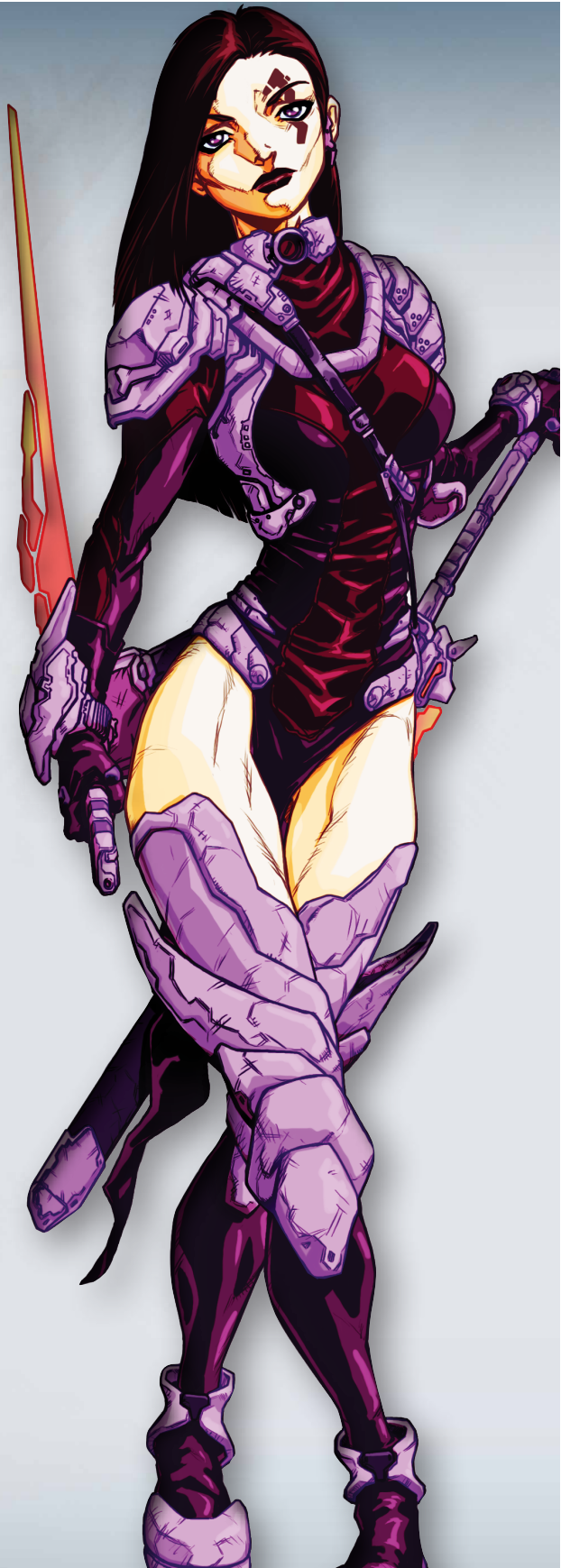
Racial Traits

Fast Metabolism: You start the game with d6 in Agility and your Pace increases by 1. Your lifespan is 2/3 of that of an average human.

Statuesque: All Furies are Attractive.

Weapon Specialization: Furies start the game with Fighting d6.

Inborn Arrogance: All Furies start the game with the Arrogant Hindrance.



3. HINDRANCES

All the Hindrances from the *Savage Worlds* core rulebook are available in *Nemezis*, as well as the new ones described below.

Burnout (Major)

You've fought the Horde in the past. All the battles you've witnessed ended in disaster – the deaths of hundreds of troopers and the overwhelming victory of the servants of Devourer. You just don't believe that victory over the dark gods is possible. You have -2 to all Trait rolls when fighting monsters of the Horde.

Cursed Blood (Minor)

Your father or mother were put to death for dealing with dark cults – maybe they even practiced dark magic themselves, and wanted to doom their home planet. Even though that day is long gone, it's not forgotten. People say behind your back that sooner or later you will betray your fellow humans as well – that evil is part of your soul. You have -2 Charisma when dealing with people who know about your background.

Debt (Minor)

Your hero is indebted – and he owes money to people who'd rather break arms and legs or shoot him outright rather than go to court. If you don't pay up your debt by the end of the year (and it should be around \$10K) this Hindrance becomes Hunted.

Hunted (Major)

There's a bounty on your head. It's high enough to tempt a few bounty hunters looking for an easy job (each of them has capabilities of a Minor Enemy). In every system you visit there's at least one bounty hunter waiting for you. If you manage to get square with the person or organization who set the bounty, you can buy this Hindrance off instead of leveling up.

I Owe You One (Minor)

Your character is not indestructible. Once, she fell in deep trouble, and only some influential allies managed to save her. These allies work much like Connections, only you're *their* connection, and

you owe *them* a favor. If one of these allies asks your character for a favor, she must help them out. If the GM decides that you've paid your debt to your allies, they become Connections, as per the Edge. But whenever you use their help, you will owe them another favor. If you refuse, this might have very unpleasant consequences.

Nanovirus (Major)

Someone must really want you to die. Your body has been infected with nanomachines which are slowly disassembling your body. You can cure yourself, using various nanotreatments, but the disease has always proved stronger. Before a game session, you need to spend a benny or you receive a Wound which will last until the end of adventure, and can't be cured in any way.

Possessed (Major)

You're a victim of a dark ritual. A demon serving the vile deities has become a part of your soul. It can tempt you and occasionally seize control over your body. To use this Hindrance, the GM must spend a benny. The player needs to make an opposed Spirit roll vs. the demon's Spirit (d6+Wild Die). If you fail, for one round the GM takes control over your character. The demon usually attacks your hero's allies, or harms them in another way (for instance, it can damage the group's only vehicle). Demons usually have Spirit d6 plus a dice step per Rank of the character above Novice, to a maximum of d12+1. So a demon possessing a Veteran hero has Spirit d10.

Space Sickness (Major or Minor)

Space travel is a terrifying experience for you. Adjusting to 0 G is a long, painful process. If this Hindrance is Minor, it causes -1 to all Vigor rolls when you're in a Zero-G environment. If it's Major, you can't function normally in one at all. Double the penalty above.

Traitor to Mankind (Major)

Your character was once (or maybe still is) a member of a cult conspiring to destroy mankind. If that secret ever comes out, it will certainly be fatal for him. This secret is quite likely known to some people you know, who will certainly use any opportunity to blackmail you.

4. EDGES

Nemesis permits all Edges described in the *Savage Worlds* core book, except for the following: Wizard, Holy/Unholy Warrior, Champion, Arcane Background (magic, miracles, superpowers, weird science). Arcane Background (Psionics) works a little bit differently; see below for a detailed description.

BACKGROUND EDGES

Arcane Background: Psionics

Requirements: Novice

Your character possesses psionic abilities. She starts the game with 10 Power Points, and the following powers: *dispel*, *telekinesis*, *detect/conceal arcana*. You can learn more powers by picking one of the following psionic schools: psychic coordinator, psionic swordmaster or psychic cop.

Mnemonic Courier

Requirements: Novice, Spirit d6+, Smarts d6+

Your character has replaced parts of her brain with a technologically advanced implant. She's lost all memories from the time before the operation, but gained the ability to reprogram her own mind.

You possess now a mnemobank – an implant you can't gain in any other way than selecting this Edge (during the operation you lose all Ranks and experience points). The mnemobank allows you to reprogram your skills according to your needs. Between sessions, you can move up to three skill levels between skills, and you can spend a benny (even during the game) to transfer another level.

Example: *Ulundi, who has Intimidation d10, Fighting d6, Stealth d4 and Survival d4, sets forth on a mission to a wild, savage planet. The player decides to move 3 points from Intimidate (thus reducing the skill to d4) and move 2 points to Survival (increasing it to d8) and 1 to Stealth (now d6). If he spent a benny, he could additionally move one level from Fighting (decreasing it to d4) to Stealth (increasing it to d8).*

Starship

Requirements: Novice

Your character owns a ship – a Freighter Ship (see page 50), good enough to carry the team and a couple of tons of cargo. It's unarmed, has basic armor and weak shields, but it's fast enough to escape most regular vessels.

Zero-G Training

Requirements: Novice, Agility d6+

You were raised in a place where surviving in low or no gravity was a necessity. When you make tests in such an environment, you don't receive the standard -2 penalty.

COMBAT EDGES

Bar-La

Requirements: Seasoned, Fighting d6+, Notice d8+, Barizian.

Shields and deflectors are based on the principle of stopping fast-moving targets. This is both their strength and their weakness: a skilled fighter, moving his blade with a particularly slow, abnormal speed is capable of fooling the sensors of these high tech devices and delivering a fatal blow!

The master duelists of Bariz developed a particular fencing technique based on this principle, called the Bar-La (slow move).

In game terms, a hero with this Edge reduces by one the Parry bonus granted by any deflector and causes a -4 penalty to the target's Shield Soak roll. This Edge works only with melee weapons. See page 38 for Shield Soak and Deflectors rules.

Chink in the Armor

Requirements: Seasoned, Fighting d8+

When fighting heavily armored opponents, your hero can prove that armor is not enough to protect them. You can find a vulnerable spot so that those five inches of armor won't save the enemy from a nasty wound. If you haven't moved in this turn, you may make a called shot with a penalty lessened by 2 (for instance – an attack to the arm of a Horde zombie is made

with no modifiers, and an attack to the head with a -2 instead of -4 modifier).

Cybernetics Resistance

Requirements: Novice, Spirit d6+

Your mind is strong enough to resist the influence of cybernetic implants. When you pick this Edge, your Cybernetics Threshold increases by 2 for each Rank.

Eat This!

Requirements: Novice, Spirit d6+, Agility d6+, Throwing d8+

Only newbies shoot their plasma guns when confronted with a big, mean monster. A real fighter knows that you can put it down with a single well placed grenade, and that there's no more pleasing sight than a Horde beast exploding from the inside. Your character may spend a benny to throw a grenade into the mouth of a hostile monster. If the Throwing roll is successful, the grenade explodes inside the creature – and the beast's Armor can't reduce the damage dealt. Don't use the Burst Template, since only one monster can be hit this way.

Force Field Fighter

Requirements: Seasoned, Fighting d6+, Repair d4+, Smarts d6+

Barizian duelists and other melee warriors usually fight with a blade plus a deflector and a force field, and they are capable of impressive stunts when equipped with both these devices.

First, they can do a maneuver called "the thump": mixing the frequencies of the deflector and the force field they can unleash the energy of the force field in a sudden, invisible Push attack (SWD p. 75), affecting all targets in a straight line of 1" by 5" in front of the shield user. The character rolls using Smarts instead of Strength during the Push attack. The size of the shield applies as normal if the Force Field Fighter decides to deal damage.

Second, a skilled Force Field Fighter, with the right timing, can use the energy of his shield to give him extra momentum while jumping. In game terms, when jumping, he adds +2 to his

Strength roll and receives +2" inches of jumping distance for each success and raise.

These feats are very energy consuming. Whenever the character rolls 1 on the skill die, regardless of the Wild Die, the force field is discharged (as per the force field rules).

It's Not Over Yet

Requirements: Heroic, Wild Card, Combat Reflexes

When you receive enough Wounds to Incapacitate you, you may make a free Soak roll. If it's a failure, you may spend a benny to reroll that test. If you've received multiple Wounds, and each attack was enough to Incapacitate you, you may make a free Soak roll after each attack.

Provoke the Beast

Requirements: Seasoned, Spirit d8+, Smarts d6+, Taunt d8+

You can enrage any beast. This can help your friends to regroup, but it draws all the creature's attention to you. To use this Edge, make a Taunt test opposed by the monster's Smarts – a success means that the monster attacks you and will ignore other creatures, as long as both of you are conscious. This Edge can be used only against creatures with animal intelligence (with [A] listed under Smarts). Anytime you use this Edge, you receive a Bennie.

Right Between the Eyes

Requirements: Seasoned, Marksman, Shooting d10+

One hit is enough. You hold your breath, aim, and shoot right between the eyes. A raise on a Shooting roll when using firearms deals an extra d8 damage instead of a d6.

Shoot and Run

Requirements: Veteran, Rock and Roll

Attacking enemy's position often requires a suicidal charge and near-continuous firing. You don't receive a -2 penalty for moving and shooting with automatic fire, even if you run (tho-

ugh in this case you still have a penalty for multiple actions in a round).

WEIRD EDGES

Ace in the Hole

Requirements: Seasoned, Lucky, Spirit d10+

Even when you're deep in trouble, and everything looks like you're doomed to die, you can still somehow find a way to save your skin. Whenever you spend a benny to reroll a Trait test made to survive, you add +2 to the result.

Fearless

Requirements: Veteran, Spirit d10+

You've slain the servants of the dark gods as easily as cyborgs defeat infantry troops. You know their weaknesses, and most importantly, you know that they're not immortal – you know that each monster you've killed was killable. You are completely resistant to Fear effects or Intimidation attempts from Horde creatures. They can still try to Taunt you.

SOCIAL EDGES

Street Smarts

Requirements: Novice, Streetwise d8+

A hero with this Edge has many friends on the streets – he knows who's important, and who's just a reject. When testing Streetwise, you may add +2 to the result.

PROFESSIONAL EDGES

Bodyguard

Requirements: Novice, Smarts d6+, Agility d8+, Notice d6+

A true protector can instantly react to danger, jumping in to protect his principal. If a character with this Edge is near the person being protected, she can intercept all melee and ranged attacks directed at them. Against area attacks, she provides the ward with 2 points of Armor. If a bodyguard is wounded while on duty, she can always make a free Soak test, with a -2 penalty. She can't spend

bennies to reroll that test, but can spend them to make a normal Soak roll (without the penalty).

Diplomat

Requirements: Novice, Intimidation d4+, Persuasion d6+, Smarts d6+, Taunt d4+.

Diplomacy is the art of obtaining things with words instead of with force, but a silver tongue doesn't make a true diplomat. Diplomacy also means the ability to sway conversations, bargain and find information relevant in your field.

Whenever a Diplomat is required to make a Persuasion roll, he can choose instead to roll on Intimidation, Taunt or Smarts, adding his Charisma bonus. In game terms, this means he transforms a humble aid request into a veiled threat, provokes his opponent in a subtle way so that he loses his composure, or outwits him with a cunning offer.

He can use this ability in Social Conflicts as well, but only in a single round, plus one for each two character Ranks above Novice (so twice at Veteran and three times at Legendary).

In addition, a Diplomat is above social gaffes. Whenever he rolls 1 on the die for Persuasion (or a skill substituted for it), regardless of the Wild Die, he can re roll, as if he had spent a Benny.

Independent Merchant

Requirements: Novice, Starship, Smarts d8+, Persuasion d8+, Streetwise d6+

Extensive knowledge in trading and negotiation gives you a +2 bonus to Streetwise rolls in business-related situations. You are also a master of appraisal. One glance – and a successful Notice test – is enough to determine the exact value of any object. Failure means that the hero errs by 10% to his disadvantage for every point below the required result.

Finally, you can also haggle during negotiations, explaining the benefits of an item you're selling or pointing out the flaws in the one you want to buy. To haggle, make a Persuasion roll opposed by the target's Spirit. Each point over the opponent's result means a 10% price advantage for you.

Officer

Requirements: Novice, Wild Card, Spirit d6+, Smarts d6+, Shooting d6+, Knowledge (Battle) d6+, Intimidation d6+

Simple academic knowledge, even if learned in the best military academies of the Galaxy, is not enough to make a good commander. You need actual real life experience, where nothing is like in the handbooks. You know it well – you’ve seen the battlefields, you’ve seen the death of your companions. You know the sweet taste of victory and bitterness of defeat.

An officer is much better in coordinating the actions of his subordinates. He increases the range of his Leadership Edges by 1 inch per Rank, starting at Novice. Furthermore, he receives a +1 bonus to all Knowledge (Battle) rolls and can ignore Rank requirements when picking Leadership Edges.

Smuggler

Requirements: Novice, Smarts d8+, must own a Starship

The starship of a character with this Edge has been equipped with secret storage spaces, concealed from scanners or other standard ways of detecting contraband. In these secret places you may hide ten cubic feet of goods. You also receive a +2 bonus to Streetwise when trying to buy or sell illegal goods, and a +2 bonus to Persuasion when you try to deny charges of smuggling and selling contraband.

Treasure Hunter

Requirements: Novice, Investigation d8+, Notice d6+, Smarts d6+, Survival d6, Vigor d6+

Searching ancient ruins, deciphering ancient scriptures, and interpreting prophecies of ancient soothsayers are what makes you tick. The immense experience you’ve gained in this field grants you a +2 bonus on Notice and Investigation rolls when investigating the secrets of the past. This bonus is also applied to tests of Survival in the wilderness – as most of your travels take place in dangerous regions.

POWER EDGES

Aura of Obedience

Requirements: Seasoned, Psionic School (Psychic Coordinator), Spirit d8+, Smarts d6+, Persuasion d8+

Your telepathic talent for command has evolved to such a degree that you’d rather send telepathic orders rather than shout them to troopers. The range of all your Leadership Edges increases by 10”.

Psionic School: Psionic Swordmaster

Requirements: Novice, Arcane Background (Psionics), Spirit d6+, Smarts d8+, Fighting d8+

Fighting with a melee weapon comes as easily to you as breathing. You don’t receive a multi-action penalty to Fighting rolls if you’ve also used a psionic power on yourself in this round (though other actions might still incur this penalty). You get one power from your school, and you gain 5 additional Power Points. You may learn more powers normally, using the New Power Edge.

A character can learn one Psionic School for each 2 Ranks (so one at Novice, two at Veteran, and so on).

Powers: *blind, boost/lower trait, darksight, deflection, healing, quickness, smite, speed, teleport, warrior’s gift*

Psionic School: Psychic Coordinator

Requirements: Novice, Arcane Background (Psionics), Spirit d6+, Smarts d6+, Persuasion d6+

The power of your mind is used to influence your troops, removing their fears and doubts, and increasing their aggression and will to fight. When you use psionic powers on subordinates in your range of command, you may influence more than one person – each additional target gives you -1 to your Psionics roll. You get one power from your school, and you gain 5 additional Power Points. You may learn more powers normally, using the New Power Edge.

A character can learn one Psionic School per 2 Ranks (so one at Novice, two at Veteran, and so on).

Powers: *barrier, confusion, farsight, havoc, healing, greater healing, light/obscure, slumber, stun, puppet*

Psionic School: Psychic Cop

Requirements: Novice, Arcane Background (Psionics), Spirit d6+, Smarts d6+, Investigation d8+

Not all cases are suitable for the normal cops. Sometimes the suspects are protected, they have bodyguards, even psionic ones – then, a psychic cop is needed. You use your psychic powers to find hidden information, defend yourself from mental attacks, and disable even the most aggressive criminals with your mental powers.

A psychic cop has law enforcement powers, and is treated as if he had Connections (police department) Edge. You get one power from your school, and you gain 5 additional Power Points.

You may learn more powers normally, using the New Power Edge.

A character can learn one Psionic School for each 2 Ranks (so one at Novice, two at Veteran, and so on).

Powers: *boost/lower trait, darksight, divination (trappings - Extrasensory perception (ESP), psychometry), disguise, entangle, fear, invisibility, mind reading, puppet, speak language.*

LEGENDARY EDGES

Steel Fortress

Requirements: Legendary, Arcane Background: Psionics, Open-Minded, Spirit d10+, Smarts d10+

You're immune to the effects of psionic echoes – you can act normally when other psionic characters would go insane. You ignore all the rules concerning the psionic echo, and you are always treated as if you were in normal conditions.



CHAPTER 3: **EQUIPMENT**

"SEE THIS BABY? YOU WON'T FIND TOYS LIKE THIS IN ANY STORE. YOU'RE LUCKY THAT YOU'VE FOUND ME. VALIANTS ARE RARE, ESPECIALLY IN SYSTEMS THAT ARE SO... DISTANT FROM THE GALAXY'S CENTER. SURE, IT'S... SECOND-HAND. SURE, THERE IS SOME BLOOD ON IT. SURE, FIVE THOUSAND WILL BE ENOUGH."

JENNER, INDEPENDENT MERCHANT.

Human civilization would be ruined if the technology used in everyday life suddenly stopped working. Humans need these tools not only to work, but also for entertainment and generally to live a normal life. This chapter of *Nemesis* is devoted to the equipment used by the player characters and NPCs. You'll find descriptions of weapons, armor and energy shields, cybernetics and nanotech toys, as well as some ordinary equipment. These descriptions are generic, and don't mention specific brand names or models – in a Galaxy with thousands of planets, that would be pointless. The equipment rules, however, are more detailed. Game Masters should take care to use these rules unaltered – significant modifications mean that you could destroy game balance.

DOLLARS

ALL PRICES FOR SERVICES AND ITEMS ARE EXPRESSED IN DOLLARS – AN ABSTRACT COINAGE, COMMON TO ALL WORLDS, INTERCHANGEABLE WITH CREDITS, CROWNS, EAGLES, OR OTHER KINDS OF MONEY USED ON INDIVIDUAL PLANETS. THE GAME MASTER IS FREE TO USE WHATEVER CURRENCY NAME HE WANTS.

IN THE HORIZON SYSTEM, THE BASIC UNITS OF CURRENCY ARE PLATINUM EAGLES (EACH WORTH \$1), DIVIDED INTO 100 SILVER FEATHERS. MOST PEOPLE DEAL WITH VIRTUAL MONEY, SEEING IT AS NUMBERS IN THEIR BANK ACCOUNT – CASH IS SELDOM SEEN, BUT IS USUALLY COINS MADE FROM RARE ALLOYS.

1. AVAILABILITY

Each item described in this chapter has its own Availability Code, describing how easy it is to obtain it. Here's what particular letters mean:

A: The item is available in every store. You can obtain it in any area inhabited by humans in just a couple of minutes.

B: The item is widely available, but not common. To obtain it you need to expend more time and effort – but no longer than a couple of hours.

C: The item is not widely available; probably it requires a license or is only available on the black market. It can be legally purchased only by people connected with the local armed forces or police (soldiers, bounty hunters, influential nobles). Others must make a Streetwise test and spend an additional 25% of the item's price.

D: The item – almost always a weapon – is available only to the army. A person not serving in the army or police force can obtain it only on the black market. They must make a Streetwise roll and spend an additional 50% of the item's price.

2. WEAPONS

So many different kinds of weapons are used on the various battlefields of the Galaxy that describing them without great simplification is impossible. Since most of them have similar parameters and use standard ammo, instead of presenting specific models, generic classes of weaponry are listed. The players can obviously describe the manufacturer of their weapon and give it a brand name, but this doesn't affect the game mechanics.

MELEE WEAPONS

Even though modern weapons are common, you can encounter people using ancient weaponry surprisingly often, including melee weapons. In *Nemesis*, PCs can use any of the melee weapons described in the SWD core book. Such weapons have Availability Code B.

FIREARMS

Plasma weapons are deadly against targets not protected by energy shields, but many people still use ordinary guns and rifles. Heroes in *Nemesis* can use any armaments described in SWD as ‘modern weapons’ (as well as ‘black powder weapons’ if the GM allows). Handguns have Availability Code B, more powerful weapons – C.

PLASMA WEAPONS

Such weapons are very effective against physical objects – material armor doesn’t protect against them at all. In game terms, attacks made with such weapons have at least 10 AP. Only energy shields or other special protection can negate this trait of plasma weapons.

GRENADES

Grenades use the normal Savage Worlds rules from page 51 of SWD.

LIST OF WEAPONS

Plasma Hand Cannon: This is simply a modified version of a plasma pistol, designed to deal the greatest damage possible. The increased firepower is balanced by an energy drain ten times larger and a significant decrease in the weapon’s range – though it can still find many fans.

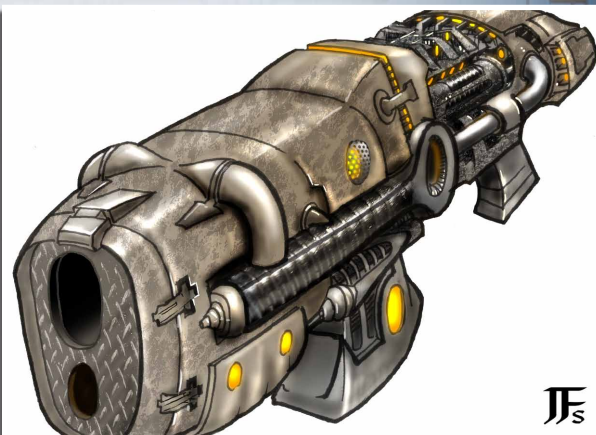
Plasma Derringer: A highly compact plasma pistol, usually used for personal protection. It doesn’t do much damage, but it works well as a backup weapon. The weapon uses a small energy cell.

Plasma Cannon: The cheapest and most commonly available military support weapon. It’s heavy, unwieldy, and inefficient, but it has great firepower.

Plasma Grenade: The most commonly-used grenade on the modern battlefield. Plasma grenades can incinerate both a soldier and his equipment, damage buildings, and even damage heavy military vehicles.

Incendiary Grenade: An older kind of grenade, nowadays almost completely supplanted by plasma grenades. They’re intended to create the highest temperature possible, which makes them able to damage military equipment, especially vulnerable electronics.

Plasma Rifle: A heavy plasma gun, able to fire only single shots. It’s used mostly in situations where firepower is more important than rate of fire.



Assault Plasma Rifle: The basic weapon of the frontline soldier, especially useful when fighting the monstrosities of the Horde. This automatic energy rifle has good range, firepower, and accuracy, which makes it a perfect universal weapon.

Sonic Rifle: An experimental weapon, used mostly on technically advanced worlds, usually by members of the special forces or special police units. Energy shields don’t protect against sonic rifles.

Continuous Wave Laser: If you need to completely cover the area with laser fire there's no better weapon than a CW laser. The coherent blast of energy emitted by the CW laser over 2-3 seconds can even penetrate the armor of a light tank. Sadly, its biggest flaw is its weight – the ray generator together with the emitter weigh over 100 pounds, which make the mobile applications of the laser very limited.

Plasma Pistol: This small and handy plasma handgun is the faithful companion of almost one in five humans. It can't penetrate most energy shields, but it's good protection against most of the dangers a civilian might encounter. It's also a decent sidearm for soldiers –every squad tells tales about a madman who saved his life by shooting this weapon straight into a maw of a Horde monster.

RPP: The Repeating Plasma Pistol is used by security, police and other quasi-military formations working in an urban environment. More compact than an automatic pistol, it can offer similar firepower, perfectly fulfilling the need for a personal weapon.

Plasma Blaster: This is a compromise between a plasma pistol and other, heavier energy weapons. It has four barrels firing small plasma charges simultaneously.

TPC: The Triple Plasma Cannon is the most common support weapon. When ordinary rifles cannot harm the enemy, it's time to call for a TPC operator to clear up the battlefield. The immense firepower of the TPC causes soldiers to refer to it as "the ram".

Empath Blade: These weapons are only issued to Psionic Sword masters. Usually they are long swords, but daggers, rapiers and even staves can be constructed with this technology. A network of specialized psionic sensors is built into these objects, made to perfectly match the mind of a trained warrior, so that the blade becomes an extension of the wielder. An empath blade deals only Str+d4 damage in the hands of a non-psionist, but this becomes Spi+d8 if used by a psionic hero. In addition, Psionics can be used in place of Fighting when using it (also Parry is calculated as Psionics/2+2).

Psychic Mace: Psionics are dangerous, so they must be controlled, and if necessary, taken down with minimal effort. These fighting batons release a powerful neural discharge when they hit the target, temporarily scrambling the psionic powers of the victim. Any psionist Shaken or Wounded by a psychic mace must make an immediate Vigor (-2) roll or suffer a level of Fatigue. In addition, if he rolls a 1 on the Vigor die, regardless of the Wild Die, he also loses 1d6 Power Points.

AMMO

Each energy weapon uses batteries as ammo. When it has fired the listed number of shots, the battery must be changed. Each battery weighs half a pound.

3. ARMOR

During the long ages of colonization, one of the few branches of the military sciences that resisted major transformation was the technology of personal armor. The conviction that it's better to attack than to defend didn't change until the present day, when it turned out that the Horde possesses an infinite number of 'recruits' while human forces are not inexhaustible.

Even though standard forms of armor offer no protection against energy weapons, the military never really stopped using them. They provide sufficient protection from the more primitive weapons, as well as shrapnel or accidental damage, and they're cheap enough to be issued to practically every military unit. Recently, during the wars with the Horde, the popularity of such defense has sharply increased – the armor doesn't protect from plasma rounds, but it can certainly stop the fangs, claws and spikes of the vile beasts. There are many different kinds of armor – from light jackets and helmets (though these are more of a uniform than actual protection), through tactical armor issued to front line troops, to heavy power armor. This last is usually used by heavy

weapon operators, or troopers assigned to support cyborgs.

BULLETPROOF VESTS

AS WITH FIREARMS, YOU STILL CAN ENCOUNTER OLDER, BASIC KINDS OF ARMOR, IN USE FOR CENTURIES. THE HEROES CAN STILL USE ARMOR DESCRIBED IN SWD AS 'MODERN'. ITS AVAILABILITY CODE IS A.

Protective Suit: A heavy-duty suit for people working in dangerous conditions – consists of trousers, jacket, gas mask, protective goggles and a hood.

Scout Armor: This is more of a uniform made from extremely durable materials than armor per se. The only reinforced materials are small plates protecting the forearms, the helmet and the boots. The armor is equipped with a standard long-range communicator (60 miles), a standard energy shield and three doses of nanodoc.

Spacesuit: The standard protective gear for pilots and other people aboard spaceships – it consists of a sealed suit strengthened with composite materials, and protects against low temperatures and pressure. It's equipped with a short-range communicator (10 miles), an air supply for

MELEE WEAPONS

TYPE	DAMAGE	WEIGHT	COST	AVAILABILITY	NOTES
EMPATH BLADE	STR+d4/SPI+d8	6	1500	C	SEE NOTES
PSYCHIC MACE	STR+d4	3	500	D	SEE NOTES

RANGED WEAPONS

TYPE	RANGE	DAMAGE	RoF	COST	WT	SHOTS*	MIN ST	NOTES
PLASMA HAND CANNON	10/20/40	4d8	1	500	1	10	d6	AP15
PLASMA DERRINGER	10/20/40	2d8	1	200	0.5	5		AP10
PLASMA CANNON	30/60/120	4d10	1	1000	20	25	d8	AP20, UNWIELDY, HW
PLASMA GRENADE	5/10/20	3d10	-	150	0.5	-	-	AP15, MBT
INCENDIARY GRENADE	5/10/20	3d8	-	100	0.5	-	-	MBT
PLASMA RIFLE	30/60/120	3d10	1	300	0.5	10	d8	AP10
ASSAULT PLASMA RIFLE	30/60/120	2d10	3	300	8	50	-	AP10, AUTO, 3RB
SONIC RIFLE	24/48/96	2d10	1	1500	5	25	-	AP10
CW LASER	50/100/200	3d10	3	3000	50	20	d8	AP30, AUTO, HW
PLASMA PISTOL	15/30/60	2d10	1	200	1.5	50	-	AP10, SEMI-AUTO
RPP	15/30/60	2d10	3	300	2.5	50	-	AP10, AUTO, 3RB
PLASMA BLASTER	10/20/40	4d6	1	500	5	25	d6	AP10
TPC	50/100/200	4d10	5	1500	25	50	d6	AP20, AUTO, 3RB

3 hours, a standard energy shield, a set of ropes (200 yards), and hooks allowing the wearer to strap himself to an object. In the backpack are a flashlight, some tape to repair any holes in the suit and one dose of nanodoc.

Assassin Suit: Custom fitted to the body, and able to change the color of its outer layers, the assassin suit is one of the most advanced pieces of protective equipment. It has an encrypted medium range (20 miles) communicator, climbing gear, a set of electronic lockpicks and tools to disable security devices, a military energy shield, and goggles providing night vision. It provides a +2 bonus to all Stealth and Climbing rolls as well as a +2 bonus to the user's Pace.

Environmental Suit: A heavier version of the spacesuit, working as well in vacuum as in the depths of the ocean. The environmental suit consists of a heavy, multi-layered suit (which significantly limits movement), a short-range (10 miles) communicator, a standard energy shield, and an air supply for 12 hours. It's also equipped with climbing gear, two flashlights built into the hel-

met, and three doses of nanodoc. In various receptacles built into the suit and in its backpack there are repair tape, a long range (60 miles) communicator, a first aid kit and two signal flares. It protects against cold, vacuum and temperatures up to 1000° C (1800° F). It allows movement underwater down to 5000 feet.

Light Tactical Armor: Such armor consists of a helmet equipped with an encrypted short-range (10 miles) communicator, a reinforced jacket and rigid plates protecting the upper arms, forearms, and legs.

Heavy Tactical Armor: This protects the entire body. It's equipped with a helmet with night vision systems, a medium-range (20 miles) communicator, an anti-gas filter, and a standard energy shield. Versions of this armor with a military shield also exist, costing \$2500 more.

Full Tactical Armor: The heaviest protection used by front-line troopers consists of a flexible, sealed suit of armor, supplemented by tough, rigid plates covering the entire body. The helmet is equipped with an air supply for 3 hours, an en-

NAME	ARMOR	WT	COST	AVAILABILITY	NOTES
PROTECTIVE SUIT	+2	4	100	B	PROTECTS THE ENTIRE BODY
SCOUT ARMOR	+4	5	200	C	PROTECTS ARMS, HEAD AND TORSO
SPACESUIT	+4	20	200	B	SEALED, PROTECTS ENTIRE BODY
ASSASSIN SUIT	+6	5	500	D	PROTECTS THE ENTIRE BODY.
ENVIRONMENTAL SUIT	+6	25	250	C	PROTECTS THE ENTIRE BODY, SEALED
LIGHT TACTICAL ARMOR	+8	25 (15)	750	C	PROTECTS THE ENTIRE BODY
HEAVY TACTICAL ARMOR	+10	50 (15)	1500	D	PROTECTS THE ENTIRE BODY
FULL TACTICAL ARMOR	+14	75 (15)	3000	D	PROTECTS THE ENTIRE BODY, SEALED
ASSAULT ARMOR	+20	200 (-)	15000	D	PROTECTS THE ENTIRE BODY, SEALED

* NUMBERS IN BRACKETS ARE THE EFFECTIVE WEIGHT OF THE ARMOR WHEN WORN.

encrypted medium range (20 miles) communicator, a visor, and targeting systems providing a +1 Shooting bonus. Synthetic muscles increase the Strength of a user by 1 level and give a +1 bonus to Pace. The backpack contains a military energy shield, three doses of nanodoc and a first aid kit.

Assault Armor: The lightest powered armor available. A complete exoskeleton with synthetic muscles, it's used to support cyborgs and transport heavy weapons. Assault armor increases Strength by 2 levels and Pace by +2. It's fully sealed, with a 48-hour air supply. It's also equipped with an assault energy shield, an encrypted long range communicator (60 miles), and 5 doses of nanodoc. The helmet's equipped with an advanced night vision system, allowing for 12" low light vision, a visor, and targeting systems giving a +2 bonus to Shooting rolls.

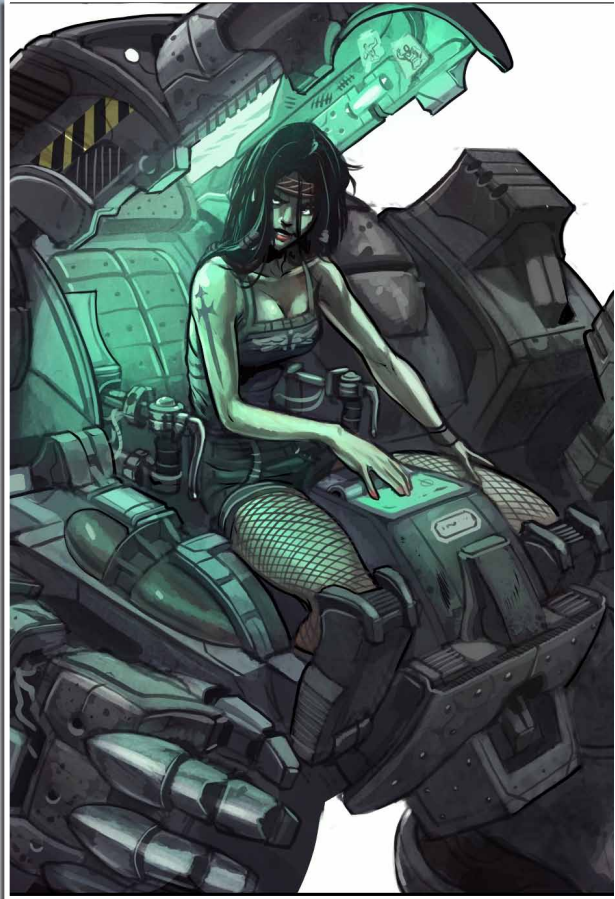
4. ENERGY SHIELDS

In the world of *Nemezis*, science has advanced to the point that portable energy shields are no longer a dream, they are a reality!

Many designs and types of energy shields are produced, but there are two basic kinds: deflectors and force fields.

DEFLECTORS

Deflectors are small energy projectors that create a circular, semi-invisible force barrier of variable diameter: the smaller ones are only a foot or so wide (like a buckler) while others are as much as a yard across (like a large shield).



A deflector is worn on an arm, and when activated is used exactly like a solid shield. The advantages are the negligible weight, the fact that it can be turned off in a matter of seconds, and finally, you can see through it. Usually an active de-

DEFLECTOR TYPE	COST	AVAILABILITY	NOTES
SMALL	500	A	+1 PARRY
MEDIUM	1000	B	+1 PARRY, +2 TOUGHNESS VS RANGED WEAPONS
LARGE	3000	C	+2 PARRY, +2 TOUGHNESS VS RANGED WEAPONS
STEALTH MODE	+50%	+1 AVAILABILITY LEVEL	NOTICE ROLL REQUIRED TO DETECT.



flector creates a distortion in the air, so it is clearly visible, but some top-of-the-line models are totally invisible (a Notice roll is required to detect them).

Deflector shields are one of duelists' favorite means of defense.

FORCE FIELDS

A force field is basically a miniaturized energy field generator, surrounding the user with an almost impenetrable energy shield.

In game terms, any character using a force field when he is hit can make a special Soak roll, called a Shield Soak. This roll is made by *summing up* the two dice granted by the shield. This roll never aces, no Wild Die is used and bennies cannot be spent on it. Apart from this, it works exactly like a soak roll, soaking a wound for every success and raise.

After the Shield Soak, the user can still soak any remaining wounds with the normal soaking rules.

A force field might seem an impenetrable defense, but it has two big weaknesses.

First, the amount of energy required to deflect a blow, even the weakest one, is so large that no force field can work continuously; the energy required would be simply too much to be stored in its batteries. So, it is built as a passive device, with a very accurate internal sensor network. When the sensors detect a threat, they generate a shield at once, raising it immediately. A system like this is very efficient, but vulnerable to certain attacks: special weapons such as shield scramblers and fighting techniques such as the Barizian Bar-La (see Edges) are designed to use this weakness.

FORCE FIELD TYPE	COST	WEIGHT	AVAILABILITY	NOTES
MINIATURE	1500	-	A	SHIELD SOAK: 2d4
STANDARD	1000	2	B	SHIELD SOAK: 2d6
MILITARY	5000	4	C	SHIELD SOAK: 2d8
ASSAULT	MILITARY	12	D	SHIELD SOAK: 2d10
VEHICLE SHIELD, LIGHT	MILITARY	-	D	SHIELD SOAK: 2d6
VEHICLE SHIELD, HEAVY	MILITARY	-	D	SHIELD SOAK: 2d8

Second, a force field must deliver a tremendous amount of energy to deflect a blow, so it is prone to discharging. Whenever the Shield Soak roll is a double (so two fives, two sixes and so on), regardless of the success or not of the Shield Soak roll, the force field is temporarily out of energy. Internal micro-generators will restore it, but for the remainder of the scene it cannot be used again.

Force fields are made in different models: miniature (easily concealable in jewellery or similar items), standard (built into belts), military (built into armor or armored vests) and assault ones (with cumbersome energy backpacks).

Example: *Jennifer is walking alone in a dark subway station on Ash when an evil cultist, hidden behind a pillar shoots her with a plasma rifle! Jennifer is totally surprised, so she can't activate her deflector, but luckily her force field triggers!*

The cultist inflicts 14 damage, which, compared to her Toughness of 6, means she takes 2 Wounds.

Jennifer's standard force field allows her a Shield Soak of 2d6. She rolls 4 and 4, for a total of 8. This is success with a raise, so two wounds soaked! But as the roll is a double, it also means that the force field discharged, and don't work for the remainder of the scene.

The plasma shot is deflected by the instant energy discharge of Jennifer's force field, and she ducks into cover while drawing her own weapon. Her heart beats fast in her chest, while she notices the energy level indicator of her force field blinking red.

5. IMPLANTS

On most of the worlds of the Galaxy, implanting cybernetic devices in your body or undergoing nanoid treatments is restricted mostly to the rich, but it's hardly anything unusual. On many planets, every human receives a basic implant called a 'jack' in early childhood: a small device connected to the nervous system, a basic necessity in the modern world. A jack is a combination of a cell phone, a small computer, a massive library, an internet connection, a translation device and a music player. It has a wireless connection to the planetary network, provid-

ing a multitude of free services – from instant communication with any other person equipped with a jack, through the access to any information (if it's freely available), to the ability to directly control machines, vehicles and many other devices.

That's only the tip of the iceberg of the possibilities available to a character deciding to use the benefits of nano- or cybertech. If you have enough money to spare, have access to one of the many cybernetic clinics and enough time to undergo an operation, rest, and receive basic training in the use of the implant, you can easily increase your physical abilities or gain powers unavailable to ordinary people.

CYBERNETICS

Cybernetic implants have been known for centuries. They increase average life expectancy, help people with crippling injuries, and make the impossible – possible. For many people, they don't just save their lives, but make a normal existence possible. And yet, for many people they're still devilish devices, something decent people shouldn't have anything to do with.

With a few exceptions, the player characters will probably be among those willing to undergo cybernetic modification. To receive implants, desire alone is not enough – you also need money to purchase the devices and to pay a doctor to place them in your body. There's another factor limiting the use of cybertech – the human mind can't accommodate a large number of implants. It rebels against combining a normal, healthy organism with a piece of metal designed and produced in a lab. Every implant placed in the body weakens the connection between the body and soul. Installing too many implants can drive a man insane, drive him into a madness from which even the most skilled psionicists won't be able to save him.

NANOTECH

Far subtler than its older sister, cybernetics, nanotechnology is still controversial and terrifying to a significant part of society. People tell

stories about disasters caused by scientists who erroneously programmed nanoids and brought forth terrible diseases, decimating the populations of entire planets. Others say some of these disasters weren't accidents, but military projects testing offensive strains of nanomachines. Though most such rumors are simply false, there is a grain of truth in them: on many technologically advanced worlds, nanoids serve as guardians and protectors, or even as soldiers in case of an attack.

Undergoing a nanotreatment is not especially difficult – you need to visit the hospital once or twice, undergo some easy tests, and then wait a few weeks while the scientists prepare a specially customized strain of nanobots. Then you simply pay, receive a few injections and wait a few days for the nanoids to work – to transform your body or even build a cybernetic implant inside it.

CYBERNETICS POINTS

EACH IMPLANT OR NANOTREATMENT HAS A CERTAIN COST IN CYBERNETICS POINTS (CP) – PROPORTIONAL TO HOW HEAVILY THEY MODIFY THE BODY. THE PLAYER SHOULD TAKE CARE THAT THE AMOUNT OF CP DOESN'T GO OVER HIS CYBERNETICS THRESHOLD.

CYBERNETICS THRESHOLD (CT)

When a young person visits a cybernetics clinic for the first time, to receive his or her jack, they have to undergo a series of routine tests to establish how their body would react to implants. The results are coded into their jack, not only to inform the cybertechnicians about their limitations, but also to prevent strains of nanobots from making significant transformations of the organism – if these would make the person go over his Cybernetics Threshold, the nanoids won't perform the treatment.

The Threshold is a number determining the maximum amount of cybernetic modifications or nanotreatments a character can undergo. If you go over that number, your character might go insane: that's why due to the jack, all treatments and most implants that would make your character

go over the threshold are simply rejected – nanobots don't alter the organism and implants don't connect with the nervous system. Only specially modified implants can cause you to go over the CT. The value of the Threshold is equal to **twice the value of your Spirit die**, modified by Edges, Hindrances and racial traits.

GOING OVER THE CT

If you go over the Cybernetics Threshold you can temporarily lose control over your body, or even go insane. Whenever you find yourself in a stressful situation like combat, an argument with a close friend, winning the lottery or the death of a loved one, you need to succeed on a Spirit roll with a negative modifier equal to a difference between the Cybernetics Points and the Cybernetics Threshold. Failure the roll means you can't control the hero until the end of the current scene – the GM decides what your character is going to do.

The character may behave in a lot of different ways, but it'll always be something unfavorable to the player. The GM can rule that in a bout of madness the hero runs away, attacks an ally, loses consciousness or something similar. But this can never (except maybe when you roll snake eyes on both the Spirit and Wild Dice) – cause the death of a hero (so you can rule out suicide attempts).

6. LIST OF IMPLANTS

Cybernetic implants, nanoid treatments, and software are described as follows:

Type: The kind of modification. Implants proper are cybernetic devices replacing fragments of body. Software is a special program placed in a jack. Nanoid treatments come in two kinds: active and passive. The first are living strains of nanoids, remaining active indefinitely in the body of the subject, while the latter transform the human body, sometimes even replacing natural organs with cybernetic ones. They die after performing their task. The final kind of 'implants' are total conversions – complete replacements of bodies due to a personality transfer.

Location: Where you install the implant. Whether the implant can be installed alongside other devices in the same location is mentioned in parentheses.

Effect: How the implants affect the character's skills and abilities.

Special: Any other information describing the implant.

CP: The number of Cybernetics Points resulting from implanting the device.

Availability: The Availability Code of the device.

Price: The price of the implant, treatment or software.

Available implants, treatments and software are described below.

AIR SUPPLY

A small container of pressurized air allows the owner of the implant to hold his breath for much longer than normal.

Type: Implant; **Location:** Lungs (yes) **Effect:** The owner of this implant can hold his breath for up to 15 minutes. The air in the container is resupplied after an hour in normal conditions; **CP:** +2; **Availability:** B; **Price:** 2500

ANTIGRAVITY SYSTEM

This complex and expensive system uses micro-generators of gravity fields for levitation, and even short range flight after proper training.

Type: Implant; **Location:** Arms and legs (yes); **Effect:** The user of this implant can fly, at his normal Pace, with Climb -1. The implant is powered by a built-in battery, which allows for 15 minutes of continuous flight; **CP:** +5; **Availability:** C; **Cost:** 50000

ANTIVENOM NANOBOTS

A simple nanobot strain, whose purpose is neutralizing any toxic substances entering the user's body.

Type: Active nanotreatment; **Location:** N/A; **Effect:** 48 hours after undergoing this treatment, the patient receives a

+2 bonus to Vigor rolls to resist venoms; **CP:** +1; **Availability:** A; **Price:** 2500

ARTIFICIAL MUSCLES

Thanks to this treatment, natural muscle fibers are reinforced by synthetic ones, increasing the user's strength and fitness, especially in melee combat.

Type: Passive nanotreatment; **Location:** N/A; **Effect:** 48 hours after undergoing this treatment, the patient increases his Strength die by +1 or +2 die types, depending on the price of the implant; **CP:** +4; **Availability:** B; **Price:** 25000 (+1 level) 75000 (+2 levels).

BATTLEFIELD ANALYZER

A small processor enhancing the abilities of the jack, allowing perfect analysis of the battlefield and improving the chance of predicting enemies' actions.

Type: Software; **Location:** jack (yes); **Effect:** Someone with this software receives a +2 bonus to all Knowledge (Battle) rolls; **Special:** Requires a jack and a cybernetic eye. **CP:** +2; **Availability:** C; **Price:** 5000

BURNER

A microcell installed in the palm allows for turning the outer layer of the hand white-hot. Just a slight touch can cause serious burning – and a strong punch could even kill the enemy.

Type: Implant; **Location:** Hand (no); **Effect:** A character installing this modification can, as an action, heat up his hand. The next successful attack with that hand deals an additional 2d6 energy damage (as well as the normal Strength die). This modification draws a lot of energy from the hero's supply; whenever the bonus damage dice score a double, it means the device is temporarily discharged and cannot be used for the remainder of the scene.





Special: This implant can be added to a pair of cybernetic arms or hands before implanting the new limb in the body; **CP:** +2; **Availability:** D; **Cost:** 10000

CHEMICAL ANALYZER

A few hundred microchemical analyzers implanted in the tongue and connected to the jack allow the user to recognize any ingested substances – including potentially harmful ones.

Type: Implant; **Location:** Tongue (no); **Effect:** Someone with this implant receives a +2 bonus to Common Knowledge when recognizing ingested substances; **Special:** Requires a jack. **CP:** +1; **Availability:** A; **Price:** 2000

CLIMBING CLAWS

This modification adds extendable claws made from hard alloys inside the fingers of cybernetic hands, making any climbing task childishly simple.

Type: Implant; **Location:** Hand (no); **Effect:** A character installing this modification receives a +2 bonus to all Climbing rolls. Extending the claws is an action; **Special:** This implant can be added to a pair of cybernetic arms or hands before implanting the new limb in the body; **CP:** +2; **Availability:** B; **Cost:** 2500

CONCEALED BLADE

This implant is staggeringly popular, but frankly, quite useless. It's a simple system, a blade extended from the inside of the forearm, which makes a good backup weapon, but is too delicate for real combat.

Type: Implant; **Location:** Hand (no) **Effect:** This implant allows the user to extend a small weapon (even though it can have many blades it's treated as either a dagger or a short sword) from inside a cybernetic arm or hand – this counts as an action, but concealing it again is a free action. Obviously, a hero with this weapon can't be disarmed. To spot this modification, you must succeed in a Notice (-2) test, with a -2 additional penalty if the weapon is a dagger. **Special:** This implant must be added to a cybernetic arm or hand before implanting the new limb in the body; **CP:** +2; **Availability:** D; **Cost:** 5000

CONCEALED SHIELD

A standard shield placed inside an empty space in a cybernetic limb.

Type: Implant; **Location:** Arm or leg (no) **Effect:** Thanks to this modification, a character can install a standard or military energy shield inside a cybernetic limb. It cannot be detected unless activated. **Special:** This implant must be added to a cybernetic arm or limb before implanting the new limb in the body; **CP:** +1; **Availability:** C; **Cost:** 2000 + the price of the shield

CONCEALED WEAPON

A small energy weapon, a miniaturized plasma pistol, hidden in the inner part of the wrist.

Type: Implant; **Location:** Hand (no) **Effect:** This implant allows for extending a small plasma pistol (with all normal parameters of such weapon) from inside a cybernetic arm or hand – this counts as an action. Obviously, a hero with this weapon can't be disarmed. To spot this modification, you must succeed in a Notice test with a -2 penalty. **Special:** This implant can be added to a cybernetic arm or hand before implanting the new limb in the body; **CP:** +2; **Availability:** D; **Cost:** 5000

CYBERNETIC ARM

A steel and plastic construction with composite skeleton and artificial skin covering fully replaces a natural limb, with the only difference being increased durability.

Type: Implant; **Location:** Arm (no); **Effect:** The implant perfectly replaces an organic arm and provides no bonuses on its own. You can install up to three modifications providing other benefits in it. **CP:** +3; **Availability:** B; **Cost:** 5000

CYBERNETIC EYE

A synthetic eye, very similar to a natural one, but able to capture images with quality far beyond the capabilities of a natural organ.

Type: Implant; **Location:** Eye (no); **Effect:** User can't be blinded. You can add up to three modifications to the eye before installing it. **CP:** +1; **Availability:** C; **Cost:** 5000

CYBERNETIC HAND

A smaller version of a cybernetic arm, replacing one hand with a mechanical device with capabilities similar to those of a natural limb.

Type: Implant; **Location:** Hand (no); **Effect:** The implant perfectly replaces an organic hand and provides no bonuses on its own. You can install one modification providing other benefits in it. **CP:** +1; **Availability:** B; **Cost:** 2500

CYBERNETIC LEG

A tough frame, fibers of unyielding synthetic muscle, and artificial skin make this implant pop-

ular not only among people who have lost natural limbs, but also with people who want to increase the capabilities of their bodies.

Type: Implant; **Location:** Leg (no); **Effect:** The implant perfectly replaces an organic leg and provides no bonuses on its own. You can install up to three modifications providing other benefits in it. **CP:** +3; **Availability:** B; **Cost:** 5000

DEFENSIVE NANOBOTS

A very simple and effective strain of nanobots – its job is to eliminate any other nanoids that enter the user's body.

Type: Active nanotreatment; **Location:** N/A; **Effect:** 96 hours after undergoing this treatment, the user's body develops a defensive strain of nanobots, protecting him from any other nanoids (including aggressive ones, like infectious nanobots). A character that has undergone this treatment can't use any other active nanomachines, nor receive any passive treatments in the future; **CP:** +1; **Availability:** C; **Price:** 2500

DUELLING ANALYZER

A complex electronic system, analyzing images captured by the cybernetic eye and comparing them with a library of thousands of fencing and martial arts schools. It gives the user advice on how to attack and defend in any given situation. When supplemented by a system that enhances natural reactions, this implant can lead to victory in many duels.

Type: Software; **Location:** jack (yes); **Effect:** Someone with this software can spend a round to analyze the combat style of the opponent – during which he can't perform any other actions. When the opponent has been analyzed, the user receives a +1 to all Fighting rolls and damage in melee, as well as +1 bonus to Parry in combat with this opponent; **Special:** Requires a jack and a cybernetic eye. **CP:** +2; **Availability:** C; **Price:** 15000

ELASTIC BONES

This modification of bone structure is based on transforming some pieces of bone into a highly resistant composite. The user is able to con-

trol the toughness of this material and alter it if necessary, which makes his bones very elastic.

Type: Passive nanotreatment; **Location:** N/A; **Effect:** 96 hours after undergoing this treatment, the patient receives a +2 bonus to all Agility rolls made to slip out of any bonds, and halves all the falling damage. **Special:** The hardened skeleton treatment negates the bonus granted by elastic bones; **CP:** +2; **Availability:** B; **Price:** 8000

HARDENED SKELETON

This treatment hardens the bone structure by reinforcing the bones with a micromesh made of high-tech alloys.

Type: Passive nanotreatment; **Location:** N/A **Effect:** 48 hours after undergoing this treatment, the patient increases his Toughness by 1 to 3 points, depending on the price; **CP:** +2; **Availability:** B; **Price:** 10000 (+1), 20000 (+2), 40000 (+3)

IMMUNOLOGICAL NANOBOTS

A simple nanomachine strain, enhancing the immune system of the user to help fight off malicious viruses or bacteria.

Type: Active nanotreatment; **Location:** N/A; **Effect:** 48 hours after undergoing this treatment, the patient receives a +2 bonus to Vigor rolls to resist diseases; **CP:** +1; **Availability:** A; **Price:** 2500

INDEPENDENT ADVISORY SYSTEM

This is a specialized AI able to analyze the user's thought processes in real-time, and simultaneously trace a similar process. In just a few seconds it can present its own solution, even pointing out the user's logical errors and inconsistencies.

Type: Software; **Location:** jack (yes); **Effect:** Someone with this soft-

ware in their jack rolls a d8 as a Wild Die on all Knowledge rolls – even if she is an Extra; **Special:** Requires jack. **CP:** +1; **Availability:** B; **Price:** 10000

INFECTIOUS NANOBOTS

The most terrifying of existing nanotreatments – it infects the user with an aggressive strain of nanoids, which attack any other person whose bloodstream they enter. Such nanobots are illegal in most systems of the Galaxy.

Type: Active nanotreatment; **Location:** N/A; **Effect:** 96 hours after undergoing this treatment, the patient develops an aggressive strain of nanoids, which attack the organisms of other people whenever they are able to enter their bloodstreams. If the carrier of infectious nanobots manages to at least Shake an opponent with an unarmed attack, the nanites enter the adversary's body, dealing 2d8 damage per round (ignoring armor), for twenty rounds. This doesn't affect inorganic beings (like cyborgs), or Horde beasts. Furthermore, there is a small chance of accidental infection if another person close to the user has open wounds, for instance, when the user attempts to administer first aid to a friend. If the result of an appropriate test (for instance Healing)

is snake eyes, the victim becomes infected; **CP:** +6; **Availability:** D; **Price:** 150 000



JACK

The basis of modern civilization, as necessary as air, water or food. This special multifunctional electronic processor, with many available connection slots and a wireless link, is installed in the spine, at the back of the neck, and is so common that on many planets installing it is compulsory.

Type: Implant; **Location:** Spinal cord (yes);

Effect: The jack is the most important implant. Every character can begin the game with a jack already installed – but if the player decides not to equip a jack during character creation, and later decides he wants one, he must pay to have it installed. A jack gives the character the following benefits:

- It can function as a cellphone, wireless modem, music player, or a small computer – with functions like a notepad, data storage, and a program for calculating FTL jumps. Whenever the character needs to use such a device, he can do so thanks to his jack.

- It allows for installing up to 10 software implants.

If the character is in the range of any planet-wide network he can use the following features:

- The network allows him to use any Knowledge skill at a d4 level, but making such roll takes at least five times longer than normally.

- He can use paid on-line databases, which can give him a +1 bonus for any Knowledge or Stretwise roll for each \$100 spent, up to +4.

- It allows him to communicate in any major language used on this planet – access to translating software costs you \$100 or \$50 – but the cheaper option gives you a very distinct accent.

- If the character possesses the relevant licence, he can access protected databases, like the police wanted lists or warrants.

CP: +1; **Availability:** A; **Price:** 100

JUMP ENHANCER

Extra muscles implanted in legs and calves which can activate when necessary, increasing the capabilities of the jumper. For safety reasons, they can be activated only a couple of times per day.

Type: Implant; **Location:** Legs (no); **Effect:** The user of this implant can triple his normal jumping range three times per day; **CP:** +1; **Availability:** A; **Cost:** 2500

LIGHT AMPLIFIER MOD

Using the same technology applied in modern night vision devices, this system enhances rece-

ived light impulses, allowing normal vision in any condition save for total darkness.

Type: Implant; **Location:** Eye (no); **Effect:** This mod allows the user to see normally in darkness and low light. **Special:** This implant can be added to a cybernetic eye before implanting it in the body; **CP:** +1; **Availability:** B; **Cost:** 5000

LIMB ENHANCEMENT

Additional muscle fibers fill those parts of the limb normally used to install other modifications. They boost the strength and martial prowess of the user.

Type: Implant; **Location:** Arm (no); **Effect:** This implant adds +2 to Strength rolls made using that limb and to melee damage as well; **Special:** This implant must be added to a cybernetic limb before implanting the new limb in the body; **CP:** +2; **Availability:** C; **Cost:** 10000.

MULTI-THREADED DEDUCTIVE SYSTEM

This autonomous AI system is combined with a massive knowledge database and has access to the planet-wide network. Thanks to this it can instantly research any information necessary, and the user can also “outsource” many thought processes to the AI, enabling him to solve many theoretical problems almost instantly.

Type: Software; **Location:** Jack (yes); **Effect:** A character with this software in his jack receives a +2 bonus to one or more Knowledge skills. The cost given below is for one skill, but you might buy more skills, paying \$5000 for each (the CP cost remains unchanged); **Special:** Requires a jack; **CP:** +1; **Availability:** B; **Cost:** 5000

MULTI-THREADED NEURAL SYSTEM

This system essentially acts as an extra brain, increasing the user’s brainpower and running several trains of thought at the same time.

Type: Implant; **Location:** Head (yes); **Effect:** A character with this implant can perform two actions in a round without a -2 penalty. The third and subsequent actions have the standard penalties (-2 for the third action, -4 for the fourth

one and so on); **Special:** Requires a jack; **CP:** +6; **Availability:** B; **Cost:** 30000

RECORDER MOD

A small memory bank connected to eye cameras allows them to save a few thousand hours of images and copy them through the jack to an external drive.

Type: Implant; **Location:** Eye (no); **Effect:** This modification allows for registering any image seen by character (with up to 2000 fps rate), and copying it to external storage. You can record up to 3 thousand hours of video. **Special:** This implant can be added to a cybernetic eye before implanting it in the body; **CP:** +2; **Availability:** B; **Cost:** 5000

REFLEX BOOSTER

Thanks to changes in the nervous system and the creation of new synapses, the person undergoing this nanotreatment moves faster and is able to react faster than ordinary humans.

Type: Passive nanotreatment; **Location:** N/A; **Effect:** 48 hours after treatment, the patient receives the Quick Edge. **CP:** +2; **Availability:** B; **Price:** 8000

REGENERATIVE NANOBOTS

An active strain of nanoids in the user's bloodstream boosts natural tissue regeneration.

Type: Active nanotreatment; **Location:** N/A; **Effect:** 48 hours after undergoing this treatment, the patient receives a +2 bonus to Vigor when healing wounds naturally; **CP:** +1; **Availability:** A; **Price:** 5000

ROLLERSKATES

It is said that the idea for this implant came with an ancient picture of a policeman with this weird, but very useful feature. Inside the cybernetic feet are three small wheels allowing for fast movement, especially on smooth ground.

Type: Implant; **Location:** Leg (no); **Effect:** A character installing this modification can, as an action, extend wheels from the soles of their feet (if they're barefoot or wear specially adjusted footwear) – this will increase their Pace to 12”;

Special: This implant can be added to a pair of cybernetic legs before implanting the new limb in the body; **CP:** +2; **Availability:** B; **Cost:** 5000

SOCIAL PROMPTER

An advanced analytical system using a simple AI to identify basic patterns of human behavior, and design reactions granting the user enhanced social skills during a conversation.

Type: Software; **Location:** jack (yes); **Effect:** Up to three times a day, the user can reroll a failed check of Persuasion, Taunt or Intimidate; **CP:** +1; **Availability:** B; **Price:** 10000

SPECTRUM MOD

Eye cameras are able to perceive a broader spectrum of colors, and to adjust the range wavelengths seen, thanks to which you can now see more details than the ordinary person.

Type: Implant; **Location:** Eye (no); **Effect:** This mod allows the user to see shorter and longer waves of the electromagnetic radiation. He can see in darkness as if he had infravision. **Special:** This implant can be added to a cybernetic eye before implanting it in the body; **CP:** +2; **Availability:** B; **Cost:** 10000

STABILIZER

A small system consisting of a strain of medical nanobots and a processor connected to the nervous system, constantly monitoring the health of the user and activating the nanomachines when his life is in danger. The nanobots stop bleeding and regenerate damaged tissue, thus saving the user from death.

Type: Implant; **Location:** Heart (yes); **Effect:** A character with this implant is treated as if he had Hard to Kill Edge when Incapacitated. A version costing \$15000 is also equipped with one dose of nanodoc, released when the hero's last Wound would knock him unconscious. To refill the nanobot container you need to spend \$500 for each new dose; **CP:** +1; **Availability:** B; **Cost:** 5000

STRESS CONTROLLER

Software controlling the central nervous system allows the user to control his hormones in times of stress or when experiencing strong emotions like fear or anger.

Type: software; **Location:** jack (yes); **Effect:** Someone with this software in their jack receives a +2 bonus to Fear rolls and their Smarts or Spirit rolls in Tests of Will; **Special:** Requires a jack. **CP:** +2; **Availability:** B; **Price:** 5000

STRESS DETECTOR

This system analyses the voice of another person and compares it with hundreds of thousands of voice patterns stored in its memory. Thanks to this, the user receives complete information on the current emotional state of the target.

Type: software; **Location:** jack (yes); **Effect:** Someone with this software in their jack receives a +2 bonus to Notice or similar skill rolls made to detect lies or recognize the current emotional state of a subject; **Special:** Requires a jack. **CP:** +2; **Availability:** B; **Price:** 5000

SYNTHSKIN

This synthetic skin perfectly replaces the natural one, and a small processor placed at the base of the spinal cord allows for altering its color.

Type: Passive nanotreatment; **Location:** Skin (yes); **Effect:** 48 hours after undergoing this treatment, the patient gains a +2 bonus to all Stealth rolls if totally naked, +1 if he is even partially dressed; **CP:** +3; **Availability:** C; **Price:** 5000

TARGETING MOD

Thanks to a simple connection between a cybernetic eye and the nervous system this implant can significantly improve the accuracy of your shots. Whenever the program managing the implant detects a heightened level of adrenaline, it helps in aiming and pulling the trigger.

Type: Implant; **Location:** Eye (no); **Effect:** A character installing this modification acquires the effects of the Marksman Edge; **Special:** This implant can be added to a cybernetic eye before implanting it in the body; **CP:** +1; **Availability:** B; **Cost:** 15000



TOOL SET

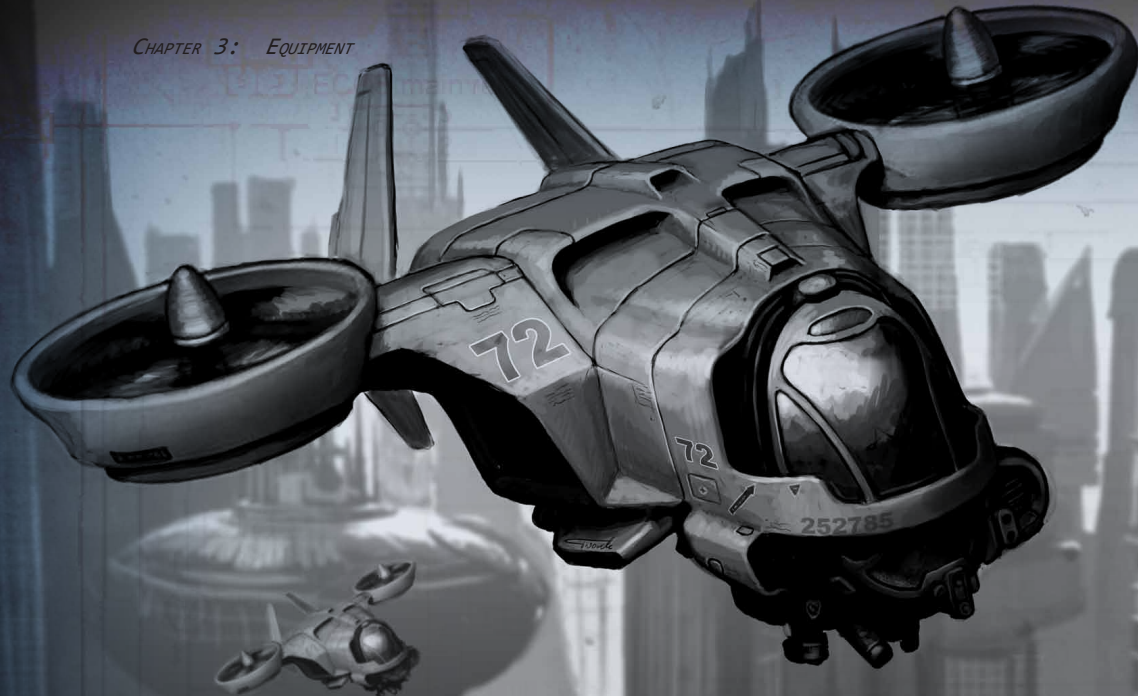
A few simple but effective tools installed inside a cybernetic hand.

Type: Implant; **Location:** Hand (no); **Effect:** A character with this modification receives a +2 bonus to all Repair rolls to repair machines and devices; **Special:** This implant must be added to a cybernetic hand before implanting the new limb in the body; **CP:** +1; **Availability:** A; **Cost:** 2500

VOICE MODULATOR

A small processor connected to your vocal chords and inner ear allows you to control the tone and pitch of your voice, and make it much more persuasive. The user of the implant can alter his voice depending on his needs, whether he wants to convince, intimidate, or bluff the listener.

Type: Implant; **Location:** Throat (yes); **Effect:** A person installing this implant in their body receives a +2 bonus to all Persuasion, Taunt, and Intimidate rolls; **CP:** +2; **Availability:** C; **Cost:** 15 000



7. VEHICLES

The world of *Nemesis* is full of spacecraft, hover tanks, and other marvelous high-tech vehicles which will make your adventures more interesting. Here are some examples.

FREIGHTER SHIP

A small, mercantile spaceship, used by independent traders and smugglers. Very old models can be found for a small percentage of the listed price.

FLYER

A generic flying vehicle, used for planetary travel. Some models are capable of reaching the

nearest moons (you can add the Spacecraft special ability for a 50% cost increase).

LANDSPEEDER

A common, four wheeled, vehicle, capable of working in almost any environment, from the devastated battlefields of Cor to the Wastelands of Ash. Landspeeders are cheap, and the most advanced models are powered by energy cells, making them virtually self-sustaining.

SKORPIO VTOL

An hybrid flying vehicle used by many military units, it can deploy troops in very awkward places, thanks to its ability to land and take off with extreme precision.

VEHICLE	ACC/TS	TOUGH.	CREW	COST	AVAIL.	NOTES
FLYER	20/140	9(2)	1+4	12K	A	CLIMB 1
FREIGHTER SHIP	50/300	30(20)	1+6	50K	B	CLIMB 1, HEAVY ARMOR, SPACECRAFT
LANDSPEEDER	10/50	7(1)	1+4	5K	A	FOUR WHEEL
SKORPIO VTOL	10/100	60(50)	1+12	MILITARY	C	CLIMB 2, HEAVY ARMOR, IMPROVED STABILIZER
HOVERBIKE	30/60	6	1+1	3K	B	HOVER

HOVERBIKE

Also known as repulsors, these slender vehicles work by generating a levitating field below them, in this manner eliminating all friction.

These are very fast, but quite tricky to drive. Their ability to reach great speeds and, if you are skilled enough, to climb almost vertical surfaces, makes them a typical vehicle of criminal gangs. Some heavily modified, top-of-the-line models are also used in Barizian races.

8. MILITARY VEHICLES

HAMMERHEAD

The characteristic cockpits of these vehicles, resembling the heads of hammerhead sharks, are one of the few positive sights for front line soldiers – most of these time these heavy carriers are used to transport reinforcements: small squads of special forces, able to turn the tide of a battle or even win it completely. These are heavily armored machines with decent weapons – but they're unwieldy and difficult to maneuver.

Weapons: 4 x TPC (two facing forwards, one each on right and left sides in rotating mounts), two batteries of BSP-10HE rockets (facing forwards), 2 CW lasers (in rotating mounts, able to cover the entire area under the vehicle).

Two TPCs, the rockets and the lasers are aimed by the copilot, the lateral TPCs by the gunners. Optionally, four BSP-2 (Demons) might be mounted, and these are also controlled by the copilot.

Acceleration/Top Speed: 20/250

Climb: 2

Toughness: 20 (8)

Crew: 6+12

Cost: 250000

Notes: Flares, Heavy Armor, Improved Stabilizer, Infrared Night Vision, Night Vision, -1 to Piloting rolls.

HAWK-7

Hawk-7s have served in the Cor military for a couple of decades, and the army has worked hard to find an equally versatile machine that could replace these old flyers. They are durable, easy to maintain and modify – and able to carry three crewmen and eight passengers wherever they're needed.

Weapons: 4 x CW lasers (facing forward, aimed by the copilot), TPC on the right side. Optionally, two BSP-2 (Demons) might be mounted under the wings, and these are also controlled by the copilot.

Acceleration/Top Speed: 20/300

Climb: 3



Toughness: 16 (6)**Crew:** 3+8**Cost:** 180000**Notes:** Flares, Heavy Armor, Improved Stabilizer, Infrared Night Vision, Night Vision.

LOCUST

Small, fast, nimble... and completely unarmored. This small vehicle, similar to present-day quad bikes, is a basic ground vehicle used by scout teams on Ash.

Weapons: none**Acceleration/Top Speed:** 25/45**Toughness:** 8+20 (shields)**Crew:** 1**Cost:** 12000**Notes:** Light shield.

PIRANHA

A small boat used by the army when there aren't enough air vehicles. It's cheap to maintain, and – since the Horde beasts seem to avoid oceans – very safe.

Weapons: TPC mounted on a rotating platform in the bow. CW laser on the roof.**Acceleration/Top Speed:** 20/40**Toughness:** 14 (4)**Crew:** 4+20**Cost:** 90000**Notes:** Flares, Heavy Armor, Light Shield.

STEEL M12 – “JAWS”

The nickname of this powerful, tracked transporter comes from its powerful bulldozer blade. It's one of the few vehicles able to move smoothly in the jungles of Cor – it leaves behind it a trail of uprooted trees and soil six yards wide, but that's not a problem for the military. The M12 is heavy armored, but not that well armed. Its firepower comes from the soldiers carried inside – Jaws can carry up to 20 heavily armored troopers or 30 light infantrymen.

Weapons: BSP-10HE mounted on the roof, aimed forwards, and TPC built into the armor (also aimed forwards), both controlled by the gunner.**Acceleration/Top Speed:** 15/30**Toughness:** 22(8)**Crew:** 2+30(20)**Cost:** 150000**Notes:** Flares, Heavy shields, Heavy Armor, Improved Stabilizer, Infrared Night Vision, Night Vision.

TURTLE

A powerful barge transporting large quantities of soldiers or small, light land vehicles. It's not heavily armed, as it's usually protected by other vehicles.

Weapons: TPC mounted on rotating platform in the bow.**Acceleration/Top Speed:** 10/20**Toughness:** 16 (6)**Crew:** 4+50**Cost:** 110000**Notes:** Flares, Heavy Armor, Light Shield.

9. EQUIPMENT

Most ordinary people don't need guns and armor or cybernetic toys. They spend their money just to live: to pay for food and drink, a place to live, transportation, everyday objects and entertainment. What they constantly deal with is bills and costs, taxes, tithes or refunds. Most of them need to watch their accounts closely, save to buy a car, to go on vacation or to pay for a cruise to visit family living hundreds of light years away.

Player Characters shouldn't deal with these mundane calculations. All the details of everyday life are summed up in one item – you just need to declare that you spend a certain amount each month to pay for your lifestyle. Below is a list of common equipment and information on lifestyle costs.

LIFESTYLE

Each hero has to live somewhere, eat, drink and wear clothes. His lifestyle level represents these costs. The number stated below is the amount of dollars the character must spend each month to maintain each lifestyle.

HOMELESS

Days spent on the street, nights spent under the bridge. Rat for lunch, whatever you managed to find in

the dumpster for dinner. An old sweater instead of a suit, a scarf made from bits and pieces instead of a tie. Being homeless doesn't cost any money.

Cost: 0

MODEST

You're living in a small room on synthetic prepackaged food. Your only entertainment is the free public channels on the planetary network. It's much better than living on the street, but you're still poor.

Cost: 100

AVERAGE

Such a person owns a small apartment and some form of transportation, and can afford most common objects. Occasionally they can afford some more expensive entertainment, like a vacation once per year. This is the lifestyle of around 80% of the inhabitants of the civilized planets of the Galaxy.

Cost: 500

WELL-OFF

Your own house with all mod cons, regular visits to your family doctor, genetic alteration to eliminate genetic flaws, and vacations in exclusive resorts are available only for the few – sadly, such pleasures are expensive.

Cost: 2000

LAVISH

This lifestyle is available to perhaps one person in a million. Great mansions, luxurious parties, cosmetic nanoids, even exchanging old bodies for the new ones – these are available only to the bosses of corporations, or the leaders of noble families or criminal organizations. If they didn't have to work, they'd say that they lived in paradise.

Cost: 15 000

EQUIPMENT

Below is a list of some example devices and objects often used by player characters. Of course, this list is incomplete and does not show many everyday objects, which the denizens of the Galaxy can't imagine life without. As these very rarely influence gameplay, they're not described below.

BATTERIES

Savage Worlds is a fast, furious and fun game and accurate tracking of energy levels for weapons, devices and shields is not in this spirit.

On the other hand many gamers, when playing a sci-fi game, like to know how much energy their characters have.

For this reason the energy levels of the heroes' various batteries, micro generators, solar cells and other power sources are handled in an abstract way.

There are four levels of energy: Very High, High, Low, Out.

Characters usually start at High Level; heroes with the Rich or Filthy Rich Edges or Well Off or Lavish Lifestyle start at Very High, while characters with the Poor Hindrance start at Low.

Any time a character makes a skill roll (apart from combat rolls) where some personal technology item is used and rolls 1 on the skill die, regardless of the Wild Die, he has used a noticeable quantity of power, losing a step of energy.

When he reaches the Out level it means that his energy is exhausted, and he suffers -2 to all skill rolls until he manages to find a way to recharge it.

The Game Master should enforce this rule with moderation, only when it is dramatically appropriate: for example, when a character makes a healing roll to save a friend's life, or tries to fix a broken vehicle (repair roll) with his personal tools. Energy levels are recovered at the rate of 10 minutes/level when an adequate supply is available (for example, in a city).

CELLPHONE

An ancient device, sometimes used on some backwater planets as a backup communicator. It's powered by a microcell (1 charge is enough for 2 hours of conversation or 2 days of passive use).

Availability: B; **Cost:** 25

CLOTHES

Various kinds of clothes, from rags through corporate uniforms to ceremonial priestly robes.

Availability: A; **Cost:** 1 (rags), 20 (good clothes), 350 (fashionable clothes), 1000 (extravagant creations).

COMMUNICATOR

The size of a matchbox, this device allows remote communication. A great range of designs for these devices exists: some are built to resemble wristwatches, jewels, or the more traditional earpiece.

All communicators can be encrypted, which forces any potential eavesdropper to decode the signal (with a Knowledge (Computers) roll at a -4 penalty).

Availability: A; **Cost:** 50 (mid-range model) + 100 (for encryption system).

FLASHLIGHT

A small, pencil-sized device throwing a 10" long shaft of light. A microcell powers the flashlight for up to 5 hours.

Availability: A; **Cost:** 50

FOOD RATIONS

A small, red pill. If you swallow it, you won't feel hunger for the next 24 hours. They are, in fact, nourishing, but you shouldn't rely solely on them. After each week during which the hero consumes only food pills, he receives one level of Exhaustion which can be removed only by a week-long diet of normal food.

Availability: C; **Cost:** 50

GOGGLES

A pair of goggles designed to protect the eyes from bright light. Wearing goggles gives +2 to rolls to resist to flash based Powers or Tricks.

Availability: B; **Cost:** 50

HANDCUFFS

Modern handcuffs are equipped with an electromagnetic field emitter that paralyzes cybernetic limbs. To break the cuffs you must succeed in a Strength roll at a -6 penalty, to slip out of the cuffs you must make an Agility roll at -4.

Availability: C; **Cost:** 75

INVESTIGATOR'S KIT

This small box contains some simple chemicals, tools allowing for cleaning and analyzing evidence, and a small chemical analyzer. More advanced versions contain a fingerprint reader with a connection to the police network. Without an Investi-

gator's Kit Notice rolls to find evidence on a crime spot suffer -2.

Availability: B; **Cost:** 100

JUMP PACK

There are two types of these; The first kind allows for free movement in space. Character equipped with them can move at their full Pace and even run in 0G environments. Being in space without such a device allows only half Pace movement. It has energy for an hour use.

The second kind is made for long jumps in normal gravity conditions. It allows making "jumps" as if using the *fly* Power, with 20 Power Points and arcane skill d8. The only limitation is that the user must land at the end of any round.

Availability: C; **Cost:** 250

LOCATOR

A small device, the size of a fingernail, often with a magnetic or sticky layer. It sends out a tracking signal over a 10 mile radius. A special microcell allows for 12 hours of activity.

Availability: C; **Cost:** 250

MICROCOMPUTER

This device is used almost exclusively beyond the range of a planetary network. It's a laptop the size of a small book, powered by a standard battery (the built in energy supply is enough for a month of constant work).

Availability: A; **Cost:** 50

MUSICAL INSTRUMENT

This encompasses both ancient instruments like guitars or drums, and electronic devices with programmable sounds.

Availability: B; **Cost:** 50

NANODOC

This small can, resembling a mouth spray, is filled with millions of medical nanoids. If you spray one dose of nanodoc on a wound, after an hour the only trace of the damage will be a small scar. In just one minute, a dose of nanodoc cures one Wound. It is limited to one use per day.

Availability: C; **Cost:** 250

PROTECTIVE SUITCASE

A small, composite suitcase with its contents protected from X-rays and other simple scanners, often used by diplomats - or smugglers.

Availability: C; **Cost:** 250



CHAPTER 4: **SUPERNATURAL POWERS**

"PSIS AND CULTISTS HAVE STRANGE POWERS, AND CAN RUIN CITIES BY THEMSELVES OR DESTROY AN ENTIRE PLANET, BUT THEY'RE STILL NORMAL FOLKS. SIMPLE PEOPLE, WHO DIE JUST A SECOND AFTER YOU BLOW THEIR HEADS OFF."

SERGEANT KATE RUSH, COR ARMY

The following chapter describes the supernatural powers used by the heroes and villains in *Nemesis*. The players can read all the information presented in this chapter, but remember that the ability to tap the power of the vile gods should be reserved solely for non-player characters. One of the themes of *Nemesis* is the war with darkness, and the player characters should be heroes pushing darkness back, not villains working towards the destruction of humankind. But if the GM has a good reason for it, the players still can use the following system to create traitors devoted to the service of the dark deities.

1. PSIONICS

Many of my friends and former friends still think that psionic powers are the ultimate evil, proof of the degeneration and imminent fall of mankind. But, despite some scuffles with them, I still think they're wrong. Psychic powers are a gift, a tool to fight the monstrosities of the Horde with. It's a pity that the universe is full of fools who'd like to see all psionists burned at the stake.

Fabio Capella, Bounty Hunter, former Priest of the Unification Church

Psionics is a phenomenon known since the dawn of mankind, but it's still not understood how some people can alter reality by willpower alone. It's not known exactly when the first people able to use psi powers were born, but scientists suspect that such powers have been present since the beginning of humanity – but until recently, there were no technologies enabling the realization of the full potential of psionic minds, and control over these strange powers. Throughout history mystics, frauds and fanatics have claimed

that they possessed supernatural powers – it's possible that some of these claims were true.

As a scientific phenomenon, psionics has been present in the popular consciousness for millennia. The first organizations of people able to control their mental powers appeared at the dawn of the great era of Galactic colonization, and they were treated in different ways on different planets. On some worlds, being a psionist was a death warrant; on others, it was a road to power and comfort. On others still, it was part of faith or religion – a man with psi powers would be called a prophet or a saint. Regardless, everyone suspected that psionists were special, and tried to isolate them from the community.

There were two reasons for this: first, the fear that the gifted would use their powers for personal gain (which was often justified, since many telepaths did use their powers to enslave others); and second, the dangers resulting from them losing control over their powers. Losing control could cause serious damage, the destruction of property or even the deaths of innocent people. Psionics was a powerful and useful, but unpredictable, tool.

In time, researchers started to experiment with mental powers. Psionists conducted research on their own, trying to understand their own powers, learn about their limits and how to overcome them. They discovered dozens of new kinds of powers, and they learned how to use psychic energy in hundreds of new ways. Army researchers unearthed new, military applications of these strange powers. Finally, researchers tried to discover why some people have psionic skills, while most don't. The results were unexpected: it turned out that almost ten percent of the population has a predisposition to become psionists. Previously, it was commonly thought that this was a one-in-a-million occurrence. Further experi-

ments led to new technologies, which could grant psi powers via genetic engineering – even though this process was very dangerous to the human organism, so only a few people would risk such a mutation.

Even though it's still not fully understood, psionics is now an integral part of human life. The ability to manipulate the fundamental forces of the universe by willpower alone is taken for granted by the average citizen of the Galaxy. Psionists are still surrounded by an aura of fear, and some planets don't tolerate their presence, but they're no longer thought of as madmen or mutants – more like specialists on some rare but useful topic.

BREAKING THE BARRIER

Despite ages of research there is no safe and sure way to produce a psionist. The predisposition or the appropriate genetic mutation isn't enough to break through the natural limits of the human mind. Aside from knowledge and talent, something else is needed, a specific factor, different for each person.

"Breaking the barrier" (as it's called) is almost always the result of a near-death experience. Almost half of all the psionists managed to break their barrier when they experienced clinical death. Accidents, serious diseases, wounds or psychic attacks can all break the barrier and activate the part of the human brain responsible for mental powers. In many engineering clinics you can, after making a payment and signing a waiver, risk the necessary treatment and special therapy – which is essentially deliberately-induced clinical death. This method works only in ten per cent or so of the applicants, and what's worse is that often you can't revive a much bigger percentage than that; the rest die during the procedure.

PSIONICS ON ASH

TODAY, THERE ARE VERY FEW PSIONISTS LEFT ON THE SURFACE OF ASH. EARLIER IN THIS CENTURY THEY WOULD HAVE BEEN FOUND IN THE POLICE FORCE, CORPORATE OFFICES AND THE SYNDICATE. TODAY, MOST PEOPLE CAN'T AFFORD TO HIRE A

PERSON WITH PSYCHIC POWERS – MOST PSIONISTS WHO DIDN'T LEAVE WORK FOR THE NEUROX FOUNDATION.

THE NEUROX FOUNDATION

ON ASH THERE IS STILL A FOUNDATION TRAINING THE GIFTED. A COUPLE OF YEARS AGO IT WAS AN INSIGNIFICANT CHARITY, BUT NOW IT'S A POWERFUL FORCE, AND INFLUENTIAL ESPECIALLY WITH THE SYNDICATE. NEUROX IS DEVOTED MOSTLY TO TRAINING TELEPATHS AND ENERGOKINETICISTS (ESPECIALLY PYROKINETICISTS). TO RECEIVE TRAINING, YOU NEED TO SIGN A CONTRACT WHICH STATES YOU WILL WORK FOR THE FOUNDATION FOR FIVE YEARS. BEING A PSIONIST IS A PRESTIGIOUS AND WELL-PAID JOB, WHICH IS OFTEN ENOUGH FOR STUDENTS TO STAY WITH NEUROX EVEN AFTER THE FIVE YEARS ARE UP. ONLY THE FEW: LOSERS, IDEALISTS AND THE MOST AMBITIOUS PSIONISTS REJECT NEUROX'S OFFER, AND LEAVE ASH TO FIND A BETTER LIFE ON OTHER PLANETS.

THE MENTAL BLOCK

When the psionist has broken the barrier, the real danger starts. An untrained psi can't fully control his powers – he uses them spontaneously, usually in moments of stress or strong emotion. His powers can be a threat both to himself and to his surroundings. Random shifts in temperature or air pressure, moving objects or wild, untargeted mental attacks are just a few examples of the untrained use of psionic powers. On most civilized worlds, people with active psionic talents are forced – sometimes even under threat of the death penalty – to undergo training enabling them to control their powers, and to raise and dismiss a mental block on their skill.

Apart from protecting bystanders, the psionist learns how to strengthen his psyche and avoid mental illness. This training is not perfect, and every person with a shred of talent has lost control of their powers at least once – sometimes causing damage and injuring the innocent. Many psionists develop various phobias; they avoid crowds, enclosed spaces, or contact with other people, and may even attempt suicide, be-



PSIONICS ON BARIZ

ON BARIZ NOTHING IS WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE. A PERSON APPEARING TO BE A PSIONICIST MIGHT BE JUST A CHARLATAN USING HIGH-TECH DEVICES, WHILE AN APPARENT BODYGUARD MIGHT BE A MASTER OF SOME PSIONIC DISCIPLINE. ALMOST EVERY BARIZIAN WITH PSIONIC POTENTIAL HIDES HIS ABILITIES FROM SOCIETY. THE STAKES OF THE GAME ARE TOO GREAT TO SHOW OFF YOUR POWERS.

BASICALLY, EVERY ORGANIZATION ON BARIZ SPONSORS A SOCIETY PROVIDING PSI TRAINING. MOST OF THEM FOCUS ON THE POWERS NECESSARY IN THE BUSINESS WORLD; PREDICTING OPPONENTS' ACTIONS, NEGOTIATION AND NEGATING THE PSIONICS OF YOUR OPPONENTS. BARIZ IS HOME TO NUMEROUS MASTERS OF ENERGOKINESIS OR TELEKINESIS, REAL ARTISTS IN THEIR TRADE. THEY'RE KILLERS FOR HIRE, PSIONIC FENCERS, AND BODYGUARDS FOR INFLUENTIAL PEOPLE.

A PSIONIC LIFE

Just possessing a talent for a certain discipline does not determine who you will become after your training, or what role will you play in society. Over the course of centuries there arose hundreds of specializations, often based not on mental abilities, but on ordinary skills and knowledge. Psionic powers can give you an edge in any job performed by normal people.

People with psionic powers are almost never members of the lower classes. Their talents are rare enough to guarantee them comfortable lives without much effort. Many of them still work for the organization that trained them (some of the organizations insist on that), and perform the duties their leaders choose for them. Some try to conceal their abilities, hiding in the mass of ordinary humans, and doing whatever they can to make a living. Only a few decide to shape their own fate – you can find them in the army or police force, or serving corporations, governments, noble families and crime organizations. They do whatever they're best at – infiltrate, scan human minds, chase fugitives (criminals, traitors, or just people their employers consider inconvenient) as well as managing disputes and diplomacy. Some

ing willing to die rather than injure their loved ones. Specialists who focus on telepathy often become insane after misusing their power – they can't distinguish others' minds from their own. The more quickly the psionist learns to raise his mental block, the lower the risk of mental illness; that's why in almost every school and foundation developing psionic skills, the first lesson is how to raise a mental block.

of them risk a sudden and painful death, but they are often more than happy to live such a life, since they well know that there is no other way to the top.

Many psionics work in police forces, but none so far has worked in a court of law. Though you can capture criminals thanks to psionic powers, they can never (except perhaps on worlds ruled solely by psionics) be used in evidence. Any information obtained thanks to telepathy has to be confirmed by a written confession.

If the psionics is a diplomat, he is treated in a completely different way. Psionic negotiators are thought to be the best in their chosen field, so they are often respected, but also often hated by ordinary people. Telepaths are especially important – they can get information straight from rivals' minds, and control conversations so that their party will always achieve its goals. Most such psionic diplomats invest in defensive implants or nanoid treatments, and hire experienced bodyguards – they are targets for assassination too often to live a normal life.

PSIONICS ON COR

ON THE FIRST SIGHT IT SEEMS THAT PEOPLE WITH PSIONIC TALENT DON'T HAVE MUCH TO DO ON THIS WAR-TORN WORLD. THIS IS PARTLY TRUE – SPECIALISTS IN TELEKINESIS, BLOCKING OR TELEPATHY CAN SELDOM USE THEIR POWERS. ESPERS AND ENERGOKINETICISTS, HOWEVER, ARE A COMPLETELY DIFFERENT KETTLE OF FISH – THE "INSIGHTS" OF THE FORMER CAN GIVE MANKIND SPECTACULAR VICTORIES AND PROTECT SOLDIERS FROM THE CONSEQUENCES OF DEFEAT, WHILE THE OFFENSIVE POWERS OF THE LATTER ARE COMPARABLE TO PLASMA RIFLES ON THE BATTLEFIELD. RECENTLY, THE NUMBER OF PSIONICISTS ON COR HAS DECREASED – FOR SOME REASON PSIS HAVE BEEN INFECTED BY A PLAGUE OF INSANITY. AMONG SOLDIERS THERE ARE RUMORS OF A DARK GOD SLEEPING UNDER THE SURFACE OF THE PLANET, BESTOWING MADNESS UPON HUMANS WITH PSYCHIC GIFTS.

USING PSIONICS

Using psi talents is difficult even for experienced psionics. This empathically isn't like riding a bike, it's not enough simply to repeat remembered movements. You need to constantly focus on the desired effect and literally force reality to align itself to your will. Sometimes this is enough to achieve your goal, sometimes you simply get a migraine.

If the specific Power description does not state otherwise, you need to succeed in a Psionics roll to use a Power. The skill is based on Smarts. Using some Powers, particularly malicious ones, requires victory in an opposed roll. The details are described below for each Power. The list of available Powers depends on your psionic school. A beginning character knows only the basic Powers, and can receive more only after selecting an appropriate Edge.

Furthermore, a character can use a Power of any Rank, but more powerful abilities are harder to use. For each difference in level between your Rank and that of the Power, you receive a -2 penalty to all Psionics rolls. For instance if a Seasoned Hero wants to Destroy Consciousness (a Heroic Power), he suffers a -4 penalty.

Abusing your Powers can cause serious exhaustion. Each failure on a Psionics test causes one level of Fatigue. Luckily, this fatigue can be removed very quickly – you only need 1 minute (10 rounds) to remove one level of this type of Fatigue.

Brainburn: When a psionic character rolls a 1 on his Psionics die (regardless of his Wild Die), he is automatically Shaken. On a critical failure, the psi lets out a psychic scream that causes him to be Shaken, along with all allies in a Large Burst Template who fail a Spirit roll. This can cause a wound.

PSIONIC ECHOES

To detect psionic powers, you don't always need a gift yourself. Sometimes, if a lot of psionic power was released in a single area over a short period of time, even ordinary people can notice it. Some of them feel anxious, or complain about headaches and nausea – others feel agitated and

full of unnatural energy. Psionicists sense such zones even more clearly, and often they can't use their powers in them. Sometimes, the pain can even kill the telepath.

Psionic powers used in highly emotional situations (most often combat) can leave echoes behind. Areas of psionic echoes are rated as high or low power. Low power areas require a Spirit roll upon entering and every hour thereafter to avoid gaining a level of Fatigue; the maximum effect of this is Exhaustion. High power areas inflict a -2 penalty to the Spirit roll and require further rolls every 10 minutes. High power areas can lead to Incapacitation, but not Death (though death may occur from hunger or thirst if the victim is not removed from the area). Psionicists are extremely vulnerable to psionic echoes and suffer an additional -2 penalty to Spirit rolls to resist their effects.

PERMANENT ECHOES

SOMETIMES PSIONIC ECHOES CAN BE PERMANENT. USUALLY THIS HAPPENS WHEN A PSIONIC FIELD OF A SPECIFIC CATEGORY IS CREATED AT LEAST TWENTY TIMES OVER A SHORT TIME (LESS THAN TWO WEEKS).

PSIONIC SCHOOLS

There are only a few minds able to comprehend psionics as a unified field, and control every aspect of it. "Ordinary" psis often lack the skills, determination, willpower and time to obtain many different powers. Instead, they specialize, using psionic powers to enhance their chosen profession. Even initial training shows many differences – psychic coordinators are taught to affect more people at once, while psionic swordmasters focus only on their own bodies. In this way, after ending their training and mastering basic powers, heroes become adepts of a particular psionic school.

The game mechanics reflect this with specific Edges. For instance a character who's going to be a police officer with a psychic edge, able to hunt the most violent criminals should pick the Psionic School: Psychic Cop Edge. Thanks to these

Edges the characters receive special benefits, including access to a large number of Powers tied to their School.

2. CULTISTS

Someone once said that magic is a name for 'technology you can't understand'. Guess he lived before the dark gods taught their servants real sorcery, since I doubt anyone sane could understand it. If they used objects taken from the tombs of dark gods or devices built thanks to their strange visions, you could at least thinkyeah, that's advanced science. But you can't explain rationally how a group of guys high on some weird drugs can summon a disease devastating an entire colony with only a mummified corpse, a couple of liters of blood and singing songs in a circle.

– **Nathan Crow**, Bounty Hunter

When introducing characters possessing black magic powers the Game Master must remember one thing: the abilities given to the followers of the dark gods can cause any effect, no matter how impossible. Their powers can break even the most fundamental laws of physics, often in incomprehensible, seemingly impossible ways. It does not mean that these spells have no limits – if the dark gods were omnipotent mankind would be extinct long ago.

Any attempt to organize the spells of black magic is doomed to fail. The power of a cultist depends on many factors besides the god he follows, his own knowledge and the recorded formulas of dark rituals. Other important elements are the personality of the follower, his sanity, and more temporary factors, like his state of mind while casting the spell. Black magic is more like praying to dark gods and hoping to receive the desired gift rather than a specific formula causing a predetermined effect. Often the cultists themselves are surprised by the effects of their prayers. Sometimes this surprise turns into raw fear when, instead of directing the power against the worshipper's enemies, the god turns it on the cultist, who irritated his master with a nonsensical supplication.

Black magic is a powerful, but unpredictable and dangerous art. Complete devotion to the ideals of the deity you worship, regular sacrifices, and total concentration when conducting a ritual can minimize the risk of your patron's wrath, but you can never be completely safe. In this way, the gods communicate to their followers that they expect faith and devotion, and that they are not simply source of weird powers.

REQUIREMENTS

TO CAST A SPECIFIC SPELL A CHARACTER (PLAYER OR NON-PLAYER) MUST HAVE THE CULTIST EDGE AND KNOWLEDGE OF THE RELEVANT RITUAL – USUALLY HE HAS TO LEARN THEM DURING GAME.

THIS EDGE IS AVAILABLE TO THE PLAYER CHARACTERS ONLY WITH THE GM'S PERMISSION.

MAGIC IN GAME TERMS

Using black magic in the game requires certain preparations by the GM. The spells and rituals cast by cultists can cause almost every imaginable effect, so you should have some prepared in advance. The list of common spells is not exhaustive, and many other spells might exist.

CULTIST (WEIRD EDGE)

Requirements: Novice, Spirit d6+, Knowledge (Occult) d6+

A character with this Edge is a servant of the dark gods, a traitor to humanity conspiring with inhuman forces awakened from their eons-long dreams. In exchange for his devotion, he receives the ability to use black magic, and may ignore all Fear rolls caused by the servants of the dark gods. Players can choose this Edge only with the GM's permission.

To cast a spell or conduct a ritual usually requires a single roll of Knowledge (Occult), with a modifier depending on the specific spell, from +2 (for lesser spells) to -12 (for spells summoning powerful beings).



BONUSES AND PENALTIES

The test for casting a spell can be influenced by a number of factors making using the dark powers harder or easier. Here are some circumstances affecting sorcerous rituals. All bonuses and penalties stack, unless their description states otherwise.

Sacrifice – Valuable Object (+1): During the ritual the character must destroy an object prepared specifically for the ritual, worth at least \$1000 – or even more for more powerful spells.

Sacrifice – Human Life (+2): When casting a spell the cultist murders an innocent human.

Sacrifice – Own Life (+4): The cultist asks his patron for his death, or he simply kills himself. He receives a bonus to the spellcasting roll, but dies instantly when the spell is cast and nothing can save him.

Dark Libraries (+1 to +4): Consulting forbidden books devoted to dark deities and black magic can increase the power of evil sorceries.

Relics or Artifacts (+1 to +4): If the dark priest possesses a relic (a body part of a powerful servant of his patron) or an artifact (an object blessed by the deity), he can receive a bonus depending on the power of the object: a tentacle from a weak monster will grant a +1 bonus, while a heart of a powerful beast can give +4.

Acolytes (Special): Cultists are organized in cells to help their masters cast powerful spells. The main caster receives a +1 bonus for each 2 additional people assisting in casting the spell – all of whom must have the Cultist Edge. However, if the character rolls a 1 on the Occult roll, the wrath of the deity affects the acolytes as well.

Emotional Influence (+1): Casting the spell under the influence of strong emotions is easier.

Harming loved ones (-2): The cultist maims and wounds someone close to him, like a lover or a good friend.

Casting on Drugs (+1): Being intoxicated (by hallucinogens, alcohol or other mind-altering substances) makes spellcasting easier.

Subduing emotions (-2): Trying to limit the power of spell or praying for partial effect makes the spell harder.

Harming other cultists (-2): Using dark magic against beings worshipping the same deity is always a hindrance.

Showing cowardice (-2): Casting a spell to eliminate an enemy which the character can defeat in another way, or just to save his own life, causes the dark powers to grow angry.

Abusing power (-1 to -5): Praying too often, repeated summoning of the same or similar effects, using black magic for petty personal reasons or showing off with your power reduces the chance of casting a spell significantly.

SPELLS

What follows is a list of the most commonly used effects. Spells are similar to other powers from the SWD core book, but there are a couple of minor differences. First, black magic spells don't have Rank requirements – any character with the Cultist Edge who has learned the relevant ritual can cast them. Second, the more powerful spells are harder to use – the Modifier states the penalty to the Knowledge (Occult) roll. Third, black magic does not use Power Points. Fourth, these dark powers are most often rituals, taking quite a lot of time to cast – the casting time of the rite is given in description of the spell.

AGING

Modifier: See below

Range: 6 miles

Casting Time: 8 hours

Duration: Instant

This spell can target either objects or living creatures. In the first case, it causes the decomposition (corrosion or rotting) of objects weighting less than 200 lbs – including cybernetic implants (so any cyborgs subjected to this types of spell receive 4d6 damage, bypassing armor and energy shields).

If the spell targets living beings, it can instantly age a single human being whose true name is known to the cultist, or whose body parts (e.g. hair or fingernails) he owns. Each five years of extra age the caster wishes to inflict causes a -1 modifier to his skill roll (so adding 30 years to the target causes a -6 penalty). The target can try to resist with a successful Spirit -4 roll, but a success only reduces the effect to 1 extra year per point of the penalty (6 years if the caster tried to age the victim 30 years). This spell can be used only once on a single being – another attempt will always end in a failure. The cultist can cast this spell even on a person he can't see.

AGGRESSION

Modifier: -6

Range: 6 miles

Casting Time: 8 hours

Duration: 1 month

This ritual affects a single human being whose true name is known to the cultist, or whose body parts (e.g. hair or fingernails) he owns. The target resists the spell with a Spirit -2 roll, and if he fails, his activities will be marked by unusual aggression. He will become very violent, and aggressive in every conflict.

If a player character becomes a victim of this spell, the Game Master can require another Spirit (-2) roll in stressful situations. Failure means the GM can take control over the character, for instance to declare an attack on an unfriendly character. The cultist can cast this spell even on a character he can't see.

CURSE OF FEAR

Modifier: -6

Range: 6 miles

Casting Time: 1 hour

Duration: 1 year

The effects of the curse of fear are twofold. First, it makes the victim very vulnerable to supernatural effects causing fear. Second, it enhances the victim's natural cowardice, awakening his phobias and fears.

The victim is defenseless against spells and effects causing Fear – he automatically fails all Fear rolls. Furthermore, even mundane factors that could potentially cause fear – like blood, darkness or dead bodies – force the victim to make a Fear test, with an appropriate penalty (assigned by the GM). The cultist can cast this spell even on a character he can't see.

CURSE OF PAIN

Modifier: -4

Range: Smarts

Casting Time: 1 action

Duration: Instant

This powerful curse makes the victim feel pain as if it was much more intense. A slight prick seems like a wound and more serious damage can cause incapacitation.

Whenever the victim of the spell feels pain (i.e., whenever they are Shaken or Wounded), they must make a Vigor -2 roll. If they fail the test, they

fall on the ground, unable to act at all. In each subsequent round they must make a Vigor roll, with a modifier 1 less than in the previous round. An success allows them to overcome the pain and recover.

CURSE OF VERMIN

Modifier: -4

Range: 1,000 yards

Casting Time: 4 hours

Duration: 1 year

The cultist can cast this curse on a single building – from a small house to a skyscraper. The power of a spell manifests itself after one day. From then on, the cursed place is a home to all kinds of insects: cockroaches, ants, earwigs or similar bugs. Initially there are only a couple of them, but day by day their numbers grow. No ordinary insecticide can remove the effects of this spell, it can merely stop it for a few days. The cultist can cast this spell even on a building he can't see.

DISFIGURATION

Modifier: see below

Range: 6 miles

Casting Time: 4 hours

Duration: 1 year

The power of this ritual can affect a single human being whose true name is known to the cultist, or whose body parts (e.g. hair or fingernails) he owns. The victim turns spectacularly ugly, and his or her Charisma decreases by 4. The cultist can cast this spell even on a person he can't see.

NATURAL DISASTER

Modifier: -8

Range: 60 miles

Casting Time: 16 hours

Duration: 1 week

This spell allows the cultist to summon a natural disaster over a wide area, up to several miles across – like a drought, an earthquake or even a meteorite. This power warps reality, increasing the odds of such an event happening. However, if a given natural phenomenon couldn't exist in

such an area (like a flood on a world without water), the ritual automatically fails. The cultist can cast this spell even on a place he can't see.

SONG OF DOOM

Modifier: -8

Range: Area up to 6 miles from the place of the ritual

Casting Time: 8 hours

Duration: Instant

This ritual summons a swarm of ghostly creatures serving the dark gods. These spirits whisper dark temptations to the minds of people in the spell's area of influence, convincing them to commit suicide. Each intelligent being in the area of the spell must make a Spirit roll to resist.

A failure means that it will soon attempt to kill itself – whether by jumping from the roof, crashing a car in a wall or swallowing poison. Luckily, this spell affects only Extras.

SUMMONING

Modifier: See below

Range: Smarts

Casting Time: 8 hours

Duration: Instant

This ritual summons a specific kind of monster (each monster has a different summoning spell associated with it). The monster appears just a few yards from the caster, in a location of his choice. Any kind of creature serving dark gods can be summoned, including foul beasts of the

Horde. A summoned beast follows the orders of the cultist, unless it succeeds in a Spirit roll with a penalty identical to that of the ritual – then it follows its own nature.

The exact modifier to Knowledge (Occult) roll is determined by the Game Master. Usually it's -2 for the weakest creatures, while the most powerful servants of the dark gods can hamper casting of this spell by up to -12. The caster can willingly increase the performing of this ritual to increase the bonds of the summoned creature – but it doesn't change the summoning modifier – it just means that the monster won't eat the caster.





CHAPTER 5: **ASH**

"No, I DON'T BELIEVE IN ASTROLOGY. I DON'T BELIEVE THAT COMETS BRING WAR, PLAGUES OR OTHER CRAP. I LAUGH AT PEOPLE WHO BELIEVE IN HOROSCOPES, PALMISTRY OR OTHER SORCERY. BUT I CAN'T UNDERSTAND ONE THING - HOW DID ASH REACTED TO THE HORDE'S INVASION BEFORE IT EVEN BEGAN?"

JENNER, INDEPENDENT MERCHANT.

Ash is the more distant planet orbiting around Horizon 2, the larger and warmer sun of the system; and it is freezing to death. Terraforming machines took ages to modify the conditions on the planet to allow the settlers to build the first towns. The process was hard and slow, and many of the colonists weren't too happy to settle here – sometimes they were even forced to. With time, life on Ash was bearable enough so that not only people without proper education emigrated there, but also specialists in various fields – from doctors to hyperspace engineers. Ash became a promising world – so no wonder that many corporations started to invest serious money in the planet, including Infinity, which was responsible for maintaining the terraformers. Cities, factories, and huge automated power plants sprung up like mushrooms. Ash became famous as a planet manufacturing reliable gear, like electronics, cybernetic implants and starship components.

And sixty seven years ago all that went to hell.

One after another, the terraformers started to fail. The climate started to cool down, which caused millions of people to move to the equatorial regions. Great industrial complexes, automated mines extracting priceless ores, and entire metropolises were left to wind, snow and ice. Ash started to die, and nothing suggests that the situation is going to change soon.

1. INTRODUCTION

Ash is a world where the concept of “law” has no meaning. The planet's government is nothing more than a puppet of the Barizian nobles, and they are only interested in maximizing profits. The police forces in the cities are doomed to fail when they have to face the full power of corporations, merchant guilds and the Syndicate, the most power-

ful criminal organization in the system. A man looking for justice has to find it himself – or find someone that will protect him. Most of them pick the latter solution, and sign contracts binding them to service of corporation.

Feudalism is back, with a vengeance.

METROPOLISES

These mega-cities, carefully designed by past engineers, were supposed to be perfect – clean, safe and warm arcologies full of smiling people convinced of their complete and total safety and awaiting their glorious future. And this image fell apart when it turned out that settlers arriving on Ash weren't very much interested in peace and obeying the law. Various scum arrived on Ash – from petty criminals ready to satisfy the demand for illegal substances, gambling and other forbidden pleasures, to leaders of large gangs working in other systems (the fore-runners of the Syndicate), and finally, the broken people whose only desires were a bottle of good booze, some drugs and a good VR experience. These scum were a minority, just a small fraction of the population – but they were visible and active enough to destroy the beautiful dreams of paradise.

An average metropolis, with hundreds of skyscrapers downtown, powerful towers of terraformers encircling its borders, a mighty wall defending it from the wastelands, and a multitude of houses, apartment buildings, factories and a spaceport, is more like a hell than heaven. Its numerous problems are a high crime rate, malfunctions in automated plants, ruined buildings, thousands of homeless, and a constant increase in the energy needed to keep the people alive. In each of the twelve cities (except for Nexus – but that one is an exception) there live around 5 million people. Ninety-five per cent of the population spends their entire life in their district. One in a hundred never leaves their house.

Life on Ash is pretty monotonous. The average day is divided between work, sleep, housework and entertainment – which usually means exploring the Cortex or spending time in a free VR. For most citizens, the apex of their dreams is a trip to another star system, exchanging their apartment for a larger one: warmer, or placed in a safer district, their own car or an extensive nanoid treatment to preserve youth.

The uncommon folk live a much more interesting life –this includes people living in the slums, members of various gangs, sects, or people more or less tied to the Syndicate. Their daily life consists of fighting their rivals, evading the police and bounty hunters, and planning other actions. One day they might break into a gun dealership, another they might protect a bar owned by one of them, and sometimes they even work as a corporation's strong-arm men. Living in the shadows gives you the chance to win a fortune, but it also promises a dark end - prison, maiming or death. The life of crime has both good and evil faces, but for the most criminals it never changes.

Use in game: Most adventures on Ash's surface are set in the cities. They're the place where the plans of all the power groups in the system interweave, and it's here where the PCs can find most of their jobs. Regardless whether they're corpo slaves, bounty hunters, Syndicate soldiers or merchants looking for a quick buck, they can find their fortunes, friends and mortal enemies in the great cities of Ash – living through hundreds of amazing adventures. Player characters rarely live calm, peaceful lives – they play with fire, but constantly avoid the worst burns. They fight for their rights, even if they have to pay the ultimate price.

Adventures in metropolises can be played in many styles. Heroes can investigate murders, search for missing or kidnapped people, track down cultists, help or fight the Syndicate – in the name of their ideals, out of necessity, or, like bounty hunters, for purely material reasons. If they play corporate workers, mob leaders or merchant guild leaders, they can participate in the game of power. They will spy on the competition, intimidate the employees of other companies, buy and sell shares, plan sabotage actions, and take part in them. These are great

cities, where you can play games of action, mystery, horror, drama or even – if you all agree – comedy.

THE CORTEX

IT'S A MIRACLE THAT, DESPITE THE DIFFICULT CONDITIONS, ALL OF ASH'S CITIES ARE STILL CONNECTED BY A PLANET-WIDE NETWORK, CALLED THE CORTEX. IN THE PAST, IT USED HUNDREDS OF COMMUNICATION SATELLITES, BUT DUE TO WORSENING CONDITIONS, HUMANS RETURNED TO AN OLDER SYSTEM OF RADIO TRANSCEIVERS AND UNDERGROUND NETWORKS OF OPTICAL FIBERS. THANKS TO NEW TECHNOLOGIES INVENTED BY INFINITY'S SPECIALISTS, THIS WORKS AS WELL AS MANY MILITARY NETWORKS, AND FAR OUTCLASSES ITS BARIZIAN COUNTERPART, U-HP.

SOME CLAIM THAT'S DELIBERATE REVENGE ON BARIZ'S FAMILIES – THE NOBLES OUTSOURCED THE CONSTRUCTION AND MAINTAINING OF THEIR NETWORK TO AN OUTSIDER COMPANY, NOT INFINITY.

RUINS

A hundred years ago the number of Ash's inhabitants was established to be 390 millions. Today, guesses (nobody sane would even think about a census) place the headcount at some 170 million, with around 80% living in the 12 great metropolises placed around the equator. The rest of the settlements: small towns built around terraformers, cities built around automated factories, colonies of scientists working in research stations, and the great cities of the north – though full of life even thirty or fifty years ago, now are doomed to die, forgotten and devoid of life. The temperatures on Ash are too low to allow smaller settlements to survive. Of course, there are people living far away from the metropolises, in occasional underground colonies or research facilities; but they're mostly exiles, escaped criminals and madmen of all sorts. If not for the ruins and scavenged loot, most of the exiles would've died long ago – from hunger, cold, and clashes between warring groups.

Almost every abandoned settlement has its inhabitants. In many there are even societies – usually ruled by brute strength. People living in the wastelands are trying to repair automated factories, to locate stored supplies of synthetic foodstuffs, and to cannibalize any device they find for spare parts – all

this to survive. The most important finds are guns, ammo, fuel and medicine. The first two are relatively common, but gas and medical supplies are getting harder and harder to come by – which provokes the ruin-dwellers to attack trains. It's only a matter of time until the horrible conditions and lack of basic resources force them to even more aggressive actions. One thing is certain – the metropolises won't welcome the ruin-dwellers with open arms.

Use in game: Ruins are a perfect setting for action adventures, for instance the rescue of a kidnapped scientist, the search for an escaped criminal, or extracting data from the computer in an underground complex inhabited by a crazy sect. Other such adventures might be military-themed and devoted to eradicating the cults of foul gods. When you limit the area of the action, cut the team off from all the resources of the metropolises, and seed the ruins with bands of savage, degenerate people (or maybe even Horde mutants) you can provide a lot of exciting combat encounters.

WASTELANDS

Ash is not only cities, surrounded by ice and clouds of steam, smoke, and fog. It's also giant areas of frozen earth, the ruins of small towns, farms, deserted cities and dozens of automated industrial plants and terraformers. The wastelands are commonly thought to be uninhabited – only a madman would try to live in such conditions. On the other hand, only a madman would try to live on Ash at all.

The wastes are home to hundreds of people who, for some reason, decided to leave the safe harbors of civilization. Unemployment, personal tragedies, trying to evade the Syndicate, the law, the corporations, or a suspicious spouse are the most common reasons for escaping to the wastelands. People who leave the relative safety of the cities are doomed to death, life as a hermit or with the likes of themselves – existence on the fringe of civilization, endlessly searching for food, equipment and fuel and constantly fighting with other survivors. Sooner or later, each wastelander begins to change. The joy of living is gone, together with other positive emotions. He becomes indifferent to the suffering, cruelty and evil he sees every day. According to some,

this is caused by Ash – the hearts of wastelanders freeze much like the planet's core.

More dangerous than these escapees are the “indigenous” inhabitants of terrain lying far from the cities. Most of them are nomadic, moving from place to place while searching deserted cities, military bases or other constructions forgotten by man. When they don't have food, they take it from others. When they want to have fun, they attack travelers, or trains; sometimes they even sneak into the cities or areas controlled by other groups. They're like wolves – loyal only to themselves, and taking what they want by force.

Use in play: The wastelands are a vast area which can be populated with any number of gangs, sects, groups of refugees or vagabonds of any sort. The heroes can try to find an escaped refugee, or hide in the wastes themselves. They can also try to find a specific person, place or object, or retrieve some important data. An accident or bandits can deprive them of their transportation – and so they'll be forced to traverse the great distances between Ash's cities on their own feet. That journey could be a challenge even for experienced characters.

TRANSPORTATION ON ASH

In the past century, Ash could boast an impressive system of air transport. Traveling the giant distances between the metropolises in any other way was simply not worth it – only the rich used small, personal vehicles. Sadly, the changes in climate effectively removed the possibility of air travel. Currently, the few pilots on Ash are real aces behind the controls of military vehicles equipped with powerful engines and advanced navigational systems.

Communication between metropolises nowadays uses solely ground transport. A small proportion of travelers use their own vehicles (like cars), but it's not a very smart move. Firstly, the roads are in bad shape, furthermore, if the car breaks down or runs out of fuel, you won't be able to find any garages or working gas stations, and any encounter with bandits, crazed hermits or wasteland gangs could mean death. The only adequately safe mode of transport on Ash turned out to be armored trains.



Train tracks, thousands of miles long, were first created in the early stages of colonization. Back then, they were used to transport resources mined in uninhabitable areas of the planet to automated factories. Later, train tracks were built in cities, as transportation of goods by land was the cheapest and most efficient method. Later on, the cities became self-sufficient, and Ash's climate got warmer. The railways were replaced by air travel, and became forgotten. Luckily, someone remembered about their existence some twenty years ago.

Organizing regular train services proved to be impossible, for many reasons, including damage to the tracks, the locomotives, and unreliable interest in this mode of transportation. Therefore, instead of a rigid timetable, an old and sure method was introduced; the train leaves the station once it has enough passengers.

The trains transport anything – natural resources, other vehicles, goods, animals, people, or even military equipment. You just need to buy a ticket (for space on a wagon or a place in a passenger car), and, if the goods are illegal, give the right people a sufficiently high bribe. A standard train has two or three locomotives, a fuel tender, an engineering

car, three or four passenger cars, the same number of transport cars, and at least five small weapons platforms, armed with machine guns – to protect the train from various dangers in the wastes. Such attacks happen all too often, since the scavengers constantly need fuel, guns, and ammo – and sometimes a whole train is attacked just for a specific object or person on it. These days, most attacks end with minor damage to the train, and the death of most of the bandits, but at least three times it was the attackers who had stronger forces – and all the passengers on the train were killed. Rumor has it that these were not ordinary train robberies but an execution of some of the Syndicate bosses by other factions, or maybe even Infinity.

Use in game: The most obvious use of trains in the game is a classic investigation. The crime could be anything; murder, espionage, tracking down a fugitive, or maybe even a dark ritual to summon a servitor of the dark gods. During the journey the heroes can gather information, protect the entire train or just an important character on it. Alternatively, the heroes can try to assassinate a passenger themselves, or with the help of a group of bandits.

2. ORGANIZATIONS

Ash is ruled by two forces, powerful and influential enough to shape the global politics of the planet. The first one is Infinity, the corporation owning half the factories, mines, industrial plants and buildings – and every single terraformer. The other is the Syndicate – a global crime organization, which has little-to-no influence among the Important People, but almost completely controls ordinary citizens. The government, controlled by guilds, other companies, the noble families of Bariz and the mob, ranks below these two factions.

Though the situation of Ash seems stable, with everyone knowing their place – this couldn't be further from the truth. Even though the planet is dying, it's also consumed by secret, ages-old wars. Everyone's fighting – the corporations, the guild, and even divided factions of the Syndicate. Unless some kind of miracle happens, Ash will freeze – but not before the cities drown in blood.

3. INFINITY

Everything would've gone to Hell if not for us. Infinity wants to save Ash from its decline, and all we want is the planet's rebirth. But we need the good will of others, and they need to work with us. Anyone who tries to steal from the corporation or assault its employees, should be prosecuted.

By which I mean killed. Violently.

Jeremy H. Willis, Blue.

When three hundred years ago a relatively unknown company called Infinity invested its all wealth in a small colony in a system controlled by the noble families, everyone predicted its imminent downfall. But ten years later no-one dared to question the decisions made by the corporate board. The developing colony soon attracted hundreds of investors. Around the terraformers, great industrial plants were built, needing qualified workers, and so towns and cities were soon erected. With time, they transformed into giant megapolises, gems of



architecture, with harmonious, beautiful city centers. The company sold part of its shares in Ash's companies, thus inviting other corporations, merchant guilds and noble families to Ash. Money earned in this way was invested in other star systems, thus creating one of the few corporations whose influence is present in many systems of the Galaxy. Today, one can find Infinity's logo in many star systems; but its headquarters are still based on Ash.

The greatest riddle connected to Infinity is the question of terraformers; over the course of a century almost all of them have been destroyed or seriously damaged. Why did the corporation, which has been maintaining them for three hundred years, suddenly decide that the damage is too extensive to repair? What or who managed to cause such damage? Or did any malfunctions actually occur? Maybe the terraformers were been turned off by order of the board of directors, and if so, why has the company condemned its employees and customers? Millions of Ash's citizens wait for the answers to these questions, but it's more than likely that they'll never be resolved.

ABOUT INFINITY

Infinity is the largest corporation on Ash, and one of the most powerful forces of the Horizon system – the only force that could challenge it would be the united noble clans of Bariz. For almost all the inhabitants of Ash, Infinity is simply 'the company', due to its monopoly in many fields of life – from medicine, through the planetary network to rail transportation. It controls interstellar travel, the terraformers, and most of the computers (through the Cortex). It owns most of the buildings on Ash. No one doubts the safety of its corporate position; perhaps the only power able to harm it is the Horde.

The goals of the company are not enslaving the planet dwellers, but making a profit, increasing its assets, and generating money to invest in other ventures. Often, it uses unethical methods: it does steal

technologies used by other companies and bribes their employees; but, frankly when it comes to unethical and unlawful actions it's not especially bad, compared to other corporations. Of course, that doesn't change the fact that an average Ashite sees the corporation as pure evil; 'they' are responsible for the planet freezing, the increase in energy prices, the cities dying out and people having to escape to other planets. It's Infinity that causes crime to increase and it's Infinity that's making mankind lose the war on Cor. Other conspiracy theorists claim that Infinity sponsors the dark cults (since its real purpose is destroying humanity), spies on everyone (and employees of the company read every bit of information sent through the Cortex), or is just a cover-up for the criminal activities of the Syndicate. Sure, some of these rumors do have some truth in them, but most of them are pure fiction.

STRUCTURE

Infinity's structure is quite complicated. Only a superhuman could coordinate all the companies' activities – the Ancient One, a mythical CEO of Infinity and its supposed founder, is therefore probably just a myth or a highly advanced AI. Because of this complexity, Infinity is divided into many departments, dealing with different areas of company's activity. Some of these departments work together, others have no contact whatsoever with each other. Occasionally, departments fall into conflict – the company tries to avoid intra-corporate wars, but overzealous, ambitious employees often escalate disputes between their divisions.

Infinity is officially managed by a board of directors, each responsible for one to ten departments. Decisions concerning Infinity as a whole are made in secret meetings, but rumor has it that only the Ancient One can issue the important orders. Each director is free to manage his own sphere of influence, as long as it doesn't interfere with other departments of the company.

DEPARTMENT 3

Security. The Blues. The strong arm of the company. They're responsible for keeping all the secrets inside the offices and labs of Infinity Tower. Many of them were once soldiers, police officers, boun-

ty hunters, or members of psionic foundations – but, once hired by Infinity they began new careers. They still do what they're best at, but their new targets are set by their superiors.

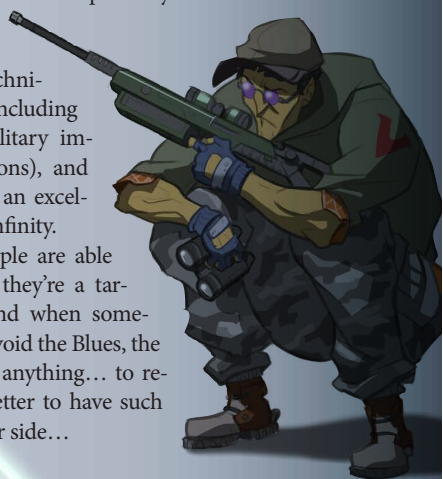
It's the most talked about department of the company. It's common knowledge that Infinity hires people to protect its assets and that they seldom obey the law. Everyone has heard about people kidnapped or killed by the Blues, or about 'mysterious' explosions in buildings. No one has ever proven, however, that Infinity has anything to do with these occurrences. Even when the police manage to capture suspects, they are very quickly released, or die in mysterious circumstances – usually in an explosion, which kills the suspects and destroys the evidence.

Dept-3 is also directly responsible for protecting the company's business. Its agents are used to kidnap or murder, find missing people, steal important information or break the law in any way necessary. They're exceptionally well trained, and equipped with the latest technical inventions (including experimental, military implants and weapons), and that makes them an excellent weapon for Infinity.

Not many people are able to survive when they're a target of Dept-3, and when someone manages to avoid the Blues, the company will do anything... to recruit them. It's better to have such specialists on your side...

DEPARTMENT 11

The power of the corporation is not derived only from its investments, managing its assets, or its luck. The real power of Infinity is access to advanced technologies, which engineers on other planets can't even dream of. The company is famous not only as a producer of interstellar engines (although since the Battle of Cor and the destruction of the system's shipyards production has been moved to other systems), electronics, and security systems,





but also for its flagship products are medicine and cybernetics. Vast soul databases for resurrections, perfectly crafted cyber implants, nanoid treatments without side effects or experimental genetic modifications have brought immeasurable profits to the company. Thanks to these, Infinity has branches in twenty stellar systems and exports its products to three hundred others. The department responsible for most of these inventions is Dept-11, with its main laboratories in the Infinity Tower.

Led for over thirty years by a pair of twins living in synthetic bodies, it's practically a company within company – it's almost completely independent from other corporate departments. The profits from its research and the sheer number of its development projects are too great for the board of directors to meddle in its activity. Of course, some research methods used by the scientists in Dept-11 aren't entirely ethical, but the fruit of these experiments tastes so sweet that Dept-11 doesn't have to fear the law. The profits outweigh the costs of court cases, compensation for the families of volunteers who die during experiments on humans, or hiring mercenaries for various clandestine purposes. Luckily for Infinity, the latter are often paid in experimental technologies or medical treatments – they are used on difficult missions, often paying the ultimate price.

James and Anna Creed – a pair of brilliant twins, the fruit of generations of labor by geni engineers trying to breed superhumans with a superior IQ. During the forty years of their lives, the Creeds have managed to push genetics further than the whole of mankind in the previous two centuries. Over twenty years ago, their minds were transferred into specially designed artificial bodies – and from that moment on, the twins have been able to devote themselves completely to their work.

James and Anna's bodies resemble mannequins – they're not heavy-duty military cyborgs, but are obviously inhuman – and their personalities complete this image. They're devoid of human emotions, and behave like machines, constantly absorbed in their projects and experiments.

MYSTERIES

No organization in Horizon is as surrounded by secrets, mysteries, half-truths and rumors as Infinity. Somehow, each risky decision made by the corporation in the past proved to be right. The leaders of the company are wrapped in mysteries, and only a few chosen people can contact them. Infinity has often been accused of espionage, assassinations, attacks on other corporations, stealing technology and thousands of other crimes – but no criminal charges have ever been made based on

these accusations. According to a significant part of Ash's population, Infinity is pure evil, and the Ancient One and the other directors are its devils. No one is deluded enough to claim that obeying the law is one of the company's priorities – although there are people convinced that it did something good through breaking the law.

SECRETS

INFORMATION IS MORE VALUABLE THAN MONEY OR WEAPONS. ANY HERO CAN TRY TO LEARN THE SECRETS GUARDED BY HORIZON'S ORGANIZATIONS – ALTHOUGH IT'S A VERY DIFFICULT TASK, REQUIRING A LOT OF EFFORT. TO LEARN ANY OF THE SECRETS DESCRIBED IN THIS SECTION, AND IN SECTIONS DEVOTED TO OTHER MYSTERIES, YOU NEED AT LEAST A FEW WEEKS OF WORK – INTERVIEWS, INTERROGATIONS, RESEARCHING SECRET DATABASES, MAYBE EVEN BREAKING INTO SECURE LOCATIONS, BLACKMAIL OR TORTURE. THE GAME MASTER DETERMINES WHAT TESTS ARE REQUIRED TO LEARN THE TRUTH – SOMETIMES, IF THE PLAYER HAS AN ESPECIALLY CLEVER IDEA AND ROLE-PLAYS THE INVESTIGATION WELL, ONLY ONE ROLL IS REQUIRED – BUT MORE OFTEN, HE'D NEED A FEW MORE. THEY SHOULD BE DIFFICULT, TOO, WITH PENALTIES RANGING FROM -2 TO -6. ALSO, LEARNING A SECRET USUALLY DRAWS SOME REACTION FROM THE RELEVANT ORGANIZATION. IF THE GM DECIDES THAT THERE IS A CHANCE FOR THE HEROES TO BE NOTICED, HE SHOULD ROLL AGAINST THE APPROPRIATE SKILL OF THE ORGANIZATION'S INVESTIGATORS (MOST OF THEM ARE EXTRAS WITH D8S IN THEIR KEY SKILLS).

WHO IS THE ANCIENT ONE?

The supposedly immortal CEO of the Infinity is a mythical figure. Most people assume that it's simply an in-joke of the board of directors, who sustain the myth for their own enjoyment. Others claim that there is an Ancient One – but it's an informal pseudonym, given to the director with the most influence. Some, however, claim that the rumors are true, and Ancient One is a real life person, kept alive thanks to advanced technology. Probably he has some kind of plan, and is working to complete it before his life ends.

The truth: The Ancient One does exist. Though he looks like a feeble old man confined to a wheelchair, he has not just an extremely sharp mind, but also a body which is a one-of-a-kind weapon, packed with advanced technology. He's been alive for a couple of thousands of years. He was actually born during the onset of the age of expansion, and he was the pioneer of nanotechnology – and achieved a kind of immortality thanks to this. The body on the chair is just an empty shell – the soul of the Ancient One is dispersed between billions of nanobots, living in his crippled body, his wheelchair and life-sustaining machinery. Thanks to these micro-machines he can perform many activities at once – contemplate hundreds of different chains of thought, and program the many machines (like cybernetic bodies) he controls, thus giving them a kind of autonomy. He is either a genius or a madman – it was he who decided to turn off Ash's terraformers, and it was his decision to allow small units of the Devourer to land on the surface of Cor. He also creates monsters on Ash, so people be in constant state of alarm and so the war (and war money) be endless. His goals? He probably wants to become a god; and frankly, he is the only human close to this goal.

TERRAFORMERS

Only a few people believe that the terraformers stopped working without a reason, and there are many theories. Some claim that it was Infinity's decision to disable the machines, others that the damage was caused by cultists worshipping a faceless deity. Whatever the reasons, all the theorists agree on one point: the planet will die and the terraformers will never be repaired.

The truth: Allowing terraformers to be infected by Lij, the Poisoner of Technology, was one of the greatest mistakes of the Ancient One. An experiment that was going to destroy her virus went horribly wrong – over three out of every four machines were seriously damaged, with some being completely destroyed.

Infinity's researchers had to confront this great challenge – a way to defeat the goddess of technological rot. Working out the theories behind tech-

nologies allowing their inventions to resist Lij took them thirty years – and it took thirty more to implement them in existing machines. A year ago, they made their first test. Thousands of experimental robots were sent to Ash's south pole, to repair the most powerful terraformer, Alpha-1. The first reports have been promising – it seems Alpha-1 will be working again in just a few months. Even though the planet could be saved, that is almost nothing compared to the chance of defeating one of the vile gods. Even now, the scientists remain cautious. What today seems like a great weapon against Lij, tomorrow might turn out to be a manipulation by the goddess to cause even greater damage.

RESURRECTIONS

Department-11, dealing in advanced medicine, has access to really advanced technology – and not just by the standards of Ash or Horizon, but a

Galactic breakthrough. The capability of recording memories and copying the mind into a new body – in other words, resurrecting the dead – is the source of immense profits. However, rumors persist that

Infinity can modify the resurrected minds, bending them to their will and turning them into unwitting agents of the corporations.

The truth: Indeed, the Dept-11 has tried to modify the memories in soul databases, but all attempts to do so have failed. The results are clear – after modifying the memories, resurrection is impossible. However, while the memories can't be modified, they can be accessed – they rarely are, though, mostly for security reasons.



ESPIONAGE

Many people, particularly teenagers, discuss the computer espionage used by the company. Supposedly, the employees of the company regularly scan the Cortex to collect vast quantities of data, with no regard for privacy or the personal lives of ordinary people.

The truth: Infinity could easily spy on the inhabitants of the planet, but they actually rarely do so – they wouldn't invest their time and money in something that brings so little profit. Infinity does have a special department dealing in “gathering information” from the network, but most of the time it just assists other departments – especially Dept-3, responsible for protecting the company's secrets.

4. THE SYNDICATE

From the beginning we've been driven by unchanging basic principles: honor, bravery, justice, honoring the ancestors and obeying superiors. For the three hundred years of the existence of the Syndicate no one who dared to break these rules managed to survive. And yet, ten years was enough to destroy everything we built. Everything except the rules – the ones that state that traitors must be executed.

And I'm the one who's going to do it.

Shiro Hino, leader of the Golden Dragon

The Syndicate, sometimes called the Organization, is almost as old as the colonies of the first settlers on Ash. It was Infinity that financed the construction of the first terraformers, and transformed the freezing globe into a planet friendly to humankind, but it was the Syndicate that provided the settlers with work – and the chance for a happy life. Everyone knew who these people wearing black and gold were, and it was common knowledge that they were willing to do anything to achieve their goals. Organized crime groups were present on almost every planet of the Galaxy – but only a se-

lect few actually helped the people living in their territory.

The Organization dealt in crime of every sort, from extortion, blackmail and burglary, through robbery and pickpocketing, to kidnapping and murder. However, the victims of these crimes were usually people who disobeyed the orders of the mob's bosses. An ordinary shopkeeper simply had to pay a small part of his earnings to make sure that no ordinary thug would attack him or his family. A restaurant owner had to only serve Syndicate members for free, and his business wouldn't accidentally catch fire. A drug dealer peddling his wares on Syndicate turf usually had a simple choice – to start working for one of the bosses (and keep 10 per cent of his usual profits) – or move to another star system within 24 hours.

Usually, fate was kind to the Syndicate. Its bosses were wise and patient, following strict but reasonable rules. Of course, the individual families often clashed – but the resulting gang wars got rid of the hot-heads and gave power to younger, more modern bosses. Whenever an external threat appeared, the infighting quickly ceased. The Syndicate was able to unite against its enemies. In many ways, it was a lesser evil, as indicated by the lack of decisive action by the government and the corporations against the mob. Rumors claim that this passivity was caused by the activity of spies within government and corporate structures, and by the immense bribes paid to the directors of the corporations, noble houses and changing administrations. Others claim it was the other way round; it was Infinity and other corps that had infiltrated the Syndicate and now controlled the activities of the mob.

The status quo was kept for centuries. The Syndicate kept evolving, adapting to new conditions, but it always followed its own rules. Everything ended when a man named Hidoi became a new boss of the Gray Wolf clan. Seven years of his cruel reign created a conflict that managed to destroy the Syndicate from the inside. Hidoi was opposed to the rule that decisions concerning the entire organization should be made by all the clan daimyos together. He decided that this should be replaced by the rule of the strongest – namely, himself. Of cour-

se, even a couple of years earlier these views would have ensured that he reigned from the inside of a wooden box, but during the chaos after the Battle of Cor no one much cared about the Gray Wolf leader's stance. Only when over a third of clans swore fealty to Hidoi did it become clear that the Syndicate was going to wage another war.

Finally, eight years ago, everything culminated in a conflict that managed to break the power of the mobs. Most of the clans have been destroyed or absorbed by the survivors. When the fighting moved into the streets and the ordinary citizens begun to get involved in it, the government and the cor-





porations made their moves. All the bosses were mown down by corporate assassins – including Hidoi, though it's rumored that he's the only one who survived this purge, supposedly by order of the mythical Ancient One himself. After a couple of months of fighting, the war ended in a shaky ceasefire. The exhausted clans began to rebuild their former positions. The new bosses realize that sooner or later the clan soldiers will reach for their weapons again and spill the blood of their companions – the questions are when it will happen, and what role will the corporations play?

THE OUTLINE

The Syndicate is a criminal organization, in a way modeled after the society of feudal Japan. It's divided into clans, led by bosses sometimes called *daimyo*. Each of them is surrounded by a group of lieutenants – people whom the bosses respect and trust, able to work on their own without detailed orders. These trusted associates command the other gangsters: soldiers, assassins, specialists in various fields, drug dealers, bounty hunters, psionics and merchants. Each clan controls a different area, or at least specializes in a different activity, but in practice the separate families are often in conflict. Such combats are often conducted by the rank-and-file soldiers of the Syndicate. The leaders are rather lenient about low-level conflicts – the death of a cocky soldier won't weaken the clan, especially since only the unskilled, stupid and foolish tend to get killed.

Currently the clans are in a cease-fire, so they try to remain relatively peaceful towards each other. However, the memories of the recent war are still fresh, and so the clans are more bloodthirsty than they were before Hidoi's coup. Conflicts are also fueled by the positions of many noble houses, guilds and corporations striving for the ultimate solution to the problem of organized crime on Ash. There are significant bounties on the heads of many high ranking members of the Syndicate – too low, however, to attract the best hunters in the Galaxy.

Today, the Organization is seen not as much as a necessary evil, but more as an ever-hungry monster, devouring everyone and everything that opposes it. Some of the clans still care about protecting the people that pay them, but many of them uphold Hidoi's philosophy, claiming that the weak should surrender everything they have to the strong – which will, in turn, graciously spare their lives. That philosophy was the cause of war and it is still responsible for conflict. These might-makes-right warlords, thanks to their aggressive stance, often clash with corporate forces – but are often able to seize valuable loot by doing so. Thanks to these constant attacks they can afford more specialists, better equipment and more competent killers. If the other families, the government and

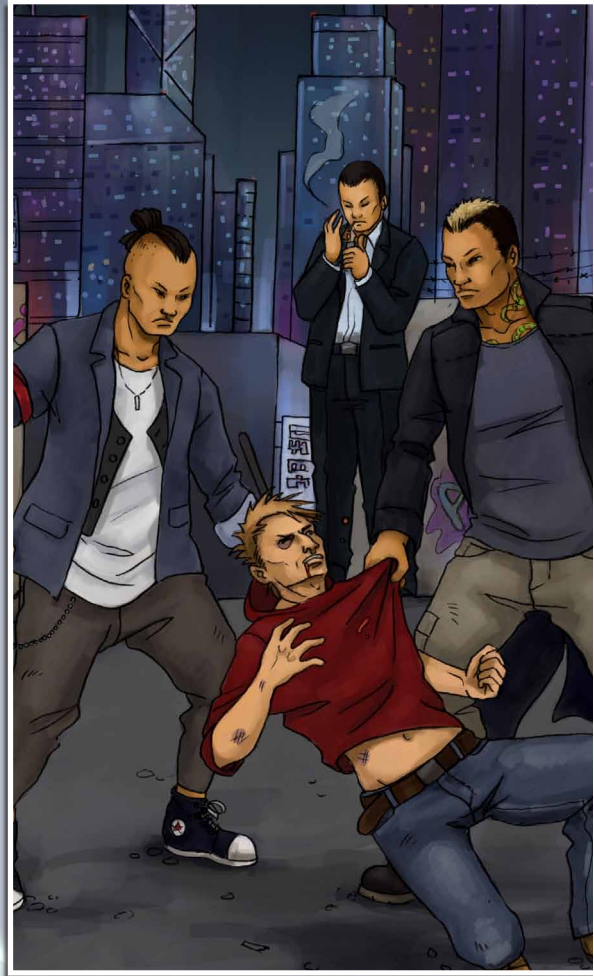
corporations don't unite against the heirs of Hidoi, the future Syndicate will be dominated by this cruel, egoistic philosophy. Passivity could create a situation where only the corporate directors and high-ranking government officials wouldn't have to fear the gangsters.

THE CLANS

Once, thirteen families formed the Syndicate Council. Now, only seven remain, with the others being either destroyed in the gang war or forced to join the stronger ones. All of them, except the Jade Mantis clan (whose HQ is on Bariz) are based on Ash, and it's commonly accepted that the power of the Syndicate ends at the orbit of that frozen world.

Theoretically, each important decision, even if it concerns only one family, must be made in a Council meeting, and discussed by the leaders of the clans. Of course, this rule is long dead thanks to Hidoi, who ignored the traditionalists demanding obedience and respect. Currently, the families are independent, and their interests are often in conflict, which only leads to more clan warfare. Only three clans obey the ancient rule of unanimity – the Golden Dragon, the Jade Mantis and the Tiger – sometimes described together as 'the Little Council'. The four other clans – Gray Wolves, Silver Herons, Black Dragons and Phoenixes – all consider themselves independent organizations and treat all the others as enemies. The only exception is the good relationship between Grey Wolves and Black Dragons – which is not surprising, since Yuki, the boss of the latter family is the daughter of the mysterious Kagi Kara, the daimyo of Gray Wolves.

The Syndicate is composed of almost three thousand gangsters and twice that many people more loosely connected with the Organization. One third of these people are soldiers or tacticians – the rest is comprised of hired specialists, spies and servants. The largest number of warriors works for the Gray Wolf clan, which has over five hundred men ready to kill. The most feared, however, is the Golden Dragon family. Its soldiers are said to be fearless and so gifted with weapons that they could fight hundreds of common thugs armed with only swords and shields. Others claim



that the real power of the Dragon is the three cyborgs who have served the family for decades.

THE BLACK DRAGON

A clan of traitors who left the Golden Dragon soon after the war broke out, and joined Hidoi. Their leader turned out to be Kagi Kara, Hidoi's cousin, who used to lead the clan of Shadows. He changed the name of the new clan, to show that it was going to be the fervent enemy of the Golden Dragon and will do anything to lead it to its downfall. When Hidoi died, Kara transferred the leadership to his daughter, Yuki, and personally assumed the posi-

tion of the new Wolves' leader – with very effective results for both families.

The Dragons are mostly assassins, burglars and kidnappers. They break into the houses of the people not willing or able to pay for protection. They kidnap the children of the rich for ransom, especially the offspring of newcomers from other systems, but they kidnap poor people as well – usually to sell as slaves in other systems. They also deal in assassination – mostly of journalists, officers of the law, nobles, guild members or corporate employees. There are only two exceptions – they don't attack Gray Wolves or employees of Infinity. It's understandable that Yuki doesn't want to offend her father, but her good relations with the most powerful corporation in the Horizon system are a surprise to everyone.

The Black Dragon has significant military potential, but little or no influence in politics or business. Three hundred soldiers and assassins, and as many specialists and servants, is all Yuki has at her disposal. That might be enough to establish yourself in the underground and defend the Black Dragons from other clans, but it's definitely not enough to allow the Dragons to influence planetary affairs.

Yuki – slightly under thirty five years old, the daughter of the infamous Kagi is not only the youngest of all the bosses but also the first female daimyo in seventy years. During the war, she was widely known for her superior combat skills. Women envied her beauty, and her enemies feared her like the devil himself. Yuki is famous not only for her prowess with a sword and her physical beauty, but also for her cruelty and mastery of inflicting pain. Over time she has learned patience and consideration, but she can still make impulsive decisions she later regrets.

THE PHOENIX

The Phoenix clan is famed for its peaceful stance – it was often the host of Council sessions, where inter-clan disputes were settled, courts were held and duels were fo-

ught. The Phoenix has been headed for over forty years by Erich Tainler, once praised for his wisdom, grace and skill in solving conflicts, and today mocked as a coward and a fool. Even the members of his own clan ridicule him – including his three lieutenants, who have been practically running the clan. Erich is a relic of the past. When he dies, an age will come to an end, and the Phoenix clan will be completely transformed, shedding the pretense of respectability, and showing their true colors.

The family's government contacts give it security and protection, as well as enabling it to smuggle any goods in any quantity both between Ash's metropolises and throughout the entire Horizon system and beyond. Weapons, military equipment, drugs, the newest technologies, information and slaves – whatever you need, Phoenix can get it for you. Officially the family deals solely in transportation, but recently it seems that it has also mastered the art of sabotage. Its people destroy factories, infect computer networks, and murder corporate specialists – to help other companies destroy their rivals. Phoenix also deals in blackmail – a few hundred smaller companies pay the Phoenix off, not so much to protect themselves from sabotage, but more to ensure that they won't be attacked by the Phoenix clan.

Erich Tainler – this man is eighty-five-years-old and apparently living out his last days. Kept alive by a complex medical apparatus, he's not even able to leave his bed. He manages his clan using the Cortex, and giving his lieutenants (who are all his children) a wide margin of freedom. It's commonly known that he couldn't care less about the fate of his clan since the time he decided to support Hidoi, which he regrets to this day. Most of the time he can be found in one of many virtual worlds, little paradises, substitutes for the dark unknown awaiting him.



JADE MANTIS

The nobles from Bariz are a loud and proud group of people, willing to try any, form of recreation, especially illegal ones. Of course, the nobles can't allow themselves to break the rules set by their ancestors who colonized the system. Still, they need someone who will organize decadent parties where liquor flows freely, get them some ladies to help, prepare treats soaked in hallucinogens, or organize a hunt for the monsters infecting Cor. That 'someone' is the Jade Mantis clan.

The family has little actual influence on Ash, and it has been treated with reserve in the past – the presence of the clan's boss at the Council meetings was tolerated rather than expected. Only its loyalty towards other families and its often selfless work as a mediator between the Syndicate and the Bariz families allowed the Mantis a degree of security and a stable place inside the Organization. Today, in these dangerous times, this clan is thought of as a valuable ally, able to protect families with no influence beyond Ash from the actions of the powerful noble houses, angered by the conflicts on the freezing planet. This makes all the families, except maybe Phoenix, regard the Mantis clan as friends. The Wolves and Herons would like to stop feuding with Mantises – but their attempts are doomed to fail. Miko Yononoke, the leader of the family, is completely devoted to the laws of the "old" Syndicate. She often quotes her father: "impudence must be cleansed with blood, and treason must be punished by death".

Miko claims openly that there can be no alliance between her family and the allies of Hidoi. She encourages members of the Wolf clan to punish their leaders for betraying the Syndicate, and to choose a new daimyo, but their only answer so far has been mockery and laughter. For now, she refrains from open attacks, but the day is close at hand when her space ships open fire on the Phoenix' smuggling fleet, and her assassins go forth to cover their knives in the blood of traitors; and some preparations have already been made.

Miko Yononoke – anyone seeing the head of the Mantis clan might think she's just a nice, little old lady. If they're a friend of the clan, this impression might persist. But for the enemies of the clan,

the "little old lady" turns quickly into the "blood-thirsty witch". Miko is not a big fan of violence, but she firmly believes in the rules of the Syndicate, and these are clear – traitors are to be killed, and enemies weakened by any means available. By obeying these rules she has managed to live a long life, and it seems she's going to carry on living. In fact, she funds a complicated process, intended to transfer her soul into a new body, created by engineers, which she could use for decades. The project is now practically complete, but Yononoke will transfer her soul only when it is the only way to survive – she knows that one of her confidantes is a traitor. Since she's afraid that someone might strike when she's vulnerable, she still lives on in her old, withered body. She controls her family mostly through the Cortex, but unlike Erich Tainler, she demands strict obedience and loyalty from her lieutenants.

SILVER HERON

The Herons, like the Wolves, live in the northern cities of Ash, but where the Wolves are cruel and violent, the Herons are more friendly; they understand the needs of ordinary people and strive to satisfy them. They run whorehouses, control the market in drugs, alcohol, and other semi-legal substances, they deal in implanting cybernetics and organizing the black market for various goods, including heavy weapons stolen from Cor's army. The covers for their activities are various security companies, shipping firms, manufacturers and night clubs – but that's just a smokescreen for the masses. Society's leaders well know what the Silver Heron deals in.

The only major problem of the clan, except for the covert war and the attacks of the corporations, is its feud with the Gray Wolf clan, which is trying to take the Herons' territory. This former friend recently became quite greedy – and it's only a matter of time until Lambert, the boss of the Silver Heron, will issue the order to put some holes in Mr. Kara's dealers.

Lambert – not many people have seen him, and even less would claim that the man they talked to was really the boss of the Heron clan. It's rumored that the real Lambert does not exist – or that he never existed, he was just a codename for a certain

group ruling the clan together, or that he's been dead for several years, replaced by one of his allies. Yet, regardless of whether he's an institution, a myth or an actual person, Lambert does issue orders – very thoughtful, sensible orders, resulting in great profit, which silence all voices of discontent arising from the mystery surrounding the clan's boss. Since the Herons are so successful, Lambert, whoever he is, is clearly a great leader.

GRAY WOLF

The infamous reputation of the modern Syndicate is mostly due to the history of the Gray Wolf clan. Until recently it was led by Hidoi, the most blood-thirsty daimyo ever, and supposedly a servant of the dark gods, who granted him his position and power. If that's true, then his successor Kagi Kara also must be a cultist, since his cruelty sometimes surpasses even Hidoi's.

The Gray Wolf deals in violence – all kinds of violence. Extortion, robbery, blackmail, assassination, murder, breaking-in, and aiding many lesser gangs working in the areas of the other clans, are the bread and butter of Kara's soldiers. The boss has broken almost every rule of his predecessors – he did not hesitate to harm the harmless, or ally himself with people who later turned out to be cultists of the dark gods. The Gray Wolf's reputation fell sharply, but its influence and wealth grew equally quickly.

Kara openly admits that his ultimate goal is the destruction or absorption of all other clans, and total personal control of the Syndicate. He thinks that all the rules of the Organization are obsolete, and should be abolished – especially in the wake of the Horde's presence in the system. He knows what lies dreaming in the Pyramid of Black Iron, but he does not try to gain influence in other systems. He behaves as if he's certain that regardless of the result of the Cor war he and his men will be safe.

Kagi Kara – short, white hair, athletic build, fashionable suit, and ornate katana on his back – that's how the head of the Gray Wolf clan looks, regardless of the occasion. Kagi is over fifty-five, but he looks as if he's at least ten years younger. He's still a handsome devil, and he uses his looks ruthlessly to charm women, especially influential ones.

Kara will not hesitate to crush opponents completely. He's as cruel towards his enemies as he is to those of his servants who fail him, and attacks anyone who opposes his will. He's very emotional and impulsive. Even though the only kind of negotiation he employs is torture and violence, and the friends of the Wolf clan can be counted on the fingers of one hand, it's this clan that has regained the most strength and influence after the war. Ultimately, Kagi Kara is right – fear, terror and violence are enough to gain obedience and wealth.

TIGER

The Tiger men claim jokingly that their work is making dreams real. There is much truth in that, since the sphere of influence of the clan concerns services – from obtaining certain objects, through providing hideouts and escape routes for people whose lives are in danger, to organizing various meetings and events. All of this, of course, requires breaking the law.

The key to a clan's success is its skill in detecting the needs of potential customers, and finding a way to satisfy them. The latter is a task for the master specialists working for the Syndicate; the Tigers boast that their craftsmen don't have any serious rivals on Ash, and their artists are perhaps comparable to some of the Golden Dragon's best. The former is the main domain of the psionics, the most powerful assets of the Tiger clan.

Some of them deal with the “usual” activities of the family, but the most skilled ones receive other tasks: spying on other clans, controlling guild, corporate and noble leaders, influencing the behavior of the government and law officers, and finding other people with psionic gifts. That last task is especially hard – recently, not enough of Ash's inhabitants have shown enough talent to interest the Tiger, and not many who show such potential decide to join the clan. Tai Po, the head of the clan, has therefore begun action to increase the number of his psionic retainers. His men are recruiting young children with the gift in neighboring star systems, and Tai Po has even ordered the construction of a couple of labs where the family's scientists experiment with artificial stimulation of the brain lobes responsible for psionic activity.

Tai Po – the word ‘jolly’ comes to mind, when you want to describe the character, behavior, and appearance of the Tiger daimyo. Tai Po is a tall man with a large belly and a friendly, trustworthy face with a constant smile. And he has good reason to be happy – during the almost fifty years of his life he has managed not only to strengthen his power and protect his clan from destruction, but also to increase his influence in the world of politics, business and the law. He’s the proud father of seven sons and five daughters, most of whom have been sent to other star systems (or “to a better world” as he says). The three eldest sons have remained by his side, and together with four psionic masters comprise his direct associates.

GOLDEN DRAGON

The members of the Golden Dragon clan seldom used their weapons in the past. They dealt in trading precious objects – works of art, jewelry, antiques, and custom tools (including weapons). They protected skilled craftsmen, sent talented artists to school, and gave proper education to people who were then supposed to pay the clan back with their talent. This combination of cautious actions, well-thought selection of talents, and business wits when speculating in works of art, allowed the Golden Dragon family to keep its status as the richest clan for long decades. The interests of the clan were going to extend into gambling and other branches of entertainment to allow the Syndicate to compete with many Horizon corporations – but the war and the activities of Hidoi and the Black Dragons stopped these plans.

Currently, the Golden Dragon strives to retain its position, but the situation of the entire Syndicate has forced Shiro Hino, the clan’s boss, to transform the family. The Dragons still deal in valuable objects, but their main source of income is now protection – many people would rather pay for the Organization to protect their wealth than hire security companies. Other sources of revenue are stealing and selling advanced technology and... fighting crime, or at least bounty hunting. The Golden Dragon is the patron of several excellent bounty hunters, who eliminate both high-ranking representatives of other families and the leaders of lesser gangs trying to take the place of the Syndicate families.

Shiro Hino – though Tanaka Hino, Shiro’s father, is alive and could manage the clan himself, instead he serves his son as one of his lieutenants. Tanaka was a great leader in the times of peace; he’s wise, patient, observant and clever – but he’s not a leader to spill blood in times of war. Shinro accepts violence and terror as one of many ways to punish traitors, so it was him that became the new leader of the clan.

The Golden Dragon daimyo is an impulsive man, able to make important decisions swiftly. Despite this, only a few dare to doubt the validity of his orders – he rarely makes mistakes. He agrees with the rules of his ancestors, and his father, though he puts a lot of emphasis on ‘punishing traitors’ – he recalls this when his men kill the soldiers of the Wolves, destroy the warehouses of the Heron, or blackmail officials working for the Phoenix. Shiro approves even of stealing the possessions of these families – claiming that they’re as good as dead, and they won’t need gold in their graves.

MYSTERIES

LAMBERT’S IDENTITY

There are various versions of the tale describing the real identity of Lambert, the leader of the Silver Heron. Some people claim that he’s really a puppet for the corporations or even the Gray Wolf clan. Others say that Lambert does not really exist, and his legend protects the real leaders of the clan. They usually suggest that the real Lambert is one of the clan’s lieutenants.

The truth: Lambert is the codename for an Artificial Intelligence, a massive database containing the memories of all the previous clan bosses and possessing knowledge of many high-profile politicians from Ash. It’s not a “hive mind” or a brain trust – it can only access the memories of the previous bosses. The effects are amazing, nonetheless. Lambert, who has led the clan for the past 100 years, has yet to make a mistake.

HIDOI’S DEATH

The bloodthirsty monster who led the Syndicate to a civil war still haunts the thoughts of clan leaders. It’s as if he survived his own death, and

appears as a ghost to his enemies, bringing them death and suffering. These rumors would be scoffed at by most rational people, if not for one thing – even when Hidoi lived, rumors persisted that he was a cultist of the dark gods, regularly performing rituals to appease them.

The truth: Yes, Hidoi was a cultist. He worshipped a deity with few real followers – Mesu, the prisoner of the Great Pyramid of Black Iron. This vile deity appeared in his dreams long before the Horde attacked Cor, and promised him power, wealth and inhuman abilities in exchange for his service. Hidoi accepted Mesu's proposal – and the god kept his word, bestowing supernatural powers upon him. Hidoi managed to survive his death somehow – although his body is dead, it's still inhabited by the soul of the boss of the Gray Wolves. Currently he's hiding in the shadows, secretly supporting the actions of Kara (who is one of the few people who know the truth about his predecessor).

DRAGON CYBORGS

The Golden Dragon reputedly possesses three military-grade cyborgs. Shiro dispatches them only in special circumstances, where ordinary people couldn't do enough damage. Though three cyborgs aren't that deadly compared to some military weapons, they make an average man turn yellow instantly.

The truth: Shiro Hino is preparing for the war. He knows that his soldiers aren't numerous enough to take on the hundreds of Gray Wolf men – but if his plan succeeds, they wouldn't even have to fight. He has invested a considerable amount of his money in cyborg training. Currently there are eight cyborgs in the service of the clan – and four more are just finishing their training.

THE SYNDICATE AND THE CORPORATIONS

Another great riddle is whether the governments, merchant guilds, noble families and the government of Ash control the Syndicate, or whether it's the mob that influence them. Various people support one or another theory, but most existing evidence suggests that the corporation is dominant.

The truth: The Syndicate was never strong enough to control the government or the major corporations. Of course, it influenced lesser companies, treated individual guilds and noble families as equals, but giants like Infinity have always been beyond the Syndicate's reach. Currently, every clan accepts the 'suggestions' of the Ancient One's servants – Infinity has a degree of control over all the clans, and it exerted this to cause the current ceasefire. The bosses were promised, however, that in time they'll be able to avenge their fallen.

5. LOCATIONS

At first, Ash seems to consist only of wastelands, and metropolises stuck into planet's surface like raisins in a cookie – of course, most of the raisins are rotten. But when you look at the planet more closely, you might notice abandoned bases, ruins inhabited by savage bands of exiles, or research institutes beyond the cities themselves. The metropolises, surrounded by powerful walls and usually built around malfunctioning terraformers, do everything to resist the oncoming frost. Each of the metropolises is different – they're practically separate worlds, with their own good and bad sides, their own rules according to which their inhabitants live, and their own problems. However, there are problems shared by all the cities – like lack of energy, malfunctioning terraformers, climate change and a high crime rate.

VICTORIA

The largest of Ash's metropolises, designed by the most famous architects and engineers of their generation. The Pearl of the South, the flower that would first open its petals to welcome the forthcoming spring, the seat of government, and the capital city of the developing world, soon to become the most important planet in the sector.

Those were the plans, at least.

Victoria is now the largest, the dirtiest and the ugliest city on Ash. A third of the capitol is a labyrinth of devastated apartment buildings, the skeletons of skyscrapers, and flattened blocks, unset-

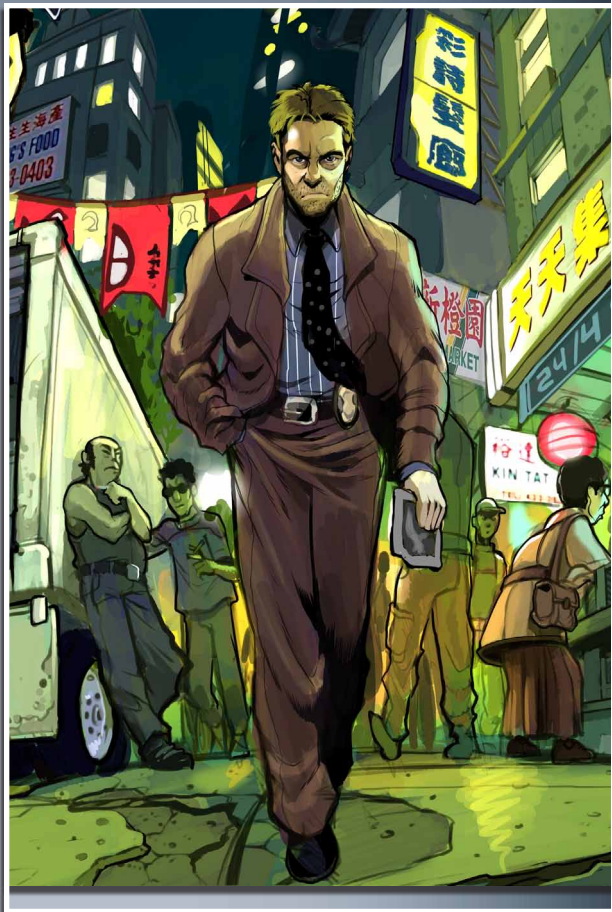
tingling passers-by with their broken windows and bullet holes – the result of frequent gang wars. The sky is constantly full of dark dust clouds – partly due to the planet's climate, but the air is also polluted by the industrial plants set in the southern part of the city. But it isn't devastation, smog, ash or the gangs that make the inhabitants of the city furious. The focal point of their hate is the giant terraformer – a machine over three hundred feet tall, a boxy construction studded with chimneys, filters, energy convertors and other equipment. The machine is still working, but it makes so much noise that not even stray animals will stay within half a mile of it. But that's not all; the machine often breaks down, and then the noise turns into a howl, reaching even the highest floors of the skyscrapers at the other side of town.

In the northern part of the city, the upper crust lives. Several thousand of people with great amounts of knowledge, money or luck live in seventeen shining towers made of steel, glass and concrete. They don't suffer from hunger, they never feel the cold wind on their faces, and they see the factory clouds only at a distance. They are, however, still worried – if within the next decade or two the climate change is not stopped, the entire planet, including their magnificent homes, will freeze.

INFINITY TOWER

The place where the dream of immortality came true. Every day, hundreds of thousands of Victoria's inhabitants wake in its shadow, look at it walking down the road, and sleep under the tower. This tower is over six thousand feet high, and is the tallest building in the Horizon system – a powerful monument to the greatness of mankind. Infinity Tower is the corporate headquarters and main research lab of the Infinity Corporation.

Inside this monumental construction, thousands of scientists swarm, not unlike the worker bees in a hive. They work with complex tools, artificially intelligent computers and nanomachines to understand the greatest riddles that Nature challenged humans with. They manipulate genes, create subatomic particles, or design new ways of creating Artificial Intelligences. Hundreds



of feet above, their experimental colleagues apply their theories in practice: by performing unusual surgical operations, transplanting artificial limbs, or injecting human bodies with swarms of miniature machines. Every second, the powerful database hidden below Ash's surface swallows the tasty memories of people arriving on Ash, to copy their souls and protect them from the unavoidable. Above them all, the genetically engineered superhumans work, artists among scientists, ready to answer almost incomprehensible questions, and to devote their entire lives to their work. Their task is to comprehend the dark gods. To understand how black magic works. To understand the thoughts of Horde beasts. Like generations of their prede-

cessors, they try to apply the scientific method to something that can't be understood by a sane man. However, their work does have some measurable results – some of their discoveries, either accidental or made as a side effect of major experiments, are the engines that drive Infinity.

The peak of the tower, wrapped in clouds, is the realm of a single man. The Ancient One, the mythical leader of Infinity for the past three hundred years. For most Ashians he's just a legend, a bogeyman used to scare the children of corporate workers. But he really exists, confined to a wheelchair. Though his body refuses to cooperate, his mind is as healthy as ever. He keeps plotting his nefarious plans, and weaves a web of intrigue across dozens of star systems. Even the beasts of the Horde flutter in this web, caught in a trap by one of his intrigues.

NEXUS CITY

Nexus is the smallest metropolis of Ash, and if you consider the number of inhabitants, it's more a town than a city. It lies far from the equator, in the zone of eternal winter. Despite the frost, the distance from civilization, and other inconveniences, it was never deserted. Nexus is the city housing the center of the planet-wide network, also called Nexus. It's here where the terabytes of data flow between the users. Of course, it's not the only nexus in the network – around one-fifth of the data flow goes through satellites – but without Nexus, the Cortex would be almost paralyzed.

The city looks deserted. The terraformer in its center is covered in snow and ice. It's been dead

for years, and so have most of the workshops and other industrial plants in the city. The only things active are a powerplant, a few workshops and automated repair plants, and of course the Nexus itself – a giant complex, partially underground, managing the flow of information across the Cortex. It needs a hundred thousand workers just to support the necessary equipment. Together with the people providing the essentials – transportation, services, and entertainment – the town has 313 thousand inhabitants – compared to six million in its heyday. No-one sane wants to live in a place where the temperature in summer is never above -10° C (14° F). The ones that stayed behind, did so for one reason – for the money

Officially the network is controlled by Infinity, and it employs the crew working on the Cortex. The average Ashian doesn't trust the corporation, so they refrain from using the network. They know that when they log in they not only show Infinity what they're doing, but also give it other important data used by AIs. The corporation denies spying on citizens, and claims that there's no hard evidence. The common people know the truth, however.

Theoretically the Nexus, and the Cortex itself, would be an easy target for terrorist groups, cultists or other organizations that'd like to see Ash completely paralyzed. Rumors claim that there have been many attempts at destroying the servers, but all of them ended happily (that is, the attackers were massacred). The Nexus is supposedly guarded by elite military troops, including fifteen cyborgs. The corporation, as usual, denies everything.

But the people always seem to know what's going on.



CHAPTER 6:
BARIZ

"PRETTY. PRETTY, BUT EXPENSIVE."

JENNER, INDEPENDENT MERCHANT.

1. GENERAL DESCRIPTION

When you see this blue-green planet for the first time, you can't deny its beauty. Hundreds of miles of plains covered in tall grass, verdant forests untouched by a human hand, and picturesque valleys between tall mountains comprise over two thirds of the land surface. An archipelago of rocky islands and another small, ice-covered continent are a home for people desiring peace and solitude. Just a first look at this world could convince the observer that it could be a home for billions of humans, which makes it even more surprising that the surface of the planet is inhabited by only a few millions, while over 90 per cent of the population lives in great cities hovering hundreds of meters over the surface of the sea.

The Barizian metropolises are best summed up in two words: splendor and technology. Designed by the Galaxy's most famous architects, they are real works of art – and they are as comfortable and safe as they are beautiful. Every denizen of the city knows his place – he has certain rights and obligations, he belongs to a specific caste determining his social status and wealth. Even a single visit is enough to spot the differences between the rich and the poor, between the “important” people and the common technicians maintaining the flying cities.

Of course, many poor people on Bariz live a better life than rich people on Cor.

DUELS

A day in the life of an average nobleman consists mainly of sleeping, entertainment and boredom. If the second is not enough to overcome the third, the nobles get frustrated and need to



vent their passions. There are hundreds of ways to kill time – and fencing is one of the most popular ones.

Mastery of melee weapons is as common amongst the nobles as are extravagance, obstinacy and inflated egos. The blue-blooded love to fight – they think that this confirms their bravery and proves their innate worthiness to the rabble. Everyone takes part in duels, from young girls looking for new experiences, through mature men obsessing about their honor, to experienced killers, murdering their employers' opponents under the cover of an honorable fight. If you refuse a challenge, you're a coward, to be ostracized and isolated as someone not worthy of their noble title.

The simple rules of the duel are more like guidelines, based on common sense. The duelists can use any weapon, provided that they can lift it in one hand. Any kind of weapons are allowed, except for weapons that could harm observers. Any kind of protection is allowed, except for powered armor which increases the strength of the combatants. The fight can be to first or to the death, depending on the duelists. Furthermore, the duel has to be 'clean' – so aggressive nanostrains, poisons or similar substances are forbidden. Psionics are sharply limited – you can't influence your opponent's mind, but talents enhancing your own combat abilities are allowed. The matter of chemicals increasing the physical potential of the fighters depends on the duelists themselves – if you want to risk your life and health to boost your power, feel free to do it – but most of the observers would disdain someone who won thanks to drugs.

Duels on Bariz are very common, but most often they're to first blood. The reasons for the duel vary, from gaining a girl's favor, defending your opinion, or clearing your name, to settling a friendly dispute or just for sport. The risk of death is small, and the excitement of sheer combat adrenaline and defeating the opponent – immense. Thanks to advanced medical technologies even the most serious wounds can be healed in just a few hours, days at worst. The only thing that could stop the nobles from fighting is therefore fear – which they cheerfully ignore.



Use in play: Duels is a good way to quicken the action of an adventure, a great way to introduce a bit of danger into Barizian intrigues (especially when duelling to the death). Smart players can use duels to disable their opponents for a certain time – or permanently, especially when trying to remove someone from the political scene or when unable to find evidence against them. Of course, the heroes' enemies can also try to remove the PCs – a single light, but painful, wound is sometimes enough to stop the hero from taking part in a dangerous mission. Stubborn heroes can suffer more serious wounds; a few days in bed will make them rethink their strategies, while the NPCs will gain the time they need to carry out their plans.

RACES

The most popular sport on Bariz has always been racing. Races can take many different forms – horse races, ATV races, suicidal space flights among the wreckage from the Battle of Cor, or even bike racing on the surface of the Cor, planet infected by the Horde. The more difficult and dangerous the road, the more people

profess their readiness to race. Of course, only a few of them would really do it – most of them don't possess an appropriate vehicle, and some lack the courage to risk their lives in these juvenile escapades. Unlike duelling, those who don't participate aren't seen as cowards – this is fear for your life, not fear of losing a little blood.

Only the young race – the elders not only dismiss such behavior, but also forbid it to their heirs. The risk of maiming or death is so great that at least one person in each race is seriously wounded. When the race is held in space, any accident could mean death. Of course, the dead racer could be raised, but the costs of restoring his soul are so great that even Barizian nobles couldn't afford it. Naturally, the kids laugh in the face of danger, and race anyway, ignoring their elders. The races are therefore organized in secret, avoiding open channels like the planetary network. Only a select few, enjoying the trust of the participants, are ever invited to the race locations – which are always chosen at the last moment. The races are never filmed or talked about outside the fraternity. The wounded hide their wounds and never talk about how they got them, and the dead are buried in unmarked graves. Sometimes, the secrets come out; but the racers always try to keep them.

Use in play: Races are seldom a good motif for an exciting game. Even if the entire team is racing, after a few minutes of description and two or three tests the adrenaline is falling and the players get bored. Races are better used as an exciting backdrop for other adventures, when the players have to interrogate a young witness – one who is racing at the moment – or if the players have to investigate the disappearance of a young nobleman who died during one such race.

GRAVITERS AND CITIES

'Graviter' is the common name for a gravitational generator, installed by the hundreds in each of the levitating cities. A single graviter is as big as a suburban house and can lift an object the size of a skyscraper. Apart from the cities, there are plenty of lesser flying objects, small towns

or single buildings inhabited by groups not connected to planetary politics, trying to maintain their independence. Most of them hover over the ocean or on the borders between the realms of noble families, often changing their exact location.

Most of the events influencing the politics of the planet happen in the nobles' residences – powerful constructions hovering hundreds of feet above ground thanks to the combined power of thousands of graviters. The largest cities are inhabited by over a million inhabitants, only a thousand or so of which are noble-blooded. The rest of the inhabitants work hard to support the rulers, often performing hard, exhausting and underpaid duties. Not many people complain about their living conditions, however. The standard of living of an ordinary worker on Bariz is often much higher than that of a businessman on Ash or on hundreds of backwater planets.

Use in play: Most adventures on Bariz will probably take place on one of the flying cities. This is where decisions are made, often after long discussions, negotiations and delays, as well as after kidnappings, duels and assassinations. This is the place where messengers from the governments of other star systems meet the rulers of the Horizon system. Finally, this is the place where trade agreements between local merchant guilds and powerful interstellar consortia are signed. In short, most of the money in the Horizon system flows through these seats of the noble families.

If the PCs also belong to the elite, they will undoubtedly have reasons to visit Barizian nobles. The goals of the visit can be very varied – the heroes can try to gain power for themselves or win a profitable contract, or they can investigate a hired killing ordered by the head of an influential family, track down cults worshipping the dark gods, or plan the assassination of a political opponent of their employer.

2. ORGANIZATIONS

An old adage says that if an inhabitant of Bariz is not a member of an organization or formal

group he's probably dead. The planet is full of various guilds, foundations and lodges, overseen by the Council, formed from the representatives of seventeen Founder Families – descendants of the first settlers from Earth, who built colonies on Bariz thousands of years ago.

The society of Bariz is a caste society: representatives of all jobs from mechanics to cooks to ladies of the night join separate groups. Thanks to this they can protect their business, control the quality of work performed (for instance by licenses allowing work in the field – which an off-worlder can obtain only after years of working for the relevant guild), and plan for the future – especially for their children, which, unsurprisingly, tend to inherit their parents' jobs. And this, in turn, explains why social advancement on Bariz is practically impossible. If you were born a janitor, you will die a janitor.

THE CALLAC FOUNDATION

An average citizen of the galaxy imagines a psionic foundation as a mystical, secretive organization with unclear, but definitely illegal goals, which include mind control over influential people and manipulating politicians to gain power over an entire star system. This image is as wrong as it's amusing – foundations are organizations finding and training people with psionic talents. Their main tasks are finding appropriate job offers for their members and scientific research (creating new psionic skills and developing the existing ones).

In the case of Bariz, an average foundation is both a school, a research institute, and a guild of psionists, providing them employment and a standard of living appropriate to their skills. The Callac Foundation has a very respectable function on the planet: its members work as advisors for the noble families, especially during meetings with representatives of companies from outside the system, and as protectors trying to prevent rival psionists from influencing negotiations. The nobles have a lot of trust in psionists, but this is not undeserved – during the long centuries of the

Foundation's existence, its members have never betrayed or deceived their employers. They've always served the noble houses faithfully – at least, until now.

Currently the foundation has a number of problems, including too many independent psionists from outside the system – young, talented psis working for corporations and other, smaller organizations. Until now, the only competitors for Callac were psionists hired by Infinity. Often, when negotiating with many companies, the mere presence of a Callac psionist was enough to ensure a profitable contract. Today, however, almost every business hires an independent psi, and discussions turn into psychic wars, determining the results of negotiations and whether multi-million Eagle contracts are signed at all. Often both sides could accuse each other of using psionists to mind-control people to manipulate the contract (one of the most serious economic crimes in the galaxy) – but they don't, afraid that their own psionists might be caught.

Confronting psionists outside the Horizon system has taught the Foundation that its entire structure, training model and results are far outclassed by the rest of Galaxy. Without a thorough modernization of the structure, changes in teaching methods, and new technologies the psis won't be able to fulfill their duty to protect the families' representatives from attacks by other psychics. First steps have already been taken – a few months ago, the first groups trained in a new way left Callac and started serving the Barizian houses. So far the results are amazingly good.

These problems have never concerned a specific group within the foundation – the Psionic Swordmasters, famed thorough the Galaxy for their skill and talent. Thanks to rigorous selection of applicants and murderous training, the adepts of Callac are not only masters of the blade but also potent telekinetics. It's a safe bet that there is no other school in a 1000 lightyear radius whose adepts have a ghost of a chance to win against a Callac swordmaster.

3. NOBLE HOUSES

The noble families of Bariz are currently facing some hard facts. Though their mandate of rulership has always been based on their wealth, it has always been assumed that another reason was the protection provided to ordinary citizens. Today, thanks to the Horde just next door and a Council seemingly unable to cope with it, the trust of the people has significantly dropped. The man on the street is not sure what the nobles will do when the vile monsters of the dark gods attack Bariz – will the leaders flee or fight? The answer to this question, but not one that the citizens would want to hear, is provided by the lesser families, outside the circle of Founder Families. The withdrawal of capital, selling of estates and moving to other systems started a dozen or so years ago, when Horizon society realized that the war on Cor would be long, bloody and not necessarily victorious. Frankly, the most common reason for escape from Bariz is not fear of the Horde, but simple financial problems; but the average inhabitant of Bariz does not see the difference.

Decreasing popular support, business problems and cut-throat competition from the major families force the lesser houses to surrender their independence and swear loyalty to one of the Council families. Usually this doesn't change their status, and only forces them to obey the orders of their sovereigns. It's hardly surprising that during the last twenty years the Founder Families have received over forty fealty pledges.

Immense influence, huge swaths of land, and popular support are sadly not enough for the heads of major houses to sleep safe and sound. The invasion of the Horde drains more and more capital from Bariz. The out-system companies wish to be better prepared against possible attack in case the servants of the Devourer move from Cor. The families do everything possible to minimize their losses, but the vision of bankruptcy looming over their companies is very real. The solution might be cooperating with local corporations – Infinity is especially interested in taking over some of the assets of companies owned by Barizian nobles. An example could be the trans-

formation of Eris, a small car factory on Ash, into a company producing armored vehicles or transporters for the Cor Army.

Yet, the families are reluctant to sell their shares to the corporations, and the Council is wary when dealing with such companies. Currently, the consortia control over 80% of production and services on Ash, provide almost 100% of army equipment and supplies, and slowly but surely creep into Barizian markets. The Founder Families are giving an especially cold shoulder to Infinity, since it has very few obstacles to becoming the actual ruler of the Horizon system, mostly legal. The nobles would never admit it openly, but their significance has fallen since the attack of the Horde. Currently, everyone's discussing the necessity of reform, changing the way government operates in the Horizon system. Of course, this means taking power from the Families and putting it in more appropriate and responsible hands – like the Infinity Board of Directors. The corporation is not interested in power for power's sake, but in the resources on Bariz. The planet is still a tasty morsel, especially its consumer goods, including objects made of natural wood. The nobles, in turn, will do anything to maintain the status quo – mostly thanks to their natural conservatism, but also because they lack the resources to start production and sell goods themselves. Infinity is trying to reach a compromise, offering the families a cut of the profits for the rights to use Barizian natural resources, but all the offers by the company are vetoed by the traditionalists in the Council.

All this causes political games and conspiracies, the hallmark of Bariz, to transform into something not unlike open warfare. The corporations have managed to divide the usually unanimous Council, causing conflicts among the upper class – resulting in broken contracts and oaths of fealty, as well as duels and assassinations. Skillfully heated arguments will eventually result in a permanent divide. Then, the myth of the Founder Families as the pillars of law and order on Bariz will disappear, and the corporations will be able to openly challenge the nobles. Psionic foundations are also involved in this rivalry between Ash and Bariz leaders, trying to strengthen their own

position (and try to secure it in case the corporations win the struggle). The psis are too weak to be treated as a serious threat, though.

Currently, thanks to the activities of corporations or smaller groups like psionics, cultists or even influential Corite officers, Bariz is a hotbed of conflict and the only safe people are those who keep themselves out of the power struggle. Every day there is at least one duel, and there is no month without the funeral of an assassination victim. Diplomacy is starting to be seen as a slow, unreliable and inconvenient way of resolving conflicts. This doesn't mean that no one is conducting negotiations – just that only the allies do so. Enemies are good only for scams, blackmail and kidnapping, or even elimination as undesirables.

The conflict between the families doesn't the system is in imminent danger of collapse. The conflicts have always happened, and have been resolved in many ways. Often blood flowed on the streets of the flying cities, and dozens of people died in duels. No, the real problem is that today fights are being fought even within individual families – the new generation tries to take the power from their elders, sometimes by force. The braver young people sometimes decide to betray their blood and go on to serve other, sometimes traditionally hostile, families.

There are three possible outcomes to the conflict on Bariz. In the first, rather improbable option, all will be lost; the corporations and the families will clash in total war, which will exhaust all the resources of the planet. The second possibility is that the corporations will eventually take power and introduce many changes, like industrialization of the world and exploiting its resources. That would mean a significant increase of the Horizon system's political power, but the planet would be ruined, or at least its ecosystem would have to be completely redesigned. The final solution is compromise

and cooperation between the fighting sides – but that would require a good will from both corporate and noble representatives, as well as skilled diplomats able to convince both sides that the alliance is the only real way to survive.

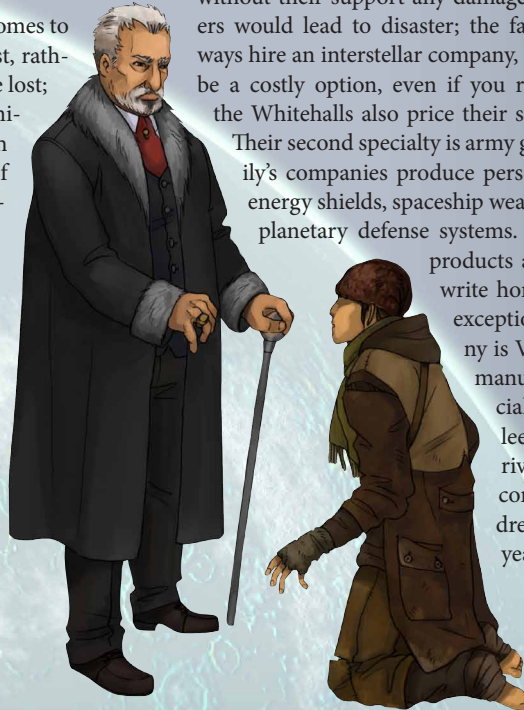
Of course there's also a fourth possibility – the Cor army will collapse, the Horde will expand and the entire system will be lost. This, however, is not even considered by any of the sides fighting.

Cunningham – the house of Cunningham values tradition above all other values. From the young age, they are being immersed in the rules set by the founders of the family in previous centuries. The rules dictate everything: behavior, clothing, even the careers available to the young. This is probably the only family whose parents still arrange marriages for their children. That of course causes numerous conflicts, elopements, disinheritance... and suicides, which are covered up by the family.

Whitehall – undoubtedly the most powerful family on Bariz, even though its current head, Angus, tries not to display his wide-ranging influence. The Whitehalls, descendants of the original terraforming engineers, have full control over the technology of the gravitational generators, keeping the flying cities aloft. This doesn't mean that without their support any damage to the graviters would lead to disaster; the families can always hire an interstellar company, but this would be a costly option, even if you remember that the Whitehalls also price their services highly.

Their second specialty is army gear – the family's companies produce personal weapons, energy shields, spaceship weapons and even planetary defense systems. Though these

products are nothing to write home about, one exceptional company is Valiant, a small manufacturer specializing in melee weapons, unrivaled by any company in hundreds of light-years. The family



is a sponsor and a customer of this company, so everyone on Bariz knows that Whitehall clan duellists possess the best weapons.

It's hard to point out the families hostile towards Angus. Most of the nobles look at his family with healthy and open envy, but there is no real hostility. However, the Chings and Valari, who also design weapons, are openly in opposition to Angus Whitehall, and attempt to undermine his every idea or bill proposed to the Council.

Ching – most nobles duel armed with swords, rapiers, katanas or at least a dagger, protected by powerful energy shields. The Chings are an exception – they fight unarmed, with their entire body being their weapon. They are famous for their mastery of the martial arts, specializing in nasty, cruel but very effective styles. Chings are viewed on Bariz as honorable, proud and hot-headed people, able to break your neck if you utter a single slur on their family honor.

In reality the Chings are no more hot-headed than the next man. They use violence only when it's necessary – though their definition of 'necessary' is fairly broad. They're very determined, and aren't afraid to use drastic measures, so if there's a small chance of compromise and violence seems to be a quicker way to solve the problem, a Ching will not waste his time talking. It's easy to assume, then, that the members of this family aren't born diplomats. Whitehalls go further, claiming that violence is the Chings' only solution. Their mutual relations recently cooled down, since the Chings, convinced that intimidating the messengers would help, blocked a very promising and profitable deal.

The source of this family's finances is a mystery. There are many theories – one is that they have bank accounts thorough the Gal-

axy, sustaining their current status, while others are more credible – for instance that the Chings are controlled by the Syndicate. This, incidentally, is true: the proud and honorable warriors of the Chings have no qualms about taking monetary aid for informing the criminal clans about the secrets of the Council and voting according to the schemes of the Syndicate.

Valari – this family is seldom thought of as "real" nobles. They are descendants of various mercenary groups who stayed on Bariz after their contracts expired. No one has confirmed officially that they're one of the Founding Families, but the Council has never denied their privileges. The Valari are a necessary part of Bariz, and unless the situation completely changes, they will still be able to step on people and control business according to their own will.

The Valari are commonly known as Vultures. They offer their services (since they haven't changed their main source of income – they've been mercenaries for centuries) to the governments of systems in desperate need of protection. Vultures are therefore preying on systems on the brink of war, attacked by organized pirate gangs, or needing assistance in eliminating particularly dangerous opponents. They specialize in protecting the rich and powerful – nobles, guildmasters, psionic foundations or influential politicians; and their 'protection' is manifold, for instance they offer champions to represent such people in duels. Of course, the services of the Valari aren't cheap.

Krabala – merchants, traders, business people – such is the image of these masters of diplomacy, negotiation and compromise. The Krabala don't have wide-ranging influence, or large estates, they aren't protected by powerful organizations or private armies – but they've been the leaders of the Council for almost four decades. According to them, the key to success is finding a partner's needs, reassuring him that his problems can be solved, and working out a solution – or rather having it worked out for you. The Krabala are convinced that every problem has a solution, and it's exactly this attitude which is responsible for their current situation.





If their approach was much more sensible they'd be the richest family on Bariz. Yet, Krabala try to exploit every opportunity, and they take on any potentially profitable job. They are even greater risk-takers in trade – they can invest millions in a product that could – but might not – be sold with large profit. If they are lucky, their wealth increases, but in the event of failure, they go down with the spaceship.

The Krabala are an interesting family – they trade not to gain wealth, but to live stylish and comfortable lives. Extravagant beyond the bounds of reason, they can waste fortunes on parties, galas, travels and gifts. They buy the most expensive custom-made clothes, jewelry or customized weapons. One of their most frequent obsessions is modern technology: they install various implants in their bodies, undergo various nanotreatments or even modify their genome. If you combine that with their gaudy, colorful clothes and a dedication to great falchions, axes and other heavy melee weapons of choice, the result is an image of vivid, noisy and colorful characters able to outtalk the Devil himself.

MYSTERIES

All the noble families have their secrets. The politics of Bariz is entirely based on discovering and using the secrets of others and hiding your own weaknesses. The families are bound by a network of mutual connections, dependencies, duties and orders depending on the information they have.

PLANETARY CANNON

One of the top secret military projects of previous eras was supposedly a massive planetary cannon – a weapon able to destroy capital ships and space stations with a single shot, bursting through their energy shields without difficulty. Rumors claim that this weapon could destroy entire cities (or maybe even entire planets)... if it had an appropriate power source. It's said that the construction of the weapon was finished a couple of years ago – and now all that's left is to equip it with engines.

The truth: Millennia ago, before anyone had even heard about the Horde or the dark gods, the rich colonists of Bariz decided to build a we-

apon protecting them from any invasion. The fear of a massive cannon able to destroy entire formations with a single shot would paralyze the warlords trying to invade Horizon and discourage them from this idea. The construction of the cannon took decades, but when the final assembly started, the project failed. It resurfaced later, when Horizon was feuding with neighboring systems. The plans were modernized, the materials collected, and the powerful weapon was built again – only to be discarded again. Over the centuries there have been seven more attempts at rebuilding the cannon. The most recent one, seventy years ago, was exceptionally spectacular – the engineers decided to use nanotechnology and let all the construction be done by nanobots, but even this ambitious project fell through.

Work was resumed three years ago, on the authority of Angus Whitehall. Luckily, it turned out that all the elements of the cannon constructed over the course of millennia had been rebuilt and renovated by nanobots. It was enough to design a power source, build a control installation and design a targeting system so that the weapon could be used. The final touches were made just a few months ago.

The cannon is as powerful as it's impractical. It was designed to destroy huge, slow vessels – but Whitehall has reworked the design so that it's now able to shoot the beasts of the Horde. The targeting systems can detect even smaller monsters, but they're too fast and mobile. The probability of hitting a target like that would be at best one in twenty.

THE INNER CIRCLE

The law states that every representative of the Founder Families has the same rights in Council. Tradition orders the lesser families to accept the decisions made by the council, but theoretically the less important houses aren't dependent on the more powerful families. In practice, the Council is supposedly only an informative body – the Bariz is ruled by the Inner Circle, composed of the most powerful families on the planet.

The truth: The existence of a group responsible for the decisions made not only in the name of the planet but the entire system is a more or less open secret. The law of Bariz is a bit archaic, especially in this tempestuous and chaotic day and age. The Inner Circle not only determines the direction of development, but also stabilizes politics and does prevent groups caring only about their own business from harming others.

The Circle is comprised not only of the noble families, but also of the most powerful corporations of Ash, the government of that planet and a few other worlds allied with Horizon, as well as the high command of the Cor Army. In Circle meetings, the only decisions made are these concerning the entire system – it does not interfere in the internal politics of its members.

BODY STORES

The longevity of the nobles is hardly surprising – with bank accounts as big as theirs you can buy anything, including immortality – whether by genetic modification, or by transferring your soul into a cloned body or a computer, and living as a virtual ghost. It's said that all the leaders of the Bariz clans are cyborgs – they've bribed the monastic starships ages ago, and every generation they buy new mechanical bodies, adjusting their capabilities to their current needs. Their priorities are combat applications and defensive systems – human appearance is only secondary.

The truth: The rumors are blown out of proportion – only a few leaders of families decided to transfer their souls to synthetic organisms (and only a part of them has actually undergone monastic training). It's true that every one of them owns at least a couple of different bodies for different occasions – always including a combat body.

BARIZIAN KILLERS

If assassinations were art, the killers of the Valari family would be the greatest artists in existence. While the family officially deals in bodyguarding, most of their earnings come not from protection but from eliminating undesirable people. There

is no task which the Vultures would refuse – they possess a wide knowledge of common personal security tactics and automated security systems – which in practice means almost 100% effectiveness.

The truth: Valari like money. They can't refuse an opportunity to earn money, especially if it's as profitable as contract killings. They are however somewhat honorable for hired murderers – they only accept selected contracts, backed by legitimate planetary governments or organizations with real power. The actual murders are always conducted by ordinary people working for the Vultures – the nobles well know that any evidence connecting them with the assassins would not only ban them from the Council and denote them to ordinary citizens, but also damage their reputation as mercenaries... and as effective killers.

4. LOCATIONS

The powers of Bariz are not places but people. The planet is mostly uninhabited, and the landscape is dominated by mighty peaks, verdant forests, hills overgrown with tall grass, and wide plains. This is a beautiful, calm place where everyone can find peace, quiet and relaxation. Average player characters would be dreadfully bored – they're mostly interested in graviters, ruins, space stations and other places where something's happening.

THE RUINS OF ALNEC

During the thousands of years of the planet's history, the engines of the flying cities have only malfunctioned twice. The first time the damage was averted at the very last moment – Letec II did not quite crash, it just fell close to the ground. The graviters created a long furrow called the Scar, which still exists today.

The second malfunction ended in disaster. The official explanation is an overload in the energy network of the city of Alnec, which led to mal-

functions in the gravity generators, and their subsequent explosion. The truth is different – the graviters were destroyed by a group of cultists following the Devourer of Worlds. The city crashed, and nearly every inhabitant (over one hundred thousand of them) died. The ruins of Alnec are a place of pilgrimage for the descendants of the victims, their friends, and for looters, trying to get everything that survived the crash.

THE PALACE OF DUELS

Several years ago in the mansion of the Qillan house (one of the lesser families) a bomb was detonated. It killed only two people, and wounded eight more – a miracle considering that it razed most of the building. The graver was damaged, and it flew the city on a chaotic, unpredictable course. The members of the family gathered the rest of their belongings and moved to the palace of the Chings, to whom they swore fealty.

Nature abhors a vacuum – so there's nothing odd in the fact that just a few weeks after the bomb attack young nobles started to meet in the Qillan ruins, to solve their problems by the means of duels. From then on the damaged graver served as a duelling arena for illegal combats. The combats in the Palace of Duels, as the ruins of Qillan mansion are now called, are fought according to strict rules. People who decide to fight must wear special harnesses, equipped with a set of sensors monitoring their health, a camera, a microphone, and a transmitter; then they're taken to the opposite ends of the platform. From then on anything is allowed – even using items found in the ruins. The Palace of Duels is a labyrinth of corridors, small chambers and secret passages. Victory in a duel fought here does not depend solely on melee mastery, but also on intelligence, alertness and the ability to foresee the movements of an opponent.

Miss Bathory – known to ordinary people as “Bitch”, this young girl is a Fury, and probably the most skilled psionic swordmaster on Bariz. Reckless, impudent, predatory – she herself claims that she has no conscience. Nobody doubts that

– during the five years of her stay on Bariz she has fought in 37 duels, and in twenty-nine of them she fought as a champion for hire. Naturally she did not win in every fight – her body was cloned in Infinity at least twice.

Bathory is thought of as a butcher, a tool used by the nobles when all the other possibilities are exhausted. She's reportedly just a puppet, a naïve girl with only two talents – psionics and killing. The reality is slightly different. She was just a sword for hire for many years, but after her last lost duel she became more thoughtful and started to plan her actions with more consideration. She does not want to be a pawn, but a player.

Anyone seeing Miss Bathory for the first time wouldn't believe that this petite girl is one of the best killers on Bariz. Short, more thin than slender, with a storm of red wavy hair, she's quite attractive, but her steely eyes and constant sneer frighten away any potential suitor. She dresses practically, often wearing armor and a sword belt over normal clothes – though the sword is just a decoration. Her real weapon is her mind.

THE GALLERY OF MEMORIES

Modern technology is a powerful weapon for any architect. Thanks to it, now almost any project, even the most reckless, can be constructed. The Gallery of Memories is one such construction. This building, resembling a medieval castle, has been erected on one of Bariz' highest mountains. Inside, it stores hundreds of Earth-made objects – from common everyday objects like newspapers, postcards, and beverage cans to curiosities and works of art. Hundreds of pictures, paintings, portraits, manuscripts or pieces of jewelry are viewed each year by mil-

lions of visitors. Humans come here to see and touch what's left from the cradle of their species. Some of them seek peace and reflection, others visit the Gallery of Memories to find the righteous anger within and motivation to fight the dark gods. All of the exhibits in the gallery are owned by Le Criffe, an artist famous for his fascination with Earth. Only a few people have seen Le Criffe in person – or at least not in his famous artist persona. Le Criffe likes to pretend to be a visitor – he observes the faces of guests, talks to them, learns about the emotions they feel when watching the works of the ancient masters. Some people claim that Le Criffe has seen Earth in person, before it was destroyed. Others add that he was a member of the investigation team responsible for awakening the Destroyer of Worlds on Nyks.

Le Criffe – modern art is based on precision and striving for perfection rather than on emotions. Contemporary artists are closer to mathematicians or architects than to the painters, sculptors, poets and composers of the past. Their works are masterpieces of engineering, with every detail carefully planned and placed using the tools of modern technology. Le Criffe is a man who destroyed the image of the artist and rebuilt it from scratch.

When he opened his first exhibition, full of works made with his own hands, not with robotic arms armed with dozens of chisels and drills, nor printed on high-quality materials, people laughed at him. But when he was spotted by some wealthy people with a weakness for eccentric artists, he started to sell his work for more and more money. Five years later nobody laughed – Le Criffe became influential, rich, popular and famous as a precursor of the new style in painting – “true art reborn”.



CHAPTER 7: **COR**

"BEFORE THE INVASION, THIS WAS A CHARMING LITTLE WORLD. PEOPLE WERE DYING TO GET INTO THESE RESORTS, AND THEY WERE FASHIONABLE ALL YEAR ROUND. THERE WERE BETTER AND WORSE YEARS, BUT THE OWN ERS OF HOTELS, CASINOS, SPAS AND TRANSPORT LINES SOMEHOW ALWAYS ENDED UP WITH PROFITS. THE WAR CHANGED EVERYTHING. NOW YOU HAVE TO BE MAD TO LAND ON COR."

JENNER, INDEPENDENT MERCHANT.

Cor orbits around Horizon-2, but it's somewhat closer to this star than Ash. It's close enough to make life around equator impossible due to high temperatures, but luckily it was otherwise habitable and didn't require terraforming. The first steps in settling the planet were made three hundred years ago, when it turned out that colonizing Cor would be very cheap. The settlers only had to tweak the local life – introducing new species of plants and animals, modifying the existing ones and hunting down the most dangerous predators.

The planet didn't have much to offer, and it became a backwater world with a small, peaceful population. No rare minerals and a rather unfortunate location made it a little-known world, nothing more than a dot on the map. With time, people started to invest more money in the planet – the first resorts, hotels and casinos appeared. The marketing campaign attracted the first tourists, who, overwhelmed by the natural beauty of the planet, came back, with their friends. Thanks to the responsible actions of corporations, noble families and guilds, a vacation on Cor became 'in' among the elites of the nearby star systems.

But promoting the planet as a fashionable resort was not approved of by the rulers of the Horizon system. The government of Ash, heads of noble houses and guild leaders were aware of the existence of the Black Pyramid, and suspected that there was a great danger connected to this structure. Some research expeditions trying to discover its secret disappeared without trace, as did the troops sent to rescue them. Instead of taking unnecessary risks, it was decided to surround the Pyramid with a cordon of troops, and to build a research institute to investigate this strange building. Despite years of hard work, this had no success. In fact, the most information about what could be hidden inside the Black Pyramid was

obtained when the Earth was destroyed. No one questioned then the decision to increase Cor's military forces tenfold.

Sooner or later, the attack was inevitable. A powerful fleet of void krakens and other spawn of the Devourer appeared on the edges of the system. It moved, to surprise of everyone who didn't know about the existence of the Pyramid, towards Cor, the poorest planet of Horizon system. The fleet defended the system valiantly, but it couldn't stop the Horde from landing on the planet.

The Horde beasts started to breed explosively, mutating to adjust to conditions on the planet. Although two decades have passed since the Battle of Cor, humanity still keeps watch, preventing the Horde from accessing Mesu's grave. Each year, thousands of troopers sacrifice their lives to defend the planet, seldom realizing that the objective of the war is not the destruction of the Horde, but preventing them from awakening another deity.

1. GENERAL DESCRIPTION

Cor is one big battlefield. Each day, thousands of Horde beasts attack human outposts, usually dying under massed plasma weapon fire. Occasionally it's the humans who attack – to destroy places where monsters hatch, to recover lost forts and bases, or to provoke the beasts to more risky maneuvers and protect the movements of other formations. The war is more like a scuffle than a real clash of arms – the front line as such does not exist, and it has been replaced by the idea of a "danger zone". This area is over 1/3 of Cor's landmass, and half of the danger zone is territory completely overrun by monsters. Basically, this means that the Horde can attack any

human construction on the planet, even if it's hundreds of miles from the danger zone.

THE HORDE

Everyone is afraid of death. Some can accept the vision of a death with dignity, in their own bed. They can imagine a sudden death, due to an accident. But only a few can control their fear when they imagine that they might be killed by one of the vile, blasphemous beasts serving the Devourer. Which is one of the reasons why Corite soldiers are considered the bravest people in the Galaxy.

An average soldier – one that does not have any special talents increasing his survival chances – is able to survive around three months, and kill about a hundred monsters. Many die in their first conflict – bad luck, probably. The veterans aren't completely accounted for, but it's highly unlikely that more than 100 soldiers would remember the Battle of Cor. The massive advantage provided by modern technology is often not enough to grant certain victory on this jungle world. Attacks of the Horde on fortified human positions end in total destruction of all the monsters 99 times out of 100. The problem is the sheer number of creatures – to these mindless beasts, it doesn't matter whether they destroy a camp after five or sixty-five attacks, all that matters is that another human outpost has been destroyed.

The determination of the Horde monsters, the appearance of ever stranger, scarier and more adaptable monsters as well as the conditions on the planet are the chief reasons why so few people decide to defend the planet. The army is composed chiefly of mercenaries on short-term contracts, or soldiers sent from distant areas of Galaxy. It seems that only by the introduction of heavy equipment, and using weapons of mass destruction, could mankind completely destroy the servants of the Devourer. Of course, something would first have to push the generals to use nuclear or other similar weapons, which would indeed destroy the Horde on Cor, but would also turn the planet into a dead, radioactive desert.



Use in play: The Horde is the basic reason for everything that happens on Cor. The beasts constantly attack human positions, attempt to expand their territory, and try to fight their way through to the Great Pyramid of Black Iron. The army's task is far harder. First, it can't allow Mesu to awaken, which ties down a significant part of the army, dedicated to watching the sepulcher of the imprisoned deity. Second, it must protect other key locations, like army research institutes, those cities that are still inhabited and the three starports. Third, it can't just focus on defense – its goal is to destroy the Horde and free Cor from its paws and tentacles.

There are numerous stories you can tell using the theme of the defense of Cor. Rescue or scouting missions, rapid assaults or finding important information about the Horde are just a few examples of adventures you can run on this planet. Just about everything is at least loosely connected to the military (for instance, power struggles in the high command) can be linked to the Horde and introduced to the game.

DESERTED CITIES

The towns weren't that rich – most of them consisted of a few small huts surrounding beautiful hotels – but the people were reluctant to leave them. The prospect of settling on another world, building everything over again from the ground up, caused not only depression and resignation, but also panic. Some decided to take a chance and stayed on Cor, trying to live their previous lives. Raids by the Horde quickly taught them that even the most demeaning job outside the Horizon system is better than being devoured by a horde of ravenous monstrosities. In just the few years since the Battle of Cor, all the inhabitants have been evacuated. All that remains are a small group of paranoid madmen (quickly eaten by monsters), and a few inhabitants of the cities on the Kusala archipelago, thousands of miles from the danger zone.

Use in play: The deserted cities of Cor can be the backdrop for a reconnaissance mission. Player characters can find themselves in a ruined town while following completely different orders. And if the town is inhabited by a strange cult worshipping the dark deities, or a small group of deserters hiding from justice, a seemingly random stop can become a basis for an entire adventure.

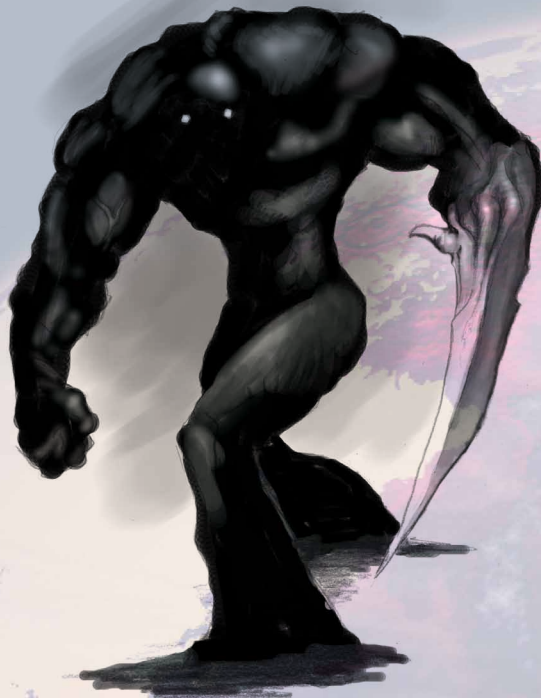
SLEEPING ON COR

There is no other planet with a greater number of insomniacs. The problem was evident even when the colony was being settled. Technicians installing the terraformers could only stay on the planet for a couple of months. Some left after that long, simply

a little more nervous than before – others left in plastic bags, after more or less spectacular suicides. Others lost their minds, and were transported to psychiatric wards where they lived on, babbling about monsters crawling through their dreams.

It turned out that these nightmares were quite real.

Cor is the tomb of Mesu, Master of Death. He can send dreams to people nearby (anywhere on the surface of the entire planet). The closer he is to a mortal, the worse the nightmares. In the vicinity of the Great Pyramid of Black Iron, he is able to force hallucinations even on people who are awake – which is one of the reasons why his prison is mined and isolated from the rest of Cor, and the troops guarding the tomb are stationed so far away from the structure. No one would be able to stay sane so close to Mesu himself. Rumors have it that the only constant guardians of Mesu's grave are cyborgs, delivered to Horizon by



Infinity. The corporation, naturally, denies that any connection with Cor's armed forces.

The god of death does not send nightmares to humans just to torture them. Their minds are a tasty treat for him – Mesu can't resist analyzing how humans react to their nightly tortures, and the deity prepares for direct confrontation with humankind. He thinks that the Horde will free him soon, and then he'll make humans suffer in reality like they do in dreams now.

Use in play: The nightmares can drive people to suicide, but more often they cause a slow descent into insanity – a very nasty form of madness indeed. Mesu tries to alter the spirit of his victims and force them to harm other humans, which the GM can use in many ways. Theoretically, the GM could introduce nightmares haunting the player characters, but that isn't especially interesting in the long run. The best solution is to limit the influence of nightmares to NPCs being altered by the god of death – their madness can be revealed in many ways. Violent soldiers, trying to commit the most spectacular suicide possible, mad doctors killing the wounded instead of saving them, and commanders with delusions of immortality hiding in the jungle are just a few examples of such NPCs. The Game Master can also manipulate the friends and foes of the heroes and change their personalities.

A PLAGUE OF LIVING DEAD

For the Cor veterans, fighting the Horde is nothing compared to withstanding attack by their own dead comrades-in-arms, which are sometimes used against the contingent guarding the Pyramid. The power of Mesu grew when the first living transporters of the Horde broke through human defences and infected Cor with their vile passengers. From that day, on the god of death was able to infect the soldiers stationed on the planet. He poisons the dead with his venom, calling them back in a twisted parody of life. Just the sight of the walking dead causes troops to lose their fighting spirit. The awareness that they themselves can become monsters and attack their

former friends paralyzes the soldiers. They still fight because they have to, but the pride that once elated humans defending Cor has left their hearts.

In the first years after the Battle of Cor the sight of an undead creature was something uncommon. The army knew about this new development, but it seemed that zombies weren't going to become a major threat. Indeed, initially their number wasn't that high, but thanks to a couple of aggressive attacks by the Horde, Mesu was able to control tens of thousands of the living dead. What's worse is that now the deity is able to reanimate slain monsters of the Devourer.

Humans just can't understand why Mesu's creations move despite the loss of all bodily functions. There are dozens of hypotheses; some people claim that the bodies of the undead are infected by small microbes serving the god of dead. This might be confirmed by the fact that living people who managed to survive sooner or later joined Mesu's host, even if no-one and nothing killed them. Another theory suggests the use of the powers of Lij – that these so-called 'bacteria' are simply nanobots transformed by Lij. Other theories usually blame unspecified 'black magic', which is not really an explanation.

Regardless of what causes the phenomenon of the living dead, or what controls the zombies, one thing is sure – the cure for the disease must be found. Otherwise, the planet will have to be quarantined – or maybe even all life must be purged from it.

Use in play: The undead can appear in many survival-horror adventures – confined spaces, no backup from allies and a specific mission to perform would force the players to use considered tactics instead of a full frontal assault.

Finding an answer to the question of the origin of the undead – whether it's rituals, a disease or something else – can be the basis for an entire campaign. The player characters would delve into forgotten research labs, contact scientists living in the far corners of the Galaxy, and even beat some pieces of the answer out of Mesu's cultists. What will the heroes do when all the pieces of the puzzle are in place, and it turns out that the source of the plague is a certain artifact hidden inside the



Black Pyramid? Will they risk their lives to find the item which grants the sleeping god the power of commanding the dead?

2. ORGANIZATIONS

I don't fight because I want to devote my life to the army. I don't fight for money or glory. I don't want to become an officer. What I want is to blast all the monsters on Cor to Hell and back, to clear the planet from this hellspawn – to restore the Cor from before the Battle. Revenge? Revenge is just a small bonus.

Sergeant Kate Rush, Cor Army

There is almost no-one on Cor who is not connected to the army. Most towns and villages are deserted, and the planet is inhabited by soldiers, madmen and bored millionaires, determined to

survive an exciting adventure and willing to sacrifice their lives just to hunt some crawlers.

THE GENGINEERS' LODGE

Founded by scientists working for Infinity, the Lodge is a brotherhood of the finest minds in genetics, with a mutual aim – to learn about the true nature of the Horde, to discover how the hundreds of species in the Horde think, and to find effective ways to destroy the beasts.

The Lodge has the tacit support of the army, which is why its members can freely move around Cor, receive any information on the monsters of the Devourer from military databases, and can receive protection from the elite troopers of the army. Soldiers view gengineers as nosy freeloaders, doing everything to obtain another “extraordinarily interesting sample” from the bodies of monsters – even at the cost of human lives. Indeed, some Lodge members are very detached from the suffering of the combatants, seeing them only as a tool for finding and eliminating beasts which are later promptly dissected. But if you consider the prime goal of this organization, you can understand why the scientists make the decisions they do. They may be harming individuals to help all mankind.

Doctor Wolfgang Ainer Rudolf Ellberg – one of the most famous genetic engineers of recent years, famous as the man who transformed the genome of a clone (giving it incredible fitness), without changing the organism significantly enough to preclude soul transfer to the new body. This technology is still too expensive and unreliable to be widely used – it's restricted only to the elites. Doctor Ellberg leads a research team based on a space station orbiting the planet. Officially, they're trying to analyze the genetic code of Horde spawn – unofficially they are conducting final tests on a virus supposedly able to destroy the servants of the Devourer.

THE ARMY

It seems implausible that the planet inhabited by less than two million people could manage to create an army composed of over 400 thousand troopers – but that was the headcount of the forces fighting against the Horde shortly after the Battle of Cor. Even if we consider the complicated system of fealties and dependencies which linked the planet to various organizations working within the Horizon system, and even in other systems, they were definitely much too large for a small tourist colony. Most people think it's some kind of the conspiracy by the rich – and strangely enough, they're right. The reason why the governments of over sixty planets spend money to support this great army is the existence of the Great Pyramid of Black Iron. The costs of training, supporting and maintaining this army are nothing compared with the risk of awakening another deity.

The present army of Cor is a mish-mash of troopers serving in dozens of different formations. Most of them were transported to the front line of the Horde conflict against their will, some were bribed, and the rest were recruited from among fanatics willing to give their lives in defense of the mankind. Initially, the officers were mostly older, experienced men – people unable to make decisions quickly, more used to conventional wars. They were bolstered by the new graduates of the best military academies. Most of them died in the first months of war; the remaining ones are the most famous officers in the entire army. They're supported by specialists in many fields, from engineering to botany (some of them spying on the group) and a group of psionics. The result was of course a mish-mash of forces, unable to effectively coordinate their tactics. The high command made a risky decision – the army was divided into small units, each charged with protecting a certain area. Most of them managed to stay alive and hold their positions. With time, the situation on Cor began to stabilize and individual units started to join forces into larger groups. After three years of war a relatively stable structure coalesced, and with some modification it's used to this day.

THE STRUCTURE

The bulk of the army is light infantry equipped with plasma weapons. Heavier formations couldn't move freely in the hot and steamy jungles of Cor, and heavy armor wasn't that much protection against the claws and teeth of the monsters. The soldiers didn't focus on defense but on offense, due to the common use of plasma weapons. Traditional firearms required two or three shots to kill a single crawler, but a plasma rifle needed only one shot.

The troops were transported to their objectives during actions in many ways. Once, ground transporters were preferred, but small flying transporters proved to be more useful – faster, able to move over difficult terrain, and able to carry not only soldiers, but also heavy equipment. Landing was initially difficult, but the pilots soon learned that dropping a small bomb on the landing zone not only clears it of plant life, but also of monster life.

Infantry can't win the war on its own. It's supported by dozens of different specialist forces, from support troops using heavy weapons and air elements able to bombard a chosen area just a few minutes after being called for, to engineers building fortifications. The level of cooperation between these units varies, but the success of the high command is the creation of this structure, defining the chain of command and the responsibilities of particular units.

FAMOUS UNITS

The army's spin doctors realized ages ago that you can present specific army units as brands worth investing in. Big posters of soldiers wearing recognizable uniforms, blasting the demonized enemy by the hundreds, have always appealed to impressionable kids and their imaginations. Indeed, demanding training, good equipment and being led by skilled officers has resulted in the well-deserved reputation of such troops. In modern times there are no armies without at least few units famous for decades, if not centuries, of service. Thousands of new recruits dream of serving in such units one day, but of course only a few of them will be able to turn these dreams into reality. Most of them will

serve as infantry troops, whose only distinguishing marks are their number, battle-cry and symbols.

The Cor command has always focused on usefulness of the army, its potential and real attack power, rather than propaganda applications. Elite units in the Cor Army are famous not because of posters and advertising, but thanks to their deeds. A soldier serving in such a unit has good reason to be proud. Joining such a formation as a rank-and-file trooper is often a greater honor than obtaining officer rank. There are at least a few thousand lieutenant on Cor, but less than a thousand elite soldiers. Each such soldier is worth far more than a hundred recruits – if only because training

and equipping them costs far more than training and equipping a hundred privates.

The Scorpions – This unit is composed of the fifty toughest, biggest and meanest guys in the entire Cor army. Each of them carries more equipment than an ordinary human could lift – and the Scorpions claim that it's far too little. This is a special heavy weapons unit – devoted to destroying monsters too heavily armored for regular soldiers. Apart from an Assault Plasma Rifle each Scorpion carries something with a bigger kick – a TPC, a plasma cannon or another big gun. Their tactics usually boil down to shooting the enemy until it stops moving.

The Haunts – when even the Scorpions can't defeat an especially tough opponent, the Haunts – a squadron of elite fighter pilots – come in. They're able to work real wonders with their fighters – and the fact that they're able to freely maneuver in Cor's jungles proves that. The infantrymen claim that for the Haunts war is easy, but if they see recordings from their missions, they quickly change their minds. Dropping bombs or shooting enemies from above is often possible only when the fighters descend to really low levels, directly above the tops of the trees... and many beasts are waiting for just such occasions. The small creatures jump on planes, trying to hold onto the machines, get into the cockpits and devour the humans who bring death from above onto their fellow monsters.

The Ghosts – predicting the actions of the Horde is the key to victory. The Cor Army possesses advanced technology allowing them to detect major groups of these creatures, but to predict small, fast-moving raids it must use more traditional methods. The Ghosts are soldiers, scouts and hunters of beasts – they're able to survive in the jungles of Cor for months without any support. Their task is observing monsters, estimating their numbers and predicting attacks on human positions. Not many people dream of becoming one of the Ghosts – fame and glory are useless after death, the destiny of every member of this unit. To this day, every Ghost has died painfully.

The Golden Eagles – just the armor tells the Horde that attacking these troops is not the best



idea. White armor ornamented with gold and red capes show that this unit does not eliminate its targets from behind the lines. The Golden Eagles are the best sharpshooters on Cor – fights with the vile beasts are usually over before they manage to reach the Eagles. Sometimes the monsters get close enough to engage in close combat – and then the soldiers grab their powered blades and chop the monsters to pieces. Theoretically, the Horde should win in hand-to-hand combat – but the Golden Eagles are just too badass.

FAMOUS COMMANDERS

A single man can be the reason why an ordinary unit becomes more famous than many supposedly “elite” troops. A good officer knows when he can take risks, when to avoid it, and when to require sacrifices from his or her men – including the ultimate sacrifice. Intelligence, the ability to predict the actions of their opponents, flexible plans and loyalty to one’s own soldiers is enough to ensure absolute respect among common troopers. In the conditions on Cor, the soldiers’ trust is essential for an officer to really command. But a single mistake can cost the commander everything – authority, respect, dignity, rank – and often life.

Katherine Anabelle Rush – a long time ago she stopped being a pampered daddy’s girl, the child of one of Cor’s tourist magnates. Life, and specifically the Horde, has taught her that if you want something, you have to fight for it. She serves in the army for several reasons – she wants to take revenge on the Devourer for her ruined childhood and murdered family, and she needs acceptance, which she has found nowhere else. Besides, she’s good at what she does – which is commanding a small squad of veterans. They say that Kate’s never lost a soldier due to a mistake – her reputation as a smart and reasonable sergeant attracts many volunteers to her team.

In another life, Katherine could be a duchess – but not one that deals with gossiping, shouting at servants or hosting balls. Miss Rush is as good at commanding a group of grizzled veterans, as at planning logistics for thousands of troopers. She could manage a large corporation – and perhaps

she will in the future, if she manages to clear out the Horde.

John H. Webber – this grizzled man is perhaps the only soldier in Cor Army that has managed to hold every rank – from a recruit to a general. He’s been serving in the army since he remembers, he took part in dozens of operations, always on the frontline. For almost a decade he resisted being promoted to officer, and even though he’s been a general for three years he still claims that he’s a sergeant inside. In the army, he’s the man responsible for “difficult decisions” – he’s the commander of North Army, stationed between the Horde areas and the Black Pyramid.

Marrow – the immaculate career of General Marrow ended when his connections with criminal organizations on Ash and the governments of other systems were revealed. It became evident that he was selling information to at least three foreign powers. The army was quick to hush things up, and gave Marrow a choice – either defend the Pyramid, or get shot in the head. He chose to be responsible for guarding Mesu’s tomb, but quickly regretted this decision.

The imprisoned deity scrutinized the officer’s mind very thoroughly. It sent him nightmares every night, and later, when the insane Marrow moved the HQ closer to the Pyramid, every day as well. The analysis of his mind gave Mesu one important edge: the knowledge that humans are afraid of death, especially a long and painful one. Probably because of this, the living dead instead of simply killing soldiers as they did up to this point, begun to torture them.

3. MYSTERIES

For most inhabitants of Ash and Bariz, the Cor War is seen as hell, with the demons of the Horde and living dead in the foreground. They think that there are not many humans left on the surface of the planet – the only combatants are supposed to be elite forces and cyborgs. The greatest inconsistencies appear when discussing progress in fighting the servants of the Devourer. Some people claim that the war is alre-

ady lost, others predict a quick victory. The only way to learn the truth is to reach for your weapon and join the fight with the Horde yourself.

THE BLACK PYRAMID

Soldiers stationed on Cor claim to have seen a massive structure, hidden in the jungle growing over the entire southern continent. They say that on the walls of the pyramid are inscriptions placed there by a race who ruled the Galaxy before mankind. Deciphering the inscriptions is supposedly key to victory in the war with vile deities.

The truth: The Great Pyramid of Black Iron does exist, but its importance is not due to the chance of defeating the gods, but simply that controlling the Pyramid prevents the Horde from awakening another god. Scientists do investigate the Pyramid, but they have yet to find anything that would give mankind the upper hand in the war with the monsters. Mesu, the dark deity hidden inside this tomb, is still too powerful to allow the mortals to discover secrets of his imprisonment – who imprisoned him, and how.

GEO-3

It's supposedly the best-equipped laboratory in the entire Horizon system, used by the best scientists of Infinity, the government, and the army. All the research is into weapons – especially ones that could kill gods.

The truth: Geo-3 is a myth, sometimes substantiated by influential organizations in the Horizon system to distract people from the real labs. The government and the army occasionally distract the conspiracy theorists with a blurred photo or a fragment of a strange device. The research supposedly conducted in an underground laboratory is in reality conducted on Ash.

CYBORGS

It's common knowledge that the army owes its success in the war with the Horde to heavy troops, consisting of instantly-produced cyborgs. The army finally found a way to drastically reduce the time taken for preparations and soul transfer. This technology is going to revolutionize warfare, and bring victory in the war with the dark gods, if the Cor Army sells the secret to the governments of other systems.



The truth: The troops do exist, but they're not cyborgs – there is no magical process to shorten the period of at least five years of preparation and training. In the war with Horde, human troopers are backed up by heavy machinery, chiefly by light powered armor able to carry heavy plasma guns, deadly against the monstrosities of the Devourer.

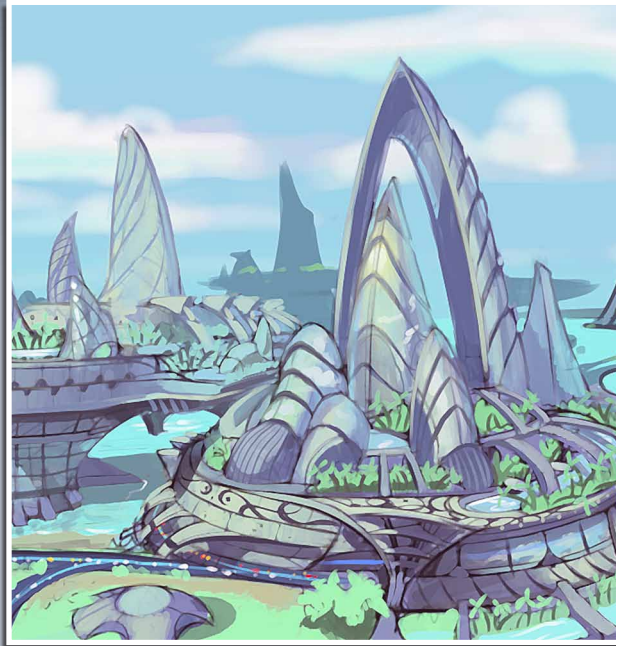
NUCLEAR NIGHTMARES

Around a year ago soldiers stationed in Jaws-2, a camp far from the danger zone, were awakened by a powerful boom. Even though none of them has noticed any explosion, the source of this incident must've been a nuclear weapon – the only weapon of mass destruction able to completely eradicate the Horde. To this very day, rumors persist that the high command decided to use this ultimate weapon because of major losses on the battlefield.

The truth: It's widely known that the only reason why the high command hasn't detonated every nuclear weapon in their arsenal is that they still hope to purge Cor of the plague of the Devourer. But only a select few know that there is another reason – the Black Pyramid, whose destruction would doubtlessly awaken Mesu. The explosion heard by soldiers at Jaws-2 was indeed the result of a nuclear explosion – but it was necessary. An important island called Arentis was infected by the Horde thanks to the reckless behavior of humans. It was not a beginning of nuclear war, but an isolated incident.

4. LOCATIONS

The planet is mostly covered by jungle or by areas of burnt, black ground created by bombs dropped on the Horde beasts and focused plasma fire. For the average man in the Galaxy, Cor is a tropical hell, where death is more common than in the worst slums of the great cities. The soldiers see this world as one great battlefield, and as a place which soon will become their grave. Only a few see something more in



Cor. For them, the planet is not just full of forests inhabited by vile beasts, but also deserted resorts, forgotten laboratories, tropical islands and the prison of Death. For anyone who visits Cor, one thing is clear – life on this planet is a constant struggle, a game where the opponents never play fair.

PALM BEACH

The world can burn, but as long as the sands of Palm Beach aren't soaked in the blood of human soldiers and monsters aren't crawling out of the ocean, surfers will visit this resort. Palm Beach is one of the few cities on Cor still inhabited – and the only one still active as a vacation resort. Before the Battle of Cor, the town had around seventy thousand inhabitants, and today this number is at least seven times smaller. But this doesn't influence the lifestyles of inhabitants and guests – hotels even rent double rooms for the price of a single one.

Palm Beach seems like a place from another world, a ball room on a sinking ship, where even

though the passengers have left, the orchestra is still playing. Luxurious hotels, exotic entertainments, waves perfect for surfers and the prospect of seeing Horde monsters and surviving cause the resort to be visited by almost one hundred thousand tourists each year.

THE GREAT PYRAMID OF BLACK IRON

It haunts the dreams of those who know. Every inhabitant of Ash with even the slightest psionic talent sees it in their dreams. It's driven thousands of soldiers insane. The Great Pyramid of Black Iron, the prison of a horror known as Mesu. The Grave of Death, a seal keeping the powers of the sleeping deity inside. Only a few know about it, but everyone can sense its presence.

The Pyramid is a monumental construction seemingly constructed from black iron, containing a maze of chambers and corridors, a mass of strange wires, pipes and deadly traps. Its incredibly ancient mechanisms still function - and their task is to kill everyone who tries to reach the Seal

Chamber. Some humans know that deep underground, in the center of the tangled web of corridors, there's a chamber containing a Seal binding the dark deity. They discovered a strange substance conserving the machinery - a strange ooze filled with something similar to nanomachines, but working in some strange, unknown way. Even now that the building has been mapped, there are still some people disappearing without trace inside. Echoes carry insane screams, but it's impossible to find their place of origin.

The Pyramid is a prison designed to bind the mind and body of Mesu. It still radiates an evil aura so strong that anyone remaining near it long enough will lose their mind and be driven insane. That's why this is a cursed place where expendable soldiers are sent. Almost a quarter of a million soldiers protect the Pyramid from a possible Horde attack. Every single one of them is insane, but the madness of an ordinary soldier is nothing compared to the warped mind of the commander of the garrison, General Marrow. Only a completely insane man would be able to impose order at the gates of the tomb of death.





CHAPTER 9:
TOUR DE GALAXY

"YOU ARE ASKING ABOUT AQUA, LAD? YOU CAN BET I WAS THERE.
I VISITED ALMOST ALL THE INTERESTING PLACES IN THIS FUCKIN' GALAXY.

IF I CAN BRING YOU THERE?
IN NO TIME, BUT IT WILL COST YOU A BIT..."

JENNER, INDEPENDENT MERCHANT.

The Galaxy isn't just flying cities, the tombs of sleeping deities or massive skyscrapers hundreds of feet tall. This chapter describes those locations known to the inhabitants of most civilized planets. Some of them are true wonders of science and engineering, others are famous because of their past, and others still because of the famous people associated with them. Any of them could form the basis of an adventure.

This chapter is divided into two parts. The first is devoted to interesting places beyond the Horizon system (though close enough to appear in your campaign). The second describes lesser-known locations in the system *Nemezis* focuses on.

The less important places are described in a single paragraph, showing their most important traits. The more essential locations are all described using the same pattern. The first paragraph is a short description of the place – what it is, where you can find it, or how you could reach it. The other paragraphs are:

Rumors – how a typical inhabitant of the Galaxy sees the location. The information in this section need not necessarily be true – however it is what the man on the street believes about this place.

The truth – the facts about the location. This explains the information presented in earlier paragraphs, identifies which rumors are false and which are true, and lists the most important plot threads.

Story hooks – complete adventure seeds or ways to introduce the location into the scenario.

1. STAR SYSTEMS OF THE SAGITTARIUS ARM

Horizon is a solar system at the crossroads of vital trade routes – in the age of expansion of mankind, it was one of the most important star systems. Today, after the destruction of Earth and the beginning of the war with the vile deities, it has lost some of its influence, but it's hardly just another of the dozens of provincial systems doomed to backwardness and poverty. Horizon is special not just because of the Great Pyramid of Black Iron, the war with the Horde or the damaged terraformers of Ash. The system is placed in one of the richest sectors of the Galaxy, full of worlds whose governments wield influence even beyond their planets. All of them are endangered by the Horde, which doubtless will attack when Mesu is awakened. This hasn't yet caused widespread panic, and the inhabitants of these worlds are disconcerted at best. However, if no one starts any action soon, at least a dozen other systems will share Horizon's fate.

TECHNE

Settled right at the beginning of the age of colonization, Techne was initially conceived as a secret laboratory where scientists could conduct experiments forbidden by various local governments. These intentions quickly became reality – Techne soon became one of the major planets of the Milky Way, and her inhabitants became incredibly wealthy. While most solar systems officially condemned the cruel practices of her researchers, they simultaneously supported their experiments with massive amounts of money. Techne was the birthplace of ideas from which

entire branches of science were born – including engineering, which allowed not only correcting the inborn flaws of human bodies, but the modification of existing humans as well.

The golden age of *Techne* came to an end soon after the awakening of the Devourer of Worlds. The deity proved to be smarter than suspected, destroying this world soon after swallowing the Earth. Mankind lost hundreds of thousands of scientists, uncountable technologies and the largest collection of scientific data in human history. The surviving inhabitants of *Techne* are currently wandering throughout the Galaxy looking for a place to settle. Rumors claim that their goal is as simple as impossible – they want to completely recreate the *Techne*, exactly as it was, even though it'll take centuries of work, since planetary construction is still just a dream.

AQUA

As the name implies, the surface of this planet is completely covered with water. If not for the massive amounts of precious substances hidden deep under the sea, Aqua would never have been settled. Yet, scouting probes detected deposits of precious ores and rare substances so massive that many risked their money and invested it in the undersea mines.

Aqua does not have a breathable atmosphere, and therefore the entire population lives deep under the surface or above it, in small flying cities using the same technology as on Bariz. In orbit around the planet there are a couple of main space stations and around a hundred lesser stations owned by private tourist companies. (For some reason, Aqua became a significant tourist attraction.)

A couple of years ago this boring, completely insignificant planet suddenly became very interesting – in the worst sense of the word. The teams repairing the transmission circuits encountered strange constructions on the bottom of the ocean. Initially it was thought that these were the remnants of the first settlers, but the ruins were too old, coming from before the colonization age. People started to suspect that this might be the



tomb of yet another deity. Access to the ruins has been blocked. Dozens of submarines and thousands of automated probes guard the construction from any fanatic or madman. Even though people have been wary, something has gone wrong. In the waves of the ocean there have appeared a few as yet unknown species – massive predators armed with jaws full of sharp teeth, able to bite through the armor of any boat.

It's not known what these beings are. Perhaps they've always lived in the waters of Aqua, but no one has encountered them before or surveyed their territories. However, they cause too many unanswered questions to accept "they've always been here" as an explanation. Everything seems to support the theory that these creatures are servants of some vile deity. War seems to be only a matter of time.

THÉNARD

Thénard is a diamond on the map of the Galaxy, the richest world known, inhabited by over thirty billion people, and for centuries associated only with trade, money and terror. It's held in the iron grip of a clique called the Senate – the greatest problem of the Galaxy, a tyrannical regime practically impossible to fight. A massive army, completely loyal to the government, shatters any dreams of destroying the Senate and freeing the populace. Thousands of trade treaties between Thénard and other major systems convince their governments that it's better not to risk war and ignore the reign of terror. The awareness that this is the only planet able to construct new terra-

formers convinces the rest of the Galaxy that the populace of Thénard has to suffer so that mankind can grow.

RUMORS

Thénard is like a cake with a bear trap hidden inside. Beautiful, almost perfect from the outside – but really it’s a deadly trap. The citizens are treated like robots – and after all, the word ‘robot’ used to mean ‘worker’ in one of the ancient languages. Sure, they smile and nod politely to offworlders, but their only alternative is summary execution. And confessing to aliens is not the only way to end up six feet underground. The surveillance system, using a network of TV cameras, microphones and bugs placed in all public spaces, as well as more modern devices (including the satellite network) is extremely efficient in finding rebels and agitators. The government of Thénard has reached the pinnacle of the art of monitoring and controlling its citizens.

It’s totalitarianism in its purest form. The rulers of thirty billion souls have created the perfect system of terror, controlling practically everyone. No-one dreams about freedom – just about a relatively calm future where people could think their own thoughts. Sadly, reality ignores their wishes – specially-trained psionic squads hunt the thoughtcriminals and give them away to the police. The law of Thénard does not see a difference between thoughts and words, and so the unfortunate citizen unlucky enough to be targeted by the agents usually ends up in the mines, or simply dead.

The only suspicious thing is why the rest of Galaxy looks at Thénard so calmly and without indignance.

THE TRUTH

The rumours about Thénard are hardly exaggerated. The planet has been governed by the Senate for over two hundred years – a group of a few dozen influential citizens, who thanks to their intelligence, willpower and courage were

able to seize control of the richest world in the Galaxy. They risked a lot, but smart planning and patience discouraged everyone from openly acting against them. Everyone cold-blooded enough to order “unofficial” actions was murdered. Soon, it was too late even to try to resist – the Senate already controlled the army, the police, the psionic foundations and the media. No one could leave Thénard without a special pass – given only to spies and fanatics who were supposed to assassinate the few dissidents in other systems. Tourists became less and less common – which was initially explained as a matter of “national security”, and later not explained at all. Eventually, everyone knew about the changes on Thénard, but the fate of the planet’s citizens was simply ignored. What mattered was business, and terraforming was one of the new government’s pet projects.

Thénard is a place where numerous industrial complexes produce everything a human being could need – from food, vehicles, weapons and electronics to terraformers. This is the only planet that still develops the technology of terraforming planets, and one of the last few still training the engineers able to program, maintain and repair terraforming engines. The money coming from colonization is more important to the majority of governments than the fate of a single world’s inhabitants, so no-one protests against the activities of the Senate; at best governments issue diplomatic notes, to show their anxiety and concern about the limited access to information.

Thénard – both the planet and the system – is an impenetrable fortress. The government maintains an army so massive that if just one tenth of their fleet had been used in the Battle of Cor, the human forces would have destroyed the Horde in a matter of hours. The military might of Thénard is just one more reason why the rulers of the Galaxy do not even think about destroying the Senate – the war would be too long and bloody.

STORY HOOKS

■ The PCs are sent to Thénard as the bodyguards of a merchant guild intending to make a deal with the Senate. Soon after their arrival the-

ir charge is arrested and disappears in mysterious circumstances, and the characters find themselves chased by the planetary police. Will the heroes be able to escape the totalitarian state and discover the reason their boss was imprisoned?

■ Infinity is influential in many areas of the Galaxy – including Thénard. A brilliant researcher sent to one of their academies disappears. The heroes are supposed to find him – but will they succeed in a world where thoughts are as treasonous as deeds?

QYRIA

In many respects Qyria is like Ash – both planets were terraformed, their inhabitants are concentrated in great metropolises and criminal organizations are the only truly organized powers. The difference is that on Ash the greed of Syndicate is kept in check by the corporations and the government, while on Qyria nothing limits the power of the mob.

In the Galaxy Qyria is famed as a world where art is seamlessly combined with technology. The planet produces various luxury products in small, but extremely profitable quantities. Qyria is famous for many things, but in the Horizon system it's most renowned for its artistic models of melee weapons, incredibly effective energy shields and personal armor, made especially for duelists.

RUMORS

I've lived here for ten years or so – ten years too long. Qyria is a mad place, constantly speeding downhill towards a giant chasm, but so far no one has realized that there are no brakes. The planet is the scene of constant clashes between various criminal organizations, currently dominated by the Syndicate. Yes, the very same Syndicate that does not officially exist on Ash. A decade ago, no-one on Qyria had heard about the organization, and now everyone is afraid of it. Apparently the bosses of the Syndicate aren't going down with Horizon – if that's the case, they've picked a great place to move to.

Qyria lacks the potential Ash had in its glory days, but you can earn really good money here – maybe even more than in the Horizon system.

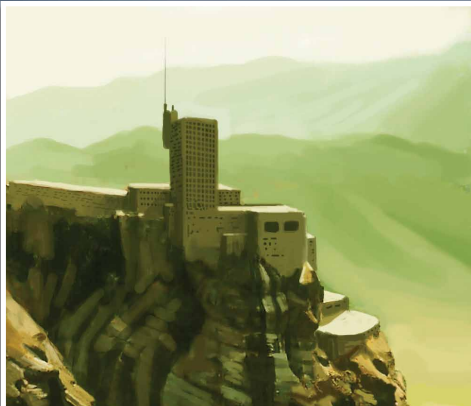
The goods made by local armorers, cyberneticists and jewelers are selling like hot cakes. It only needs organization and “protection”, and the money will flow like a river.

THE TRUTH

Qyria is a star system very much in the Syndicate's sphere of interest. Far enough from the Horizon system that a potential Horde attack would be impossible – at least in the next few decades – it seems to be an ideal place for the mob's next headquarters. If the clans manage to remove other competing groups, Qyria will become their new home.

The world's technology level is very high, and terraforming ended over two centuries ago. People are concentrated in massive cities, leaving the rest of the verdant planet to itself. Most of the landmass is covered by forests – it might be the home of every single species of trees in the Galaxy. Even though the population of Qyria is around half a billion people, farming here is purely symbolic – all needs, including nutritional ones, are satisfied by advanced technologies.

Life on Qyria is pleasant enough, provided that your dream is owning an apartment and earning enough to keep a family. Any attempts to rise above the masses, earn more money or build a company able to compete with the existing ones will almost certainly provoke attacks by the various organizations or guilds controlling the government of the planet. Everything even remotely profitable – from the works of art, through smuggling, to illegal nanotreatments – is in the hands of the mob, the psionic foundations or other organized groups. Compared to the Syndicate, they are small fry, but to the average Qyrian they appear incredibly powerful. In recent years the situation has changed and a new player has appeared on the scene. It's only a matter of a few years until the Syndicate controls these separate organizations, swallowing them or destroying them if they resist. Their ultimate goal seems to be controlling the legal government of the planet.



LYRA

STORY HOOKS

■ The player characters are agents of the Syndicate, hired to eliminate the leader of a group trying to defend its own business. A short investigation discovers that this person is a member of Infinity's management, hiding under a false identity. Will the heroes risk angering the powerful corporation? Why is Infinity interested in Qyria?

■ A holiday on Qyria might not be the best thing since sliced bread, but it's still better than a monotonous life on Ash. On board a spaceship, one of the passengers has been brutally murdered. In Qyrian orbit, an investigator arrives to find the murderer. The question is why is he ignoring the obvious evidence and trying to prove guilty a man who couldn't have committed the crime? Who is the real murderer, and why does the government of Ash want to protect him or her?

■ On the borders of the Qyrian system, a small number of Horde creatures have appeared, and more and more people are thinking about evacuation. Are the servants of the Devourer really about to attack the planet, or is it only a probe? If someone is really trying to cause an invasion, why?

LYRA

Lyra is a world that failed. Divided into dozens of mutually hostile factions, the planet died in a nuclear inferno caused by its inhabitants. Over three centuries ago, every single lifeform was totally annihilated. Everything beautiful on Lyra was gone, hidden under a shell of glassy sand.

Today there's nothing there except for mutants, ruins, and bunkers hidden deep underground. Until recently, Lyra was visited only by madmen trying to investigate the mysteries of the planet, especially the blueprints for war machines, once a famous export of the world; or deluded hermits hoping to find peace of mind on a dead world – and soon dying of radiation sickness.

However, recently in orbit above Lyra there appeared a massive space station, called *Dawn* by its owner, an eccentric billionaire named Woe. On board *Dawn* many of the best minds of the Galaxy are trying to find a way to restore life on Lyra. The owner of the station dreams of seeing the former beauty of Lyra once more – but most people assume this is just another rich man's folly.

2. HORIZON AND ITS ENVIRONS

The Horizon system is not just three inhabited planets, but also dozens of lesser objects. Some orbit Ash, Bariz and Cor, others are small bases on planets unsuitable for terraforming. Old landing pads, forgotten research stations, and the concealed hideouts of smugglers are all traces left by humans on the outskirts of the system.

Many of them are irrelevant, but could still become the backdrop for an adventure. Others are widely known to almost all the inhabitants of Horizon, many of which dream of visiting them some day. Such locations could be the central point for an entire campaign, or recurring themes if the characters return to them often.

ORBITER-2

High above the surface of Ash there circles a space station for loading housing and reloading

goods and passengers. This old station, often rebuilt, is the second structure to serve in this position – the previous one was destroyed a few decades before the Battle of Cor.

Initially, the Orbiter station was intended to prevent dangerous people and illegal goods reaching the planetary surface. The Syndicate changed that – and today the station is a kind of refuge, a place to rest for travelers, and a hideout for people on the run from the law or influential enemies. It's a place for anyone who can pay 100 eagles a night and leaves their ranged weapons aboard their ship (non-lethal and melee weapons are allowed).

RUMORS

People say that Orbiter isn't safe anymore. The Syndicate left ages ago, and the security forces stay in their own sectors, not willing to risk encountering inhabitants of the worse sectors, full of fugitives, psychopaths and mercenaries. Rumor has it that there are even cultists hiding among the usual madmen. It's hard to believe it, especially after the Battle of Cor, that anyone is deluded enough to believe that you could save your life by selling your soul to the gods. Yet, during the last weeks many people have been found massacred, their bodies eviscerated. Some say it wasn't the cultists, but mercenaries killing the poor to sell their organs for transplants, but that just seems ridiculous.

Regardless, nobody cares about these poor, gutted scum. Until it's the son or daughter of some honcho, everyone will pretend that the station is just the way it used to be – dangerous, but still better than being on the planet. Orbital is a great place to hide from bounty hunters (though in the end, they can find anyone.) or to rest up before an interplanetary journey. It's a neutral zone for negotiations, or recuperating after a tough mission or implanting a new nanotreatment.

THE TRUTH

Orbiter-2 somewhat resembles the poorest district of a massive metropolis - where someone has built a modern business park. In its time, the



station worked smoothly, and was a place of peace and order – but that was a long time ago, before the Battle of Cor and the first malfunctions of Ash's terraformers. Today, each of the nine sectors has separate owners – three belong to different clans of the Syndicate, two to private companies, one (the central hub, the one in the best condition) belongs to the military, while the rest are home to independent merchants, entrepreneurs and others.

The station is not only a den of bandits, madmen and cultists, but also a neutral zone where representatives of influential organizations in the system (including Barizian nobles) can meet safely. Orbiter-2 is still a place which transfers a lot of resources – and most of the money and goods here come from smuggling. The most popular cargo is military equipment, transported straight from Cor, especially military implants, which can be safely implanted in one of the station's clinics. Of course, this service includes not only the operation, but also recuperation. There is even a possibility of telepathic therapy to speed up the process of assimilating the implant. The costs of such services are slightly higher than on Ash, but the skills of specialists inhabiting the Orbiter lower the risk to near zero –the price even includes bribes for the military.

Curiously, much of the wreckage of the earlier station (Orbiter-1) is still inhabited. Many modules have been sealed and equipped with autonomous life-support systems powered by solar pan-

els. Currently, they're a home for various groups of outcasts, including deserters escaping from the horrors of the Horde, and researchers who previously worked for the Cor Army; but mostly they're eccentric artists who want to work alone, or "families" – small sects grouped around a charismatic leader.

STORY HOOKS

■ The heroes have to find a brilliant scientist who lived on the station just a few years ago. It turns out that he moved to one of the modules of Orbiter-1, and later he joined one of the sects. The leader of the "family" is a psion wanted in several neighboring systems, using powers to gain "worshippers" who'll provide him with a comfortable life.

■ One or more of the characters is having a new cyber-device implanted in an Orbiter-2 clinic. During the preparations, the clinic is attacked by a group of unknown individuals (cultists or organ harvesters) – the heroes have to defend themselves without armor or weapons.

■ An investigation starting on Ash directs the bounty hunting heroes to Orbital-2. Their target is a smuggler, backed by the military. Will they be able to capture him alive? And if they succeed, will the station be available to them in the future?

■ The army on Cor is getting smaller, and the military needs new recruits. The commanders decide that the easiest way to expand the army is to capture the worst scum or random people, and force them to enlist. Will the heroes, suddenly torn from cold but relatively safe Ash make it as Corite soldiers?

THE VAN RYANT MINE

For centuries, the Van Ryant family was famous for its power and wealth. Around twenty years ago, the last of the family, Armand Van Ryant, decided to invest a massive amount of money in an automated mining station on the surface of Renari, a moon of Dys, the largest planet in the Horizon system. Though that investment was risky, it was supposed to break even after five years of operation – but Van Ryant didn't live to

see the day. Eleven years ago, all his family was murdered by members of the Syndicate and all its wealth was taken by the influential leaders of that organization.

Shortly after they took over the station, the first problems appeared – initially insignificant ones, later more serious malfunctions, requiring the constant presence of technicians. Seven years ago, 19 out of 22 workers were killed in an accident, and the remaining three left the system a short time afterwards. The station was abandoned.

RUMORS

This perfect hideout couldn't have stayed empty all this time. Some claim that recently it was used as a warehouse by smugglers trading equipment between the army and various mercenary corps. Equipment not needed on Cor was being sold for big money, and everybody won – the army, the intermediaries, and the mercs. Some time ago the exchange stopped, but some of the military equipment was left in the mines, and is probably still there.

Yet, no-one sane thinks about stealing from the station. There is something out there which terrifies not only ordinary scavengers but also experienced soldiers. It's not known whether it's a rogue robot, a spawn of the Horde or something worse. In the mine there is something that murders people in a slow, painful way. A few groups of bounty hunters tried to clean out the mines – only one survivor was ever seen alive. This mercenary, crippled and mad with fear, was babbling something about a metallic monster hunting people, supposedly capturing them alive and torturing them for days, keeping them alive thanks to some strange medical equipment.

THE TRUTH

The Van Ryant mine is an example of an investment where everyone skimmed on the essentials. Everything there was flawed in some way, starting from the design, through the experimental mining programs, to the mining equipment. It was a miracle that the station worked

at all – sooner or later it would have shut down, requiring serious repairs.

The station was not financed by Armand Van Ryant himself; almost half of the cost was covered by independent investors – in reality, figureheads for the Syndicate. When it turned out that the mine would bring them only losses, the family of Van Ryant was eliminated and their money was confiscated to “cover the costs” of the leaders of the criminal organization.

No-one knows what’s going on in the mine. It’s certain that no human could live there – in the accident that killed most of the workers, the life-support systems were almost completely destroyed.

STORY HOOKS

■ The mine has been poisoned by Lij. The goddess has modified the program controlling the automated systems on the station – it was her who caused all the malfunctions, including the last one, culminating with the death of all technicians. The heroes have been hired by the Syndicate to turn off and repair the computers in the station. Will they be able to avoid all the traps of the Poisoner?

■ Despite the malfunctions, the automated mine has been working all the time. In its warehouses there are immense amounts of priceless materials – the only problem is reaching them. The heroes can earn a massive amount of money, if only they’re able to survive in an environment hostile to life.

■ The heroes are chasing a group of criminals, who decide to hide in the Van Ryant mine. Will the characters be brave enough to land in a place that seems to kill everyone connected to it?

CROSSROADS

Only an insane proprietor would open up a bar on the deck of a line ship falling apart and unable to use its main drive. Aliys Naura, daughter of the famous Commander Rennard, is not insane, but her bar is a major argument against that. Despite everything, the idea succeeded – the *Lone Gunner*, the spaceship her father com-

manded during the Battle of Cor, was transferred into orbit around Dys, and converted into a bar for the crews of transporters moving the raw materials to the inner planets of the Horizon system. Today the Crossroads Bar is one of the few places of the system with a real soul.

Each year the decks of the former ‘Gunner’ are visited by tens of thousands of new customers. Some stop in just for a while, to refuel before landing on Ash. Others stay a while, but a few spend every free moment here, to enjoy the peace and quiet and distance from worldly matters. Some of these old timers are hired as helpers by Aliys – and it’s sometimes said that the crew of “Crossroads” is made up exclusively of Syndicate murderers, rogue scientists from Infinity, agents, spies, soldiers and former bounty hunters. And these rumors might just have a grain of truth in them.

SPACE BEACONS

Many years ago, when the only colonized planet was Bariz, one rich member of the Van Ryant family had the idea of creating a network of transmission stations. The initial idea was to help in determining the position of spaceships in the sector – but it was decided that each station should be equipped with storage space for supplies, tools, batteries and a power generator – that is, the basic equipment for saving human lives. Each station would also be manned by a human crew. The idea was ridiculed from the very beginning – who would want to spend entire months with only a few other people, or completely alone? To the surprise of the mockers, there was no lack of candidates. Some were tempted by the easy money, others wanted a break from the pace of the life on Bariz, others wanted to escape from the law, family or other troubles.

Over the centuries, almost one hundred stations have been built, with some orbiting over each of Ash, Bariz and Cor. Each of the other planets, moons and major planetoids also hosts at least one beacon. Furthermore, a couple were placed at major transit points, giving a chance of

rescue to the crews of damaged ships – the unfortunate people who earlier couldn't count on anything except death.

All the beacons are still functioning.

RUMORS

People say that the inhabitants of the space beacons are the weirdest people under all the suns. They occasionally talk to themselves (sometimes even singing instead of talking), constantly scratch their bodies, mumble, spit, and lick their lips. Some of them tattoo their bodies, others cut themselves, creating a network of small scars. Some of them are aggressive, but mostly they're quiet, introverted, bordering on catatonic. Only a few of them behave normally – and these are probably the worst ones.

Some of them are insane cannibals, who have murdered the real operator, poison their guests, and make tasty meals out of them. Sometimes a pirate attacks a beacon, transforms it into his lair, and prepares to attack travelers in trouble to steal their all possessions. Their career is usually very short. Anyone who has killed a beacon operator will sooner or later be hunted down and killed – often just stealing supplies from a beacon will warrant the death penalty.

THE TRUTH

Space beacons are sacred in the Horizon system. No-one sane will destroy such a station, rob it or hurt its crew – everybody knows that they were built for the common good to save lives. All crimes committed aboard them are punished much more severely than on Ash or even Bariz. The stations are theoretically under control of the Army, which prefers to sentence the robbers to death rather than risk them destroying a vital station in the future.

The operators of the beacons are indeed eccentric, but mostly harmless. Often they have access to astounding amounts of vital information – sometimes even specialized knowledge, which they share with strangers more easily than the inhabitants of the system. Some of them earn extra money by harboring the refugees, but never real

criminals wanted by the government or the people working for the Syndicate.

STORY HOOKS

■ A criminal pursued by the characters hid on board of space beacon, crewed only by his brother. The heroes don't know the exact location – they can visit all of them in order (which could take years), try to investigate former operators living on Ash, or just fly to the nearest beacon and try to get some fresh information from its crew. The question is – will they capture their target alive?

■ Alpha-17, the largest beacon station, is being attacked by cultists who want to summon some powerful servant of the Devourer of Worlds on board. No ship will be able to reach the station in time –except for the ship of the heroes, just close enough to Alpha-17. Will they decide to stop the nefarious plot of the cultists? This will certainly be a hard task – the station is miles upon miles of narrow corridors, airlocks and rooms which are not only places to hide but also to set traps.

THE BATTLEFIELD

Far above the surface of Cor, in high orbit around the planet, there circle the wrecks of hundreds of ships which took part in the battle that sealed the fate of the Horizon system. Millions of tons of metal, and organic scraps from Horde beasts, circle Cor year after year, constantly decaying or falling apart. Though this is the grave of thousands of soldiers, it's not completely dead. It attracts all sorts of scavengers trying to find functioning equipment and weapons, refugees and bounty hunters. In the labyrinth of wrecks one might find agents of the military or the Syndicate trying to find important data, or even cultists attempting to revive the body of a very nasty beast. Initially they were kept away by legends about still-living monstrosities, but now, today, when all the stories have turned out to be false, the potential visitors to the orbital graveyard are only stopped by their fear of other scavengers.

RUMORS

There is no greater concentration of wealth in the system. Thousands of ships mean tons of military-grade equipment, just waiting for brave spacers to collect it. 'Equipment' doesn't only mean guns, armor, grenades, explosives, energy shields and advanced communication modules, but also experimental cybertechnology, military spaceship components, precious information and secrets withheld from civilians. The only dangers lurking among the wrecks are the other scavengers.

Well, maybe not the only one.

Old pilots and experienced looters tell tales about a wounded void kraken – a terrible monster which, despite its wounds and limited mobility, still circles the Battlefield looking for ships it could crush with the one limb it has which still works. The creature is more of a myth than a real danger – the risk of encountering the creature is minimal, but people unlucky enough to enter its realm are not heard from again.

THE TRUTH

For a long time after the Battle of Cor the army, the governments of Horizon and other influential organizations tried not to let anyone reach the graveyard of wrecks and Horde beasts. However, no one could keep such a large region of space safe from greedy scavengers. Dozens of gangs of scavengers made massive amounts of money smuggling amazing gadgets off the battlefield. Sometimes, one trip was enough to set them up for life. Of course, apart from various military-grade cyberware, the wrecks of the ships contained something far more useful – information. Corporations from many systems have sent agents to the graveyard, and ordered them to extract any data found in the databanks of the on-board computers. The CEOs wanted to learn about the secret technologies of the Horizon military or learn the truth about the Battle of Cor – which was fairly harsh.

The power of the Horde was so massive, it was a miracle that the battle didn't end hours after the arrival of the first void krakens at the planet's or-

bit. The heroism of the fighters, the superhuman abilities of the pilots and their willingness to sacrifice their lives when necessary transformed a clash doomed to be another defeat into the first battle in history where humanity had the chance to completely obliterate the forces of the Horde. At the critical moment, the fight was joined by the forces of systems neighboring Horizon, even though their governments had previously declared that they would not send help. It seemed that the Battle would end in total human victory.

Then, on the orders of the Ancient One, a small group of cruisers broke their line and allowed some beasts of the Devourer to slip through and infect the planet. Others tried to shoot them down before they reached the surface, but the only effect of these attempts was a counterstrike by the Horde. When the last shot had been fired, all the servants of the dark gods were dead, and the fleet, which once numbered over ten thousand ships, now consisted of 111.

STORY HOOKS

■ The cemetery of wrecks is the hideout of a group of pirates attacking Syndicate ships. The PCs, agents of the Organization, are tasked with forming and commanding a mercenary group, and locating and eliminating the pirates. Will they be fortunate enough to discover the cruiser serving as the pirates' base? What will they do if they win – return the robbed goods to their superiors or keep them for themselves?

■ No-one, except the few select members of Infinity and the army, knows the genuine history of the battle of Cor. How did humans manage to destroy the massive forces of the Horde? Why did the monsters allow their own defeat? The answers to these and many other questions can be found in the databanks of the fleet's flagship. Keeping these matters secret is in the best interests of the military. If the heroes are soldiers, whose task is to stop a group of independent agents trying to gain this information, will they kill them? And if the PCs are on the opposite side – will they be able to defend themselves from an attack by tro-

ops that are supposed to guard the secrets contained in the databases of the commanding ship?

THE EMPEROR TENJI

The very fact of existence of this ship is one of the most guarded mysteries of Horizon. *Emperor Tenji* is one of the oldest monastic ships – and one surrounded by aura of notoriety, since all the cyborgs trained there are devoid of practically all human emotions. Traditionally, the ship's commanders ordered all traces of humanity erased from the minds of soldiers about to be transferred to artificial bodies. Efficient, calculating and emotionlessly cruel, *Tenji's* cyborgs are famous for their battle prowess – there's simply no more respected unit in the Saggi-tarius Arm.

RUMORS

People who know anything about the Emperor Tenji treat it like a Horde beast. The soldiers sent to the ship, instead of learning how to calm their minds and discard their needs, are tortured for months on end. And when they forget about everything except the pain, the real training can start. That's why the cyborgs from Tenji are so inhuman and dispassionately cruel – humans and other creatures, including the servants of Devourer are just tools for them, to discard or destroy on the orders of their superiors – or just simply when they cross their path.

It's said that occasionally the commander of the Emperor Tenji sends his trainees on practice

missions. They are reportedly responsible for destroying a few gangs, lending support to the Golden Dragons, and other activities. For some reason, no cyborg has yet been sent to Cor, even though this would help the fight against the Horde, perhaps even stop the monstrous beasts completely.

THE TRUTH

The *Emperor Tenji* arrived in-system a few months after the Battle of Cor by order of the commander of the local forces, General Mitsuru Miyagi, and after a special request of Shiro of the Syndicate. The task of the crew was training in less than ten years at least five hundred soldiers, and transferring at least a hundred of them into cybernetic bodies in the next eighteen months. The cyborgs are being created as quickly as possible. Their full power will be only used in a case of emergency – and the only thing General Miyagi would consider as such would be an attack on the base guarding the tomb of Mesu.

Currently, over seven hundred and fifty cyborgs are combat-ready, with another hundred in training. These forces wait for orders from the General, but he's far from deciding to send them to the front lines. Miyagi ignores the voices of his advisors, who claim the cyborgs would tip the scales of victory in favor of humanity. He thinks that trying to retake Cor would be a waste of human lives. The planet is already lost, and the only thing that matters is keeping the Death asleep.

STORY HOOKS

General Mitsuru decides to train and transfer a small group of soldiers that could be sent to support troops fighting on Cor. The player characters, veterans of clashes with the Horde, are chosen to fight in this unit. Will they sacrifice their own humanity? Will they be able to survive the murderous conditioning and training on board the *Emperor Tenji*?

A daring attack by some local pirates on the *Emperor* ends with the death of all the attackers, but causes some serious damage. An investigation implies that it was sabotage. Who ordered the attack, and why?





CHAPTER 9:
THE ENEMY

*"IF MANKIND WON'T UNITE, MANKIND WILL DIE.
ONLY A MIRACLE CAN SAVE US."*

FATHER FABIO CAPELLA,
PRIEST OF THE UNIFICATION CHURCH.

Never before in its history has mankind encountered a threat as powerful as the dark gods, awakening from their eons-long dreams. None of the thousands of wars or cosmic cataclysms could threaten the entire species. Sometimes, thanks to madness, coincidence or ordinary stupidity, millions died – maybe even all the inhabitants of a planet. It was an extremely rare occurrence before.

Today, it's a common event. Each year, the vile beasts of the Horde conquer a dozen star systems, which are subsequently devoured by their master, the Worm of the Void. The gods send diseases and madness, eroding souls. By awakening the hatred and anger inside human souls, they bring forth new wars. Their whispers, promises and threats make the weak-willed fight their brethren. Fear, terror, violence and lies are the weapons of the dark powers.

1. THE GODS

What humanity knows only fragments of information about the dark deities. It's not known how did they came into existence, what the source of their power is, or how they bestow it upon their followers. Their sleep, millions of years long, is also a mystery – was it a punishment, forced on the gods by some more powerful will, their own choice, or maybe it's their natural state? Decades of search have discovered two sarcophagi containing sleeping gods – and one of them is close to awakening. Does that mean that all the gods save these two are already active? Another question, possibly the most important one, also remains unanswered: are these beings truly immortal?

Sadly, there are no clear answers. No one knows what the deities are, what powers they possess or

how many of them are there. Mankind has learned of ten of them, but it's quite likely that at least two dozen have awakened. Some use powerful magic to hide on inhabited planets, and at least three often possess the bodies of humans to use them for their own vile purposes. There seems to be no common link between them, save their power, their ability to communicate with their followers, and their desire to destroy mankind.

Below are descriptions of ten deities influencing the lives of Horizon system inhabitants. Each entry consists of a description of the being from the perspective of the inhabitants of the world, and facts the players and the Game Master should be familiar with.

2. THE MADNESS

Fear him, for it is he that bestows madness and insanity upon ordinary humans. You won't utter his name until you have completely forgotten your own. You will see his true form when you stop seeing other people. His voice will resemble insane babbling, but when you start understanding his words, you perceive human speech as babbling instead. Finally, everything you have learned in your lifetime will be strange and alien to you. You'll know ancient secrets, but you won't be able to tell them to anyone – you'll be part of his host, imprisoned in the mouth of madness forever.

Among the divine beings encountered by humans, few are as feared as a being dubbed Insanity, Madness, or the Unnamed. There's a superstition saying that anyone that names this being will turn permanently insane, and that's why it's not talked about, or even researched. The few scraps of information on the Unnamed come from the mouths of his victims.

It seems that time and space have no meaning for him. The Madness can be in many places at once, and move as fast as it wants. Only the victims of its strange powers can see it – yet there are people who miraculously remain sane despite the Madness' touch. The Unnamed initially appears as a flickering shadow, a bright spot, or something else which can't be easily identified or recognized. If a man starts to examine it more closely, he'll see more and more details – and he'll lose contact with other humans. In time, he'll start behaving more oddly; instead of talking, he'll squeak and babble, instead of walking, he'll crawl or roll. After some time, he'll hear the Voice of the Unnamed speaking his name. In that moment all the bridges connecting his mind with the normal world will collapse, pushing him into complete madness.

The insane usually die after a few days after that moment, forgetting how to breathe or unconsciously hurting themselves. Some live on, falling into a kind of coma. The first occurrences were treated psionically, but this ended with in catastrophe: the telepaths were also affected by the madness, and they transmitted the insane thoughts to other people, infecting everyone around them with insanity. Though the dangers of reading insane minds are well known, there are still psionics trying to discover secrets within the minds of the insane.

It's not known where, when, and in what circumstances the Unnamed was awakened. Most people say that he's been a companion of mankind since the beginning, bringing insanity and madness since the dawn of time. It's a fact,

though, that when the Earth was destroyed and the crusade of the Devourer started, the number of the mentally ill rose sharply – sadly, today on many planets they are killed instead of treated.

3. THE DEVOURER OF WORLDS

The greatest and most powerful enemy of mankind, the Worm of the Void, the Master of the Horde, the Devourer of Worlds – this god has many names and is overcome by a terrible hunger. It will not rest, until it extinguishes the last spark of life. It will not sleep if there is another thought in the universe save its own. Nothing can resist its power. The most powerful weapons designed by humans often fail against its servants – so how can humanity hurt their master and creator?

The Devourer is the greatest threat to mankind. Compared to it, all other wars, diseases and cataclysms are insignificant. Consumed by unimaginable hunger, it travels from star to star, devouring moons, planets and suns. The Horde, a powerful army of frightening monsters given weird, grotesque forms, destroys all the lifeforms it encounters. To defeat this threat, humankind has begun to unite for the first time. Giant armies are created to fight the waves of Horde monsters and defeat the dark crusade. Many battles have been won, but many ended with the defeat and death of millions of beings.



Madmen worshipping the Devourer of Worlds claim that it can take any form and is omnipotent. However, while it's certainly powerful, it's not all-powerful. The Worm can be in only one place at a time, and can't simply erase living creatures (except for those of the Horde). It's also significantly slower than human ships, traveling at a speed of roughly one light year per day.

The Worm can turn devoured matter into hideous beasts, collectively known as the Horde. It can also speak directly to the mind of anyone who calls upon it, regardless of distance. People claim that it can freely change its shape, but it has only been seen to take one. A blurred record from a research satellite is the only existing image of the Devourer. It shows the moment when a worm, hundreds of miles long and with a perfectly black body, moves across the backdrop of the Sun, aiming to devour the cradle of mankind.

There are humans who worship the Worm of the Void – motivated by fear or a desire for power. In exchange for their service, they toned no longer fear death – none of the vile beasts of the Horde will harm them. The chosen ones receive great powers: mystical abilities resembling psionic powers. The cults worshipping the Devourer grow in power, especially in star systems close to the front line of the war with the Horde. As they're a massive threat, on most planets worshipping the dark gods is punished by death – usually a slow, painful death.

4. NNYRT, THE LIGHTDWELLER

Humans have always considered the sun as a symbol of good – it gives warmth and light, protection from the creatures of the darkness. But today even the stars can be imbued with evil, slowly infecting the flesh of humans living on the planets illuminated with their light. Nnyrt is a weird form of radiation, bringing forth strange, unknown diseases – some kill in few hours, others in months. The only defense against Nnyrt's venom is escape, though there are few worlds willing to harbor refugees from a world

subject to Nnyrt's cursed light. Through sacrificing thousands of lives, millions can live safely.

The Infected Light is a practically undefeatable foe. It nests inside a sun, poisons it somehow, and then through the sun's light it poisons the human inhabitants of the system. For a long time, its influence stays unnoticed, but when enough people have become infected, a massive epidemic of an incurable disease breaks out. Not even the strongest man can resist it. In the course of just a few weeks, every human being on the affected world dies. You can't save the body, but you can save the soul, for instance by transferring it to the synthetic body of a cyborg.

It seems that this god is a servant of the Devourer. It appears where the Horde would be easily defeated – in systems defended by powerful armies and mighty fleets of spaceships. Nnyrt attacks star systems of great importance: those at a crossroads of trade routes, or housing the headquarters of multi-planetary organizations. In just a few months, the planets of these systems die. When this happens, Nnyrt moves to another star, and the one it just left is devoured by the Worm.

Few people know what the Lightdweller really looks like. It's commonly thought of as a malicious spirit, an energy being, unable to be seen, captured or destroyed. The truth is, however, slightly more optimistic. The god called the Lightdweller is a sphere of hot matter: a small star, only 60 miles in diameter. Even though that form seems indestructible, it's certainly a material form. If mankind ever discovers a way to extinguish Nnyrt's flames, it'll be able to destroy the monster.

5. GRYTH, MASTER OF WAR

Gryth is one of the two deities accompanying mankind since its very dawn. He's inspired leaders, created wars, turned ordinary people into heartless murderers committing cruel and horrible crimes. Gryth is present everywhere blood is spilt, supporting both sides at the same

time. It's often whispered that he and not the Devourer is the most powerful god, and humanity should fear him more than the Worm. On the other hand, people have been killing each other forever, and they will kill each other until the end of universe. The Master of War is not the enemy of humans as much as their companion.

Gryth is not exactly a single individual, but a multitude of bodiless beings with a shared consciousness. These live inside the hearts and souls of men, poisoning them and turning into insane killers. The Gryth live on spilled blood, the memories of murder, and the emotions felt when killing. The longer the Gryth live inside a victim, the colder the affected human becomes; all positive feelings die. The victim treats living beings like objects, and no longer sees friends and enemies, but tools and obstacles. To achieve their goals, they use the former to destroy the latter. When they run out of pawns to manipulate, they take matters into their own hands.

The Master of War has been present in human consciousness forever, but only now, after the other gods have awakened, has he shown his real power. In the past he's influenced leaders, whispering to their minds, promising them power in exchange for obedience. Now, he can not only influence more beings at once, but his power is stronger. What once was a whisper, is now a roar.

It's often said that the voice of the Master of War is heard not only by humans, but also by the beasts of the Horde, or maybe even the gods themselves. It's reportedly Gryth that leads the spawn of the Devourer to attack more worlds, often not to easily-conquered places, but to well-defended systems. The evil, anger and aggression, spilled blood and deaths of thousands of beings are said to give him enormous power.

Gryth does not want the universe to be destroyed – if mankind defeated the gods or was eradicated by them, Gryth would lose all his power, and could even disappear. That's why he tries to equalize the powers of the combatants, supporting both sides to prolong the conflict. Some followers receive courage, others inhuman strength or skills.

6. LIJ, THE POISONER

A thousand deaths upon the fools that have awakened Lij! Eons of suffering in the Universe's deepest hells! Beware, for those who awakened the Poisoner from her slumber could not control her powerful will. Instead of a tool in the hands of the Void Worm's servants, she has turned into an insane beast, ready to attack any being attracting her attention.



Lij is the death humans brought on themselves. She was awakened on purpose, by madmen worshipping the Devourer. She's a great threat, despite her relatively low power. She's more of a tool of the Master of the Horde than a servant. In fact, she takes orders not only from the Worm, but also from other creatures – including humans who are smart, brave and wise enough to properly conduct the rituals of summoning the Poisoner.

Lij is more like a computer virus than a deity. Unlike the rest of the deities, she can't influence the minds of intelligent creatures. Her domain is technology – the more advanced, the more havoc the Poisoner can create. She warps the programs of robots and automata, ordering them to kill people and destroy resources. She's able to manipulate information in databases, and transfer it between computers regardless of the distance between them or the kind of connection. The most terrifying power of Lij is the ability to enter a machine and control it completely. The Poisoner loves to control synthetic cyborg bodies without human minds, using them to destroy entire lab complexes.

Not all people are afraid of Lij. Many, including intelligent, talented scientists, try to investigate her powers, or analyze the ritual of summoning of Poisoner and closely compare it to the data on other deities. They want to produce a ritual that will allow them to capture Lij in an object and force her to sleep again. Some suspect that with time you could create rituals of hibernation for the other deities – which would be a first step towards victory.

7. ZYLIC, HOUND OF DESTRUCTION

A soul for a soul, an easy calculation. If you want somebody's death so badly that you're willing to pay the ultimate price, you can summon Zylic. It'll eat your soul and using the power thus gained it'll go forth to kill the target. Nothing can save the victim from the death – not technology, or sacrifice to other deities, or a transfer to a cyborg body. Escape staves off the moment of death, but sooner or later Zylic will find its mark, rend its body and devour its spirit.

Zylic is the most powerful of the three hounds set on mankind by the Devourer. It's not a god in the usual sense; it can't even move through the void by itself, and its powers are nothing compared with the might of the Madness or Nnyrt. Zylic's power is, however, greater than that of any

single human. The Hound of Destruction is a mercenary, used by humans consumed with hatred to destroy their enemies, when they would rather die with their enemies than live in defeat.

Zylic can take on many forms, from a small, helpless child to a great foul beast of the Horde. It possesses a couple of forms which it uses most often – they're convenient but also useful when searching for, tracking and murdering the victim. As a human, it usually looks like a well-built, dark skinned man with white hair, riddled with cyber-implants. In combat, it takes the form of a great black snake, with a mouth filled with dozens of long tentacles ending in spikes, or the form of a mighty ape-like beast with a rusty skin, fighting with six powerful arms. In each of these forms Zylic is strong, fast and durable, able to kill even a squad of cyborgs.

The Hound of Destruction is not a foe of all humankind. It kills one person at a time – and often the mark is able to escape for months before it's dispatched. Even when it attacks powerful people, their death is at best noticeable in the scale of a planet or a system. What people fail to notice is that the hunt takes it less and less time with each victim. Apparently, devoured souls make the Hound stronger. It's quite likely that in a few years it'll be able to take "contracts" on larger groups and perhaps even on entire cities or planets. With time, it may be Zylic and not the Horde beasts that is the greatest threat to mankind.

That's why it needs to be stopped immediately.

8. TALIC, HOUND OF DESIRE

The Devourer does not understand the human mind. It can't understand why humans fight when there's no chance of victory, why they sacrifice themselves to defend other people. Hope, love, and faith are just empty words to the Worm of the Void. But it's trying hard to understand the meaning of these words.

From a part of itself, it crafted Talic, a being which will be able to understand humans one

day. *The Hound of Desire walks among people, looking for victims – failed activists wanting to get rid of their memories, desperate victims wanting to find peace and forget their lives. She takes what they don't want to know, and keeps a small part of their souls for herself. The day will soon come when Talic understands humanity.*

Talic is closer to a human than to a divine creature. She was spawned from a part of Devourer's mind, put in a human-like body, and sent to the worlds inhabited by the creatures she's supposed to study. The Hound of Desire usually travels the Galaxy looking for people who are haunted by the memories of their past. She claims to be a psionic therapist, able to delete thoughts that cause suffering – but she always warns that along with the painful memories, she might also take good ones. However, she collects all important human memories, so she “cleans” her victims almost completely. Rarely, she leaves a part of the victim's identity, and even more rarely still she takes only a small piece of the subject's mind – depending on the identity of the patient.

Except for these strange telepathic powers, Talic isn't much different from an average human. She does not feel human emotions – she can only store and analyze them. She's a skillful actress, and so far no one has recognized her as a servant of the Devourer. The real identity of this Hound is learned only by those she intends to kill – but a single human can fight Talic as an equal, and escape from her is even easier.

Talic has only one form – a beautiful, healthy woman with a gentle appearance and hypnotic green eyes. She's not so harmless; she possesses powerful psionic abilities, and is a trained fighter, but not on the level of a professional assassin or a veteran of war with the Horde. That's why, if she has a choice between a risky combat and fleeing, she almost always decides to escape.

9. VYIC, HOUND OF WAR

He destroys peace wherever he arrives. He's a harbinger of woe, a messenger of hatred and rage, a servant of death and oblivion. He's been sent to make us destroy each other, to make man fear not the gods but his own brothers. Vyic is an advisor with bloody hands, a voice in the mind of rulers telling them to end the negotiations and force the opponents to submit with fire and steel. He promises great victories, riches and fame; he whispers about the great wealth and happiness which will reign after the dust of battle settles. In reality he can promise only one thing: a bloody, destructive war.

Vyic appreciates balance above everything else. All his actions even the odds for both sides of the wars he creates. The weaker side is supported not only by his tactical advice, but also by his impressive wealth and a number of allies he's made during his long period of activity. In the most desperate cases, he can command the cult of the Devourer, but he rarely does so – when he uses the cultists, it's usually so that he could create a conflict...

Like the other Hounds, Vyic does not command a great power. He's an excellent actor, able to read the surface minds and desires of people. He's a crafter of complicated plans, taking years to complete and woven around hundreds of supposedly unconnected people. Thanks to his immense intellect and intuition, almost all of his plans are successful: their effects are great wars fought by humans with humans. When the ravaged combatants cease fire and start talking about peace, their defenseless systems are attacked by the Horde.

While the Hound of War usually appears as a small, frail old man, he's hardly a weak opponent. When he needs to, he can transform into a strange creature full of teeth, claws and spiked tentacles, able to destroy entire troops of soldiers and cyborgs. He uses this form only in exceptional cases, when death is the only alternative.

10. MESU, THE DEATH

Mesu is the nightmare that's about to come. Imprisoned in a sepulcher hidden inside one of the Galaxy's planets, he waits for the moment when the ties with which unknown beings bound him will be broken. Even bound, he's able to send nightmares and raise the dead. If he returns to his full strength, mankind will learn the full extent of his divine power. The moment of freeing Mesu is close – it's only a matter of a few months, or maybe years, until the last bastions of the humans defending the chains containing the Death are destroyed.

Of all the gods, only Mesu could be equal to the Devourer of Worlds. From the information obtained from tortured cultists and their blasphemous books, it's inferred that Death's domain is power over everything that once lived and is now dead. Death can recreate the creatures of the Horde in a new and terrifying undead form, and is able to return the semblance of life to a body of a human – retaining knowledge, skills and memories, but losing free will. According to cultists, his glance alone can turn a victim into thousand-year old dust – and he's able to transfer part of this power to his loyal servants.

Mesu is portrayed as a swarm of billions of writhing black leeches. In the visions he sends to people, these creatures cover the surface of entire planets, as if these worlds were drowned in seas of black, oily blood. Sometimes, instead of these leeches, he appears as a giant slug-like creature, with a body covered by spines, oil, blood and venom, thousands of howling mouths, and emerging and disappearing limbs and other aberrant organs. Both of his forms emanate primal evil, a malicious desire to destroy life and cause the greatest suffering possible.

Mankind is not aware of the threat posed by Death. The deity is imprisoned in a tomb hidden deep under the surface of a planet named Cor. When the Devourer awakened, Mesu begun to rise up again, but so far his power isn't great enough to be a serious threat. All he can do for

now is to raise a handful bodies or send nightmares to a slightly larger group of humans – that doesn't seem much, until you remember that he's still bound.

11. ZEI-AES, THE TWO-FACED LORD

The Two-Faced Lord can be summed up in one word: "contrast". This insane, maimed deity is one of the most terrible enemies of humankind – but it also hates other beings like itself. The deity's two connected aspects are harmonious Aes, and Zei, overwhelmed with a desire to destroy everything in existence. These beings constantly whisper to the minds of their followers, promising great power for picking one side or another. Usually, they submit to Aes, but sooner or later every cultist becomes a puppet of Zei. The war in the mind of the Two-Faced Lord will soon end – the beauty is going to die, leaving only anger and destructiveness.

Zei-Aes, also called the Two-Faced Lord, is another insane monstrosity bestowing madness upon its followers. It's a god ordering its worshippers to murder their enemies in one moment, and punishing them in the next. Its consciousness is torn between two identities: Zei, a personification of destruction, ugliness and rage, and his sister Aes, a being devoted to beauty, harmony, and serenity. While it may seem that Aes would be friendly to humanity, this is a mistake. This god's desire is a universe in a perfect harmony – which could happen only when all change stops.

Zei-Aes is a headless humanoid, with the left side of the body perfectly sculpted and with immaculate skin, and the right horrible, marked with wounds, scars and disease marks. The two faces of this deity are placed on the inside of its palms. In the left hand lies the face of Zei, an ugly visage with bloodshot, mad eyes, a rotting nose and a mouth filled with black, rotting teeth. The right hand is the face of Aes, a woman with perfect, inhuman beauty, smiling serenely.

Humans don't know the real power of the Two-Faced Lord. His followers are granted powerful

abilities; they're able to age other people in an instant, summon diseases and mutations, but also to heal and take away pain. They can also turn any item into dust – regardless whether it's a child's toy, a simple tool, a pistol, or a cybernetic implant. It's also said that each worshipper receives two gifts called "godseed" – small parts of the god's soul, infecting the soul of the mortal. They remain there as long as the cultist keeps the balance between the desires of the two personalities of their divine patron. If one personality wins, it bestows the follower with greater powers, but the other takes its gifts back.

Usually, it's Zei that ends up victorious.

GODS AND SECTS IN THE GAME

Everything went perfectly when we opened the gate. I can't describe the thing that crawled from inside. It was basically a mass of spiked tentacles, a misshapen body covered with blisters filled with some disgusting goo, and a giant mouth full of sharp teeth... and screaming soldiers, which were grabbed and swallowed one after another. What I can't forget is the sound of that thing purring with delight as it chewed on their bodies

Kate Rush, Cor Army sergeant

Dark magic, vile deities, and their monstrous spawn constitute one of the most important motifs in *Nemezis*. The war with the dark deities awakened from their eons-long dream could be a backdrop for many adventures in various genres – from survival horror or action adventure to a slow-paced investigation. When introducing the beasts of the Horde, servants of the deities or cultists wielding black magic, the Game Master can easily lose control of events. The following section is intended to help the GM in controlling events, and give him some ideas tied to these enemies of mankind to introduce in a game session.



SUMMONING RITES

You can introduce the theme of gods and sects worshipping them in many ways. The first, the simplest and the most often used is the motif of cultists trying to summon a vile monster using some kind of ritual. The player characters, most likely hired, motivated by their sense of justice or simply by accident, conduct an investigation, which ends up in the dungeon under the sect's headquarters, most likely in the middle of summoning ritual – and more specifically just before the human sacrifice.

It's cliché, but nevertheless it's an exciting finale for detective work, and thus it's satisfying for the lovers of both puzzles and exciting combat. Below are a few variants that could make this simple plot more exciting.

TOO LATE!

The adventure begins when the ritual has already been conducted, and the beast has been summoned. Perhaps something went wrong – maybe the summoned creature turned out to be too powerful, and didn't submit to its summoners, or maybe it appeared in incorporeal form, and escaped by possessing one of the members of the sect. The heroes, instead of looking for

bits of information, connecting the facts and preparing for the great finale, will instead face a situation which they can't control. They'll find enough evidence to realize what has actually happened. Some of these clues will be left by the monster itself, others will be deduced by the heroes, but the bulk of the information will probably come from members of the sect – they might be terrified by losing control over the summoned monster, and wish to seek help from the player characters.

This adventure might be run in many ways. First, it could be a classic investigation – the PCs try to discover the identity of the cultist and then track down the rampaging beast. Second, you could run it as a survival horror, if you set the game in a confined area (for instance, the heroes are the crew of a space station, or a research institute far from the cities, where the cultists have summoned the monster) and limit the availability of military equipment. Third, this could be an introduction to a campaign in the vein of conspiracy theories – when the PCs kill the monster, they also learn of the existence of a powerful cult, with influences in the military, politics and the business world.

A LINK TO THE PAST

The adventure can start months, or even years after the summoning of the monster; the heroes, while investigating a minor case, encounter traces of a dark cult. Though these clues are old, there will be no other explanation – some time ago a group of cultists serving the vile gods managed to complete a rite and summon one of their powerful servants to this world. Everything suggests that the beast is hiding among men to this day.

Finding the guilty would be quite a task – but finding concrete evidence to punish them might be even harder. Ironically, the heroes would gain the most information from the summoned monster – in this case, likely a kind of demonic spirit, which took over the body of a human sacrificed during the ritual. Now that the demon is imprisoned in human form and devoid of most of its powers, it will probably try to take revenge on

the cultists responsible for this entire situation. Such a being might find cooperation with the PC group very tempting, treating it as a “necessary good”, a way to regain full power.

Of course, when the cultists are killed, both sides – the heroes and the demon – will try to double-cross each other. The PCs will probably try to kill the monster, but when the creature finds a way to regain its power, it'll try to murder the only humans aware of its existence, or to escape to further the goals of its maker.

UNWITTING PAWNS

The player characters could be drawn into the cult's plot, and be duped into furthering its nefarious goals. Eliminating the enemies of the cult, obtaining rare materials or resources necessary to conduct some vile rite, freeing a businessmen (a cult guru) kidnapped by a group of insane fanatics (a group of bounty hunters tracking down cultists – not always in a legal way), all might seem to be ordinary tasks for a band of mercenaries, but the truth will eventually come to light. The activities of the heroes and the players' awareness will decide whether the group realizes what their employers are planning. If the heroes don't realize what's going on, the adventure (or the entire campaign) will be devoted to setting things right, like hunting down the cultists or killing the monster.

SPELLS

Spells mastered by cultists can theoretically cause any effect, no matter how strange. You can find several black magic spells on page 64. This means that the Game Master can use black magic as an explanation of any unusual event. You should use this opportunity sparingly, avoiding situations when a spell creates an event that's impossible to explain in mundane terms. You shouldn't abuse the spell powers solely to explain plot holes in your adventures, regardless of circumstances. But first and foremost, you need to resist the temptation to use black magic to take away the characters' abilities, killing them without any possibility to avoid or resist the

spell, removing all chances of victory over the cult, or frustrating the players in any other way. Magic should be an exotic element of an adventure, and not a tool to give the Game Master ultimate power.

OFFENSIVE SPELLS

A standard way to use black magic in the game, besides summoning a vile monster from the dark depths of the void, is as a powerful weapon in a direct confrontation between Player Characters and cultists. This is especially useful in campaigns focused on action adventures, where there's no place for more exotic, weird spells. The GM should remember, however, that the effects of black magic do not imitate spells from fantasy games.

Offensive spells can be divided into two categories: quick ones, used directly in combat, and lasting ones, requiring preparations, but causing as much or even more damage. You might think of the first kind of spells as fire balls, lightning called from a cloudless sky, animated objects or psychic domination forcing the enemy to kill themselves – but even though such effects are magical, they don't have anything in common with the black magic used by the cultists. Their spells should be far less spectacular, but much more painful. Instead of a fiery bolt you might want to use a spell creating ugly blisters filled with smelly liquid, which immediately burst, freeing the infectious contents and causing a bleeding wound, hard to staunch. A paralyzing spell can look like a wave of worms, puked out at a victim from a cultist's mouth. These worms cover the victim's entire body, paralyzing him – and the creatures might even try to crawl inside the subject to feed on the tasty meat...

Another kind of offensive spell allows for even weirder, more interesting effects. For instance, by performing a ritual a cultist can make everything he eats himself to appear inside the victim's stomach. The investigation into a series of mysterious suicides might initially look nonsensical, but this will change when the heroes reach the guilty party – the sight of a madman swallowing broken glass, nails or razors, drinking concentrated acid

or poison might cause surprise, quickly supplanted by terror when the heroes realize exactly how the spell works.

Cultists don't always kill – often they'd rather intimidate the victims, causing diseases, mutilations, mutations or other changes of mind or body. Disfiguring a famous model and promising to restore her normal looks when she joins the sect, changing a weak, intimidated pencil-pusher into an aggressive, hulking mutant, or driving a politician opposed to the cult's leader insane are just a few examples of using offensive spells in a less direct way.

BAD TASTE

THERE IS A THIN LINE BETWEEN MYSTERIOUS, STRANGE AND DANGEROUS SORCERY AND TASTELESS DESCRIPTIONS. THE GAME MASTER MUST REMEMBER THAT THE PURPOSE OF BLACK MAGIC IS NOT SHOCKING THE PLAYERS WITH GORY DESCRIPTIONS OF THE CULTISTS' CRUELTY. MAGIC IS A MYSTERIOUS, INCOMPREHENSIBLE THING, FORCING PEOPLE TO COMMIT INHUMAN DEEDS – IN SHORT, CASTING OFF ALL THAT'S GOOD IN HUMANS AND TO SUBMITTING TO THE WILL OF THE DARK DEITIES. VIOLENCE, SPILLING BLOOD, SACRIFICES AND OTHER IMMORAL DEEDS SHOW THE PLAYERS THAT THE SOURCE OF BLACK MAGIC IS ABSOLUTELY EVIL, AND YOU CAN'T USE IT WHILE REMAINING PURE. TOO MUCH VIOLENCE, SPILLING BUCKETS OF BLOOD OR DESCRIBING MACABRE RITUALS IN DETAIL CAN DISGUST YOUR PLAYERS.

DEFENSIVE SPELLS

Nemezis' black magic can be used to summon any effect. Theoretically this could mean that the cultists can defend themselves from the PCs direct actions, by creating barriers to protect them from shots or transforming into powerful monsters, able to rend their foes. You should avoid such maneuvers – they don't have anything in common with the nature of the dark deities, or the reasons why they bestow powers upon their worshippers.

PLOT SPELLS

This group of spells concerns all the magical powers which influence events other than scenes of conflict. Such magic manipulates background characters, changes the probability of some events occurring or not, or provokes events influencing numbers of characters. Such spells are a great help in setting the mood of adventure and showing the ideas behind the dark deities.

Impossible situations, beings or occurrences breaking the laws of physics or strange happenings are all standard effects of black magic. The Game Master can use these to introduce any effect – but you need to control yourself. It's best to determine before the game what a warlock can do; adding new spells and rituals during the game can disorientate the team.

When you build the plot of the adventure around the actions of the cult you might encounter some problems, especially when the heroes can foil their plots right at the beginning. The easiest solution is to begin the adventure at the moment where the cult is starting the most important part of its plan. Usually, you can assume that the tests necessary to conduct the ritual key to the adventure were automatically successful. However, the consequences of a botched ritual can be as interesting. The final decision ultimately depends on the GM, but when planning the game, it's worth noting what would happen if any tests of black magic end in failure.

Black magic spells influencing the plot of the game can be divided into three kinds: affecting the background characters, introducing unusual events or changing the scenery. The first group of plot spells most often change the personality of NPCs, allowing the cult to control them (for instance through blackmail, as with the disfigured model example mentioned above), or allow warlocks to gain powers beyond the human norm – for instance to read the mind of a tortured victim. A sect worshipping the World Devourer could give such power to a fanatical lawman, one who would do anything to punish the guilty. If this policeman turns out to be a friend of one of the player characters, who'll notice the change in his pal, this character can start his investigation, and thus

begin a thread which you can introduce in many later sessions.

The second kind of spell works very well as a warning – strange effects can show the players that evil has been summoned and only they can prevent it from getting worse. A murder of crows created with black magic and transmitting terrible diseases is a threat by itself. But when the players learn that the birds are just a side effect of another powerful ritual, requiring lengthy preparations, they will certainly take action to disrupt the ceremony. From the team's point of view the crows are an element of the world that doesn't affect them directly, but their presence alone will motivate them to find the person responsible for creating the crows.

The third kind of spell is used far more rarely than the other two. Spells influencing the game world usually bring forth natural disasters or other unnatural events causing destruction and the death of many humans. They can also change the conditions of a certain area or the appearance of certain places. A spell could affect some location with radioactivity, causing diseases and mutation – and eventually death.

CULTS

The only argument they can understand is fire and steel. Not only do we have to fight Horde monsters or other spawn of the dark gods, we also have to kill creatures which were once human. Yes, were – I don't consider any of these filthy traitors human.

Fabio Capella, Bounty Hunter, ex-priest of the Unification Church

The idea of a 'cult' brings to mind a secret organization of a small group of fanatics completely devoted to their faith. People connected to such a cult will commit even the most inhuman deed if it's expected by their god. The sect meets irregularly, always in secret hideouts or secluded spots where no one can stop their blasphemous rituals.

That vision, though very vivid and practical (at least from the point of view of gamers preferring

simple solutions) is not always completely accurate. When you worship one of the dark deities you don't always whisper blasphemous spells, wear dark robes or spill the blood of sacrificial animals. People who decide to betray their own kind usually have an important reason to do so – and they're often fully aware that they are selling their own souls.

Cults worshipping the awakened deities have a clear-cut role in *Nemezis* – their activities provoke adventures based on investigation. They kidnap people, sacrifice them, conduct strange rituals and summon monsters – all that makes PCs earn their bread. Theoretically, all adventures with a cult as the primary antagonist could use the exact same framework and feel similar. But if you change the goals, methods or skills of the cultists, you radically change the basic plot of the adventure.

In the standard plot a sect works within a simple framework – kidnapping, murder, ritual. The heroes can encounter the cult in each and every phase – they can search for a missing person, investigate a ritual murder or try to find those guilty of conducting the summoning ritual. To this basic scheme, the GM has to add only new scenery and unique NPCs – their abilities, goals and resources. Placing an adventure in an exotic location, or making the bad guys memorable, will certainly make the session more enjoyable; but not necessarily change its plot.

But if you alter the cultists' modus operandi you can easily vary adventures based around cults. It's worth remembering that only the most fanatical believers are ready to commit crimes in the name of their religion – and that they see it as a good deed. An average man, even if he suppresses the guilt of worshipping the enemies of mankind, would not risk personally killing an innocent man. Without the necessary training and equipment they'd find it very hard even to kidnap the victim. If the cultists have no military background, are mostly sane and are trying to have normal lives, their sect would not necessarily kidnap innocent.

Servitude to the dark deities does not have to mean murdering innocents. The god can force

its adherents to help other cults, undermine organizations fighting the cults, subvert the political situation or even support criminal organizations to divert the attention of the police services. Gaining important information, finding evidence of crimes (real or faked) committed by enemies of the cult, blackmailing influential people, and spreading misinformation about the dark deities is often more important than kidnapping and murder. The activities of the sect can therefore be misunderstood – the investigating heroes can think that they're trying to track down ordinary criminals, terrorists, or soldiers in a war between corporations or noble families. The GM should remember to keep the identities of the cult members secret – the PCs should only learn the truth just before the final confrontation. Then they'll learn that the cultists are cautious enough to keep the cult secret.

Adventures based around cults do not always have to be investigations. It's easy to design an action adventure – for instance if the heroes happen to find an object that's very important to the sect, or if they are hired to protect a person marked as a target by the cult. Successive attacks by the followers of the dark gods, evidence found thanks to investigating an object or a protected person, and the evident presence of black magic will all give hints to the players as to the identity of their opponents. The only reasonable solution then is taking the initiative and trying to destroy the threat. Such adventures should be filled with combat scenes and chases, but also with meetings with important characters. The Game Master can safely ignore moral dilemmas requiring the player to identify with his character. The team will be expecting action, opportunities to use their inventiveness and apply the game system, not difficult choices.

Cultists are not necessary knife-waving fanatics, they can also be politicians using black magic to strengthen their power and gain influence. In the case of conflict with such people you can't simply discover that they're connected to a sect – you need real evidence. Strong and conclusive evidence, enough to ensure a powerful ruler is ar-

rested and convicted. In this case, vigilantism is not an answer.

Below are three sample sects operating in the Horizon system. Each of them varies in outlook, goals and methods of operation – and therefore they can be used in a different kinds of games.

THE BROTHERHOOD OF THE ROOK

The Brotherhood of the Rook has only a few members, but its influence reaches far and wide. These cultists are mostly businesspeople, politicians, members of powerful noble families and high-ranking military officers, all with an immaculate reputation, all with power and money. All thanks to black magic.

The sect does not worship any deities. The cultists are practical people – they know that the gods are absolutely evil, and that they want to destroy the universe, but they also know that they can give boons in exchange for sacrifices. Thanks to their knowledge of black magic, the Brotherhood can influence planetary governments and call forth events affecting entire star systems. As a payment for that, they do things the dark gods want – they sacrifice people, support other believers (often manipulating the members of rival sects), they conduct rites, and summon vile beasts (very rarely, only when it's absolutely necessary). Only a select few knows about the existence of the Brotherhood – some other cultists, and a few influential people throughout the Galaxy. The plans of the sect and details of its activities are known to its members only.

Use in play: the Brotherhood can serve as the power behind the throne. The sect should work in the shadows as a major antagonist of the PCs – who will discover the identity of their foe only after a long investigation. The destruction of the cult would be an excellent goal for experienced characters, since you can achieve it only after a long time – preferably as a culmination of a campaign.

THE MASTERS OF PAIN

This sect can be best described by the word “fanaticism” – understood as a lifestyle absolutely devoted to their professed faith. The Masters of

Pain resemble machines to outsiders – they follow the orders of their superiors (who receive them in dreams or during self-mutilation), they pray and work, but that's the end of the similarities between them and the average man in the Galaxy. Their sole goal is the service of the Two-Faced Lord.

The sect attracts people who were affected by immense suffering – loss of families or fatal diseases – and which weren't accepted by society, being forced to live alone. When the candidate undergoes the initiating rituals (where dark magic warps their souls), it's revealed to them that their new goal is servitude to the dark gods – and their old pain is just replaced by a new one.

Use in play: The Masters of Pain are a perfect opponent for beginning characters. They have little influence, their knowledge of black magic is limited to a couple of simple rituals (like summoning a weak monster), and they focus their activities in the lower classes of society.

THE HERALDS OF RUIN

Considered by many a terrorist organization, the sect called the Heralds of Ruin is one of the few cults operating on Bariz. Their activities are usually sabotaging military bases, the destruction of important installations and attempts to assassinate important characters in the Horizon system. Usually these attempts fail, and all the cultists involved in them die. Strangely, this does not diminish the Heralds' power.

All these actions are attempted by cannon fodder, insane fanatics completely devoted to the Devoirer. The ringleader priests are the ones who plan the attacks and conduct the rituals worshipping the Worm of the Void. The possible death or imprisonment of the cultists carrying out these plans is just a minor risk their leaders are willing to take.

Use in play: The Heralds of Ruin remind players that the dark deities' influence does not extend only to Ash but also to Bariz. The investigation of a terrorist group planning an attack on a graviter can point the player characters to a cult – tracking down and arresting important cultists will certainly take up many game sessions.

MONSTROUS SERVANTS

The antagonists of the player characters will usually be humans, but in some adventures they will confront them inhuman servants of deities – beasts of the Horde, or the creations of deities other than the Worm of the Void. Just the presence of the servants of the dark deities should be a sign that something has gone Terribly Wrong. Well, except in adventures on Cor, where the presence of the Horde is something normal.

The Game Master is free to make up any monster to challenge the player characters. What you need to remember is that the servants of the deities are always hostile towards men, and should have inhuman traits: unnatural abilities, strange anatomy, or other such things. Most of these beasts are bloodthirsty creatures, wanting only to kill and destroy, but the ranks of the servants of the gods are not composed only of such creatures. In fact, among the many creations of the deities, only the Horde creatures are mindless monsters. The other deities enhance the intellect and wit of their creations – most of them are far smarter than humans. You can couple this with various powers to create very dangerous monsters.

The goals of the beasts can differ wildly. Some want to kill as many humans as possible, other want to bring forth insanity, and others still need to infiltrate communities and gather information on humans and the civilization they've created. Not every monster will try to eat a character. It can just as easily run away, try to possess him or even convince him that it's not a threat to humanity. Of course, such a situation will take place very rarely, especially given that the standard reaction of a PC meeting a monster will be to attack – it's not impossible, though.

THE HORDE

The name given by the people to the creations of the Devourer is a perfect description of their attitude. Myriads of nasty, aggressive and mindless creatures with only one goal: to destroy

mankind and eradicate all of its achievements. Driven by the will of their master, and the wits and instincts of a predator, the vile monsters of the Horde scourge the galaxy in search of worlds inhabited by humans – to invade them, kill all the inhabitants and destroy all traces of humankind. The creations of the Devourer wouldn't be as terrifying if they were simply predators. The most horrible thing is that these monsters were created specifically to annihilate all mankind. It's said that these beasts feel pleasure only when they rend a human body with their mighty fangs and claws.

To use the Horde in your game, create a monster causing an instinctive fear in humans. Its very name should be a synonym for pain, blood, death and evil. Just the possibility of seeing one of the Devourer's creations would paralyze an average man. In any confrontation, an ordinary citizen will die without fighting, overcome by mortal fear. The player characters are the proud few able to withstand the monstrosities thrown at them by the Worm of the Void. Of course, the reason why the characters are so brave isn't because they're all valiant and heroic, but because the players know the game system, they can understand how the powers of the vile deities work, and they can count on bennies to survive. However, you can still describe that attitude in-game as amazing bravery and willpower.

"Vile beasts of impossible shape" is the best description of the creations of the Worm of the



Void. The Game Master does not have to worry whether the monster could survive in reality. It's enough to describe it as the creation of a warped mind, the product of an absolutely evil being with an alien, incomprehensible soul.

In practice this means adding to a body of a monster a certain amount of tentacles, suckers, claws, venom glands, spikes, mouths, beaks, teeth and tails. You can cover them with foul ooze, acid, black venom or the blood and body parts of previous victims, to complete the monstrous appearance. Now you only need to add some strange, incomprehensible and deadly powers, and the creature will join the foul ranks of the Horde.

These changes can transform ordinary monsters from cannon fodder into frightening enemies. If the players don't understand the source of their power, how the spawn of the Devourer uses them, and why it's doing it (apart from the obvious – destruction of humanity and its creations), then the Game Master has done his homework properly.

THE HORDE AS CANNON FODDER

You don't have to always remind the players of the strangeness of Horde monsters, how vile they are or how blasphemous are their bodies and powers. During adventures connected to warfare, where the most important things are

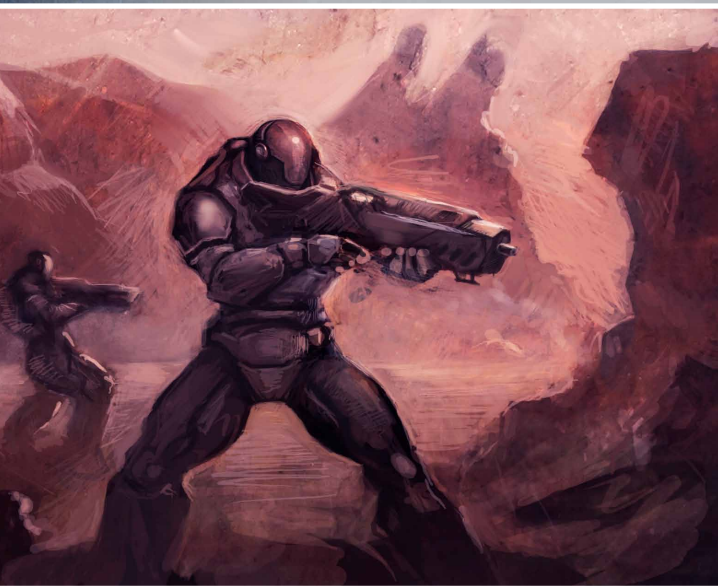
fast action and a lot of tabletop skirmishes, detailed descriptions can bore the players. There's nothing wrong with using the Horde as cannon fodder – a mass of aggressive beasts used as a target practice for invulnerable heroes. The Game Master should focus then on the abilities of the monsters – their skills, the combat potential of their powers and their tactics in combat.

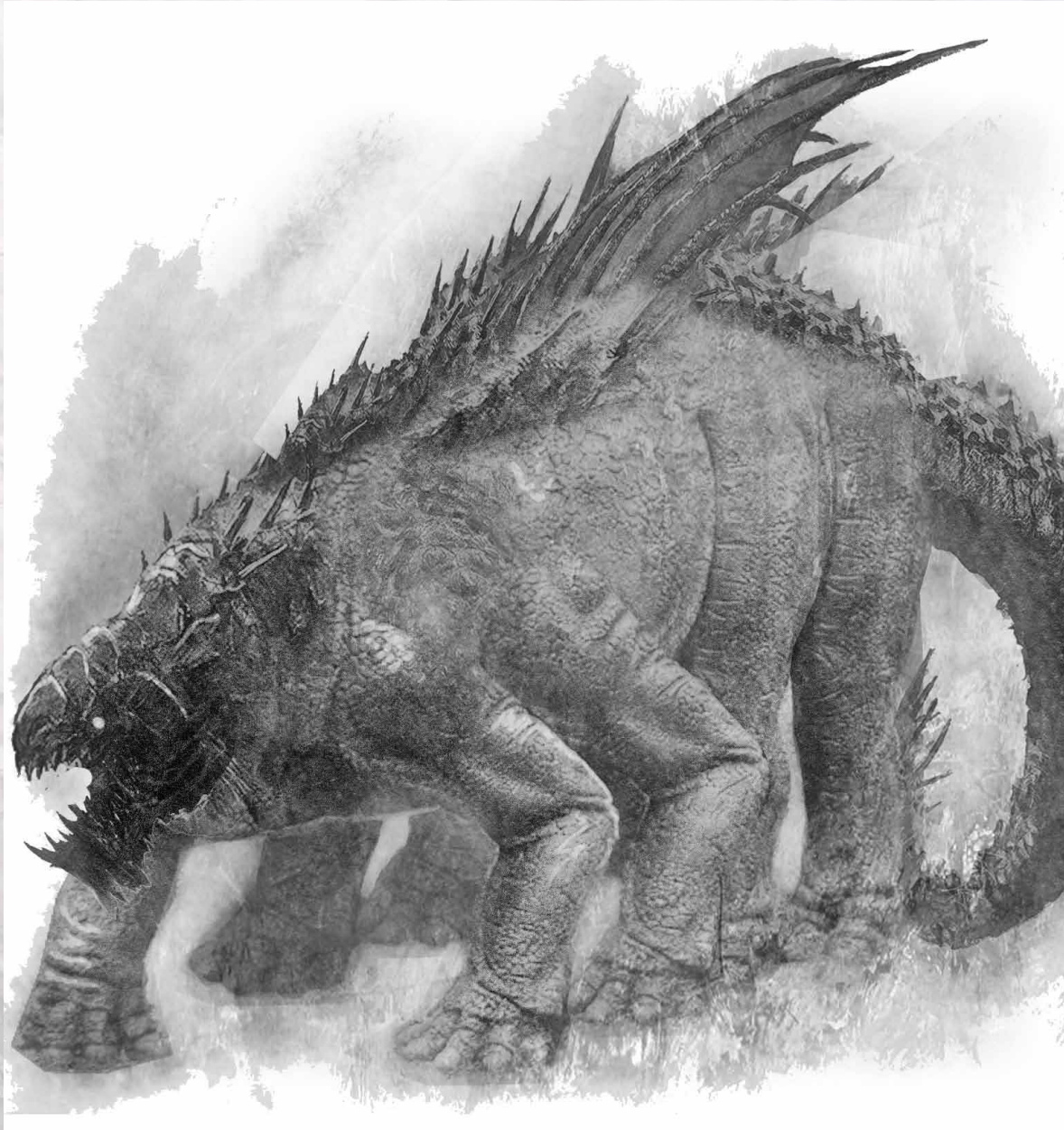
THE HORDE AS A SOURCE OF FEAR

Some players like far less focus on combat. They prefer calmer, more balanced gameplay, focused on clever solutions or well-planned operations. During the sessions played by such teams, the Horde monsters play a totally different role than in the adventures of a group of veterans trying to survive on Cor. If the player characters are merchants, rulers, psionics or lawmen, introducing the powerful servants of the Devourer will result in a bloody and nasty end. The Horde in such adventures works better as a threat, constantly hanging over the heroes' heads. The beasts should appear in such games only as the consequence of a total disaster – when the PCs fail to conduct an investigation properly, the protected NPC will be murdered, and the members of the sect will manage to conduct a ritual they've been planning for months. Even, then the heroes should have a chance of survival –

even if it's very small. Dooming the heroes to certain death is a serious mistake. *Nemesis*, after all, is an heroic game – and heroes shouldn't die for nothing.

The monsters can also be predators, aliens hunting down harmless heroes, who have no chance against them in open combat. When you place the characters in a confined space and force them to constantly search for escape routes and weapons to attack the monsters with, you can create an excellent adventure. A lot of players don't like such adventures, however – they'd rather be the hunter than the hunted, and they would rather attack the monster outright.





CHAPTER 10:
BESTIARY

*"NATURE CAN CREATE BEINGS AS BEAUTIFUL AS THEY'RE DEADLY - THE BEASTS OF THE HORDE ARE
SIMPLY DANGEROUS. THEY'RE UGLY AND NASTY - IN SHORT, MONSTROUS."*

FATHER FABIO CAPELLA,
SERGEANT KATE RUSH, COR ARMY

Among the servants of the dark deities there are many creatures to which the soldiers react with fear or insanity; some can even literally scare troops to death. These vile creatures have aberrant, unnatural bodies, and cause terror and disgust in everyone. Below are nine sample monsters, which the Player Characters can confront during the game. GMs shouldn't hesitate to introduce more creatures, like the ones described in SWD. For instance, skeletons can be undead horrors raised by Mesu, while giant worms can be another of the Horde monstrosities of the Devourer.

CERBERUS

This creature would resemble a dog, if it didn't have three eyeless heads, each boasting a mighty jaw with three rows of sharp fangs, three spiky tails, and if its limbs didn't end in long claws. Oh, and if it wasn't ten feet tall.

These monsters have many names – puppies, wolves, three-headed bastards, but the most popular one, used even by officers, is Cerberi. These are the one of the few creations of the Worm of

the Void without any strange abilities. While their creator has given them the strength of an elephant, toughness able to resist a direct hit from a tank cannon, surprising speed and a foul temper – it has denied them supernatural powers. Even so, soldiers treat the cerberi with respect, if not outright fear. The largest are supposedly even able to kill cyborgs.

Luckily, these beasts are found only on battlefields, when the Horde is swarming in great numbers. It's certain that cerberi are spawned in another way from the lesser beasts found inside the bodies of harvesters – and that's why they're much rarer. Sadly, their power and ferocity more than make up for their small numbers.

Horizon: The army knows of exactly seventeen cerberi in the Horizon system. All of them are active combatants on Cor, and they're part of the Horde forces whose aim is to awaken Mesu. Each of these monsters is closely watched – the army managed to mark each of them with at least a couple of tracking devices. In fact, tracking their movements lets the army predict major Horde offensives; that's why when dealing with cerberi, the soldiers have orders only to hurt them.

Attributes: Agility d10, Smarts d4(A), Spirit d6,



Strength d12, Vigor d12

Skills: Climbing d12, Fighting d12, Notice d10, Stealth d6, Swimming d6, Tracking d10.

Pace: 12; **Parry:** 8; **Toughness:** 14 (4)

Special Abilities

- **Armor +4:** Thick hide.
- **Bite:** Str+d8.
- **Fearless:** Immune to fear and Tests of Will.
- **Go for the Throat!** – Cerberi instinctively go for an opponent's soft spots. With a raise on its attack roll, it hits the target's most weakly-armored location.
- **Killing Machine:** Cerberi have the First Strike and Combat Reflexes Edges.
- **Size +2:** Cerberi are the size of a bull.
- **Three Heads:** A Cerberus can make three attacks per round without any penalties.



ILLAS

The being you see was without doubt once human. The only reminder of that now is its beautiful, noble face. The rest of the creature – a body covered with ooze, callous tissue and long spikes, three legs as thick as tree trunks, a giant maw with a row of dull, square teeth and a tangled mass of tentacles following the beast's body – clearly show this is the spawn of the dark gods.

Illai, as the monsters are called by aesthetes, are a horrific reminder of what happens if a human loses himself in the faith of the Two-Faced Lord. These beings were once beautiful and influential, but they weren't strong enough to preserve the element of Aes. Slowly corrupted by Zei, they transformed into mindless, bloodthirsty beasts. Illai can be found in city slums, old, deserted buildings, canals and other ruined places. What small shreds of humanity they've somehow preserved tell them to hide their ugliness – which is why they love dark places, always covered in shadow. Illai don't need food or water, but they're very aggressive, and attack humans whenever possible – including other followers of their maker. They're driven by the rage which erupts whenever they see beauty in a living being. De-



stroying it is the only pleasure they're able to feel. Ironically, they don't hate other Illai, and groups and small herds of such monsters are occasionally found. Such encounters are very dangerous since Illai work together surprisingly well, first focusing on the greatest threat, before trying to eliminate less dangerous targets.

Horizon: Illai are most often found on Ash. At least a couple of hundred such beasts live in the north, hiding in the ruins of deserted towns. There are also at least three arenas, the owners of which use Illai during dark ceremonies to honor the Two-Faced Lord. Usually such rituals consist of sacrificing harmless beings, who are devoured by these insane monsters.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d6, Spirit d6, Strength d10, Vigor d10

Skills: Fighting d8, Notice d6, Stealth d6.

Pace: 6; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 11 (2)

Special Abilities:

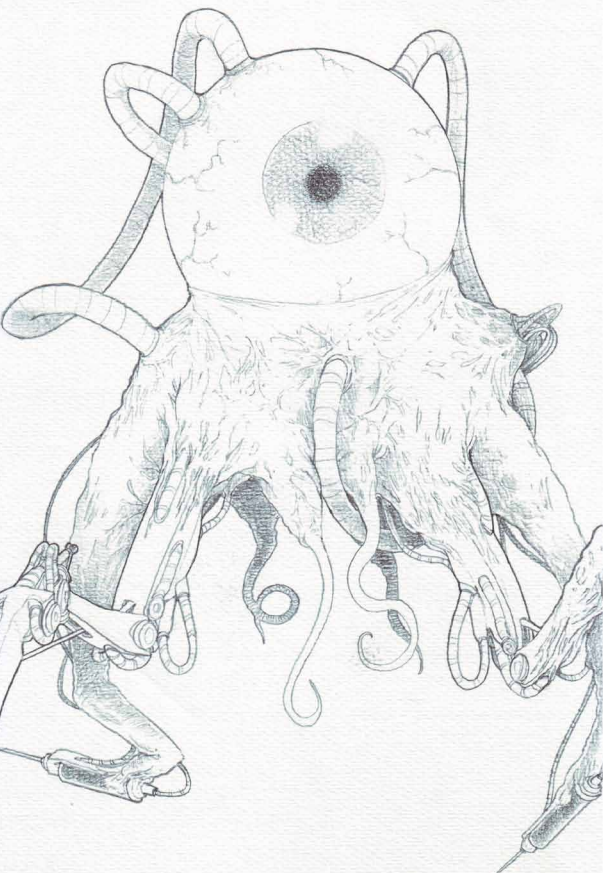
- **Armor +2:** Thick, scaly hide.
- **Devourer:** Using a whole round an Illai can devour the body of any defeated enemy, and regenerate one Wound as a result.
- **Fearless:** Immune to fear and Tests of Will.
- **Size +2:** Illai are larger and more massive than ordinary people.
- **Tentacles:** Str+d8.



NEMOTIC

This creature does not look very terrible, rather it seems amusing – it's a great eye set on a strange construction made of muscles, bones, metal and veins. It does not look like a terrible opponent. But when the first of you shot a plasma round at it, you understood that this fight is not going to be easy. The creature absorbed the charge, and then sent it back, shooting it from one of its spidery limbs.

A nemotic is one of the most terrifying creatures heroes might encounter. This creature, endowed with an inhuman mind, serves the dark



gods, creating death and destruction. Their most terrible ability is their power to summon madness – a nemotic can change the character of any person, pushing him into an insanity which usually ends in suicide.

Horizon: These creatures are fortunately rare, occurring usually when some fools are brave enough to summon them with a dark ritual.

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d12, Spirit d12, Strength d8, Vigor d12

Skills: Fighting d10, Intimidation d12, Knowledge (Occult) d12+2, Notice d10, Shooting d10.

Pace: 6; **Parry:** 7; **Toughness:** 18 (10)

Special Abilities:

- **Armor +10:** Mystical aura (protects from plasma weapons as well).
- **Arcane Resistance:** +2 to Toughness when resisting psionics and black magic, +2 to any opposed rolls when powers are used against it.
- **Black Magic:** Nemotics know the following spells: *curse of fear*, *curse of pain*, *disfiguration*. Casting such spells is an action, though their range is only 10 yards. It receives a +4 bonus to Knowledge (Occult) rolls.
- **Combat Reflexes:** Receives a +2 to Spirit rolls recover from being Shaken.
- **Fear -2:** Anyone who sees a Nemotic must make a Fear roll with a -2 penalty.
- **Fearless:** Immune to fear and Tests of Will.
- **Level Headed:** Acts on the better of two cards.
- **Plasma missiles (-2 to Shooting rolls):** 3d10 damage, (24/48/96).

CRAWLER

These creatures resemble a cross between a crab, a beetle and an octopus the size of a pony. Their elongated bodies are covered with grey ooze and also have six limbs ending in spikes, and heads on long, snakelike necks, presenting spikes and teeth in an inhuman parody of a smile.

Crawlers are the most common Horde monsters. Essentially, they're not that terrifying – they move quickly, but not as fast as plasma bolts, and they're practically mindless. Instead of hiding or

sneaking around, they always charge and attack frontally.

Sadly, they always travel in large hordes. Six or so creatures can, in just a few weeks, multiply so that the pack consists of dozens of beasts. When they have enough food (though they love human flesh, they can subsist on plants), they breed like rabbits. One in a dozen crawlers is usually mutated somehow – and some crawlers have a nasty habit of mutating into the far more dangerous reavers.

Horizon: Cor is said to have more crawlers than people. Assuming that in the lands overwhelmed by the Devourer the monsters breed as explosively as on the front line, this claim is most likely true. Crawlers are found everywhere, most often in the tropical forests of the planet.

Mutations: What ordinary humans think of as singular single breed of crawlers is really a giant family of related beasts, differing in many anatomical details. Each crawler has one of the following traits (randomly determined by a d10 roll, or chosen by the GM):

1) **Sucker:** Instead of a normal attack, the crawler can shoot a tentacle ending in a toothed maw from its throat. The tentacle bites the enemy's flesh, ripping off a small bit of the body, and then it snaps back inside the monster. The range of this attack is 3". The crawler uses its Fighting and deals Str +d6 damage in such an attack.

2) **Ooze:** The crawler is covered in foul, greenish ooze. It receives a +2 bonus to all Agility or other Trait rolls made to slip out of bonds.

3) **Venom:** The claws of the monster are covered in a thick slime, which is a deadly poison. Wounded creatures must succeed at a Vigor roll with a -2 modifier. If they fail, they become paralyzed for 1d6 hours.

4) **Smell:** The creature has an inhuman sense of smell, receiving a +2 bonus to Notice when tracking or using this sense in any other way.

5) **Blind:** This mutation causes the crawler's eyes to disappear. The creature can live without sight, relying on inhuman hearing and smell instead. It effectively sees in the dark with a 12" range, and it can't be blinded.

6) **Pincers:** Two of the crawler's front legs end in massive crab-like pincers. These horrible weapons deal Str+d10 damage.

7) **Blisters:** The creature's back is covered in blisters filled with a putrid substance. When the monster dies, they burst, spraying their contents. Every creature under a Medium Burst Template centered on the crawler receives 2d6 damage (as for a grenade explosion, though the characters obviously can't throw a dead monster back).



8) **Shell:** The armor of the monster is much thicker than usual. The crawler receives an additional +2 bonus to its Armor.

9) **Chameleon Skin:** The skin of the creature can change color, adjusting to the environment. The monster receives Stealth d6 and has a +2 bonus to tests using this skill.

10) **Many Eyes:** This monster's head has not one, but several eyes, which gives it a +2 bonus to all Notice rolls when it tries to spot something.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d4(A), Spirit d6, Strength d6, Vigor d6

Skills: Climb d6, Fighting d8, Notice d6, Swim d6

Pace: 8; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 7 (2)

**Special Abilities:**

- **Armor (+2):** Thick skin covered with ooze, fur and scales provides crawlers with decent protection.
- **Claws:** Str+d4 damage.
- **Fearless:** Immune to fear and Tests of Will.

REAVER

The monster seems mostly composed of teeth, claws, spikes and stingers – apart of course from the chitinous armor. It's fifteen feet tall, but its powerful paws, ready to attack, make it seem

bigger. It roars, and then moves towards you incredibly quickly.

Reavers are distant relatives of crawlers – mutated, overgrown and bloodthirsty mutations of the most common Horde monsters. These big, strong and incredibly fast monsters are a terrible opponent even for elite units, armed with plasma weapons. Luckily for humans, they're no smarter than crawlers – their most underhanded tactic is waiting motionlessly for a victim. Usually they're not that patient, and attack whenever they see a potential target.

Horizon: These creatures are fortunately rare, and in the Horizon system are found only on Cor. Reavers support the Horde only during larger offensives, helping the swarms of crawlers or other vile beasts. Away from the frontlines, they're seldom seen, usually in areas fully controlled by the Horde, especially in places full of crawlers.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d4(A), Spirit d6, Strength d12+4, Vigor d12

Skills: Climbing d4, Fighting d10, Notice d6, Swimming d6

Pace: 8; **Parry:** 7; **Toughness:** 24 (6)

Special Abilities:

- **Armor (+6):** Thick skin.
- **Claws:** Str+d12 damage.
- **Fearless:** Immune to fear and Tests of Will.
- **Fear:** Anyone who sees a reaver must immediately make a Fear Check.
- **Gargantuan:** Reavers are Huge and thus suffer +4 to attacks against them. Their attacks count as Heavy Weapons, and their Armor as Heavy Armor.
- **Hardy:** This monster isn't Wounded if Shaken twice.
- **Size +10:** Reavers are at least fifteen feet tall, and they weigh a ton or more.
- **Swallow Whole:** A reaver can swallow a man-sized opponent; to do so, it must succeed in a Fighting roll with a -4 modifier. A swallowed victim receives a Wound every round. When they're Incapacitated they automatically die – the reaver has chewed and swallowed them.



HATCHER

It's humanoid in the broadest sense, though it moves on four limbs not unlike a spider. Its body is surprisingly smooth, covered with grey, hairless skin. The head of the monster is like that of a bird, ending in a long, clapping beak. But in the hatcher's chest is a wound, and from inside it come whispers, chirps and strange sounds. When the monster stands up, the first of the crawlers hiding inside emerges from this orifice.

Hatchers are among the most terrifying beasts of the Horde. They're not that scary by themselves – sure, they're strong, fast, and their beaks are able to penetrate the best personal armor, but these traits aren't exactly unusual among the monsters of the Worm of the Void. Their most nightmarish aspect is their ability to transport other beasts inside their bodies. Somehow, they're able to house dozens of creatures, which together are far larger than the hatchers themselves. Some veterans call them “clown cars with killer contents”.

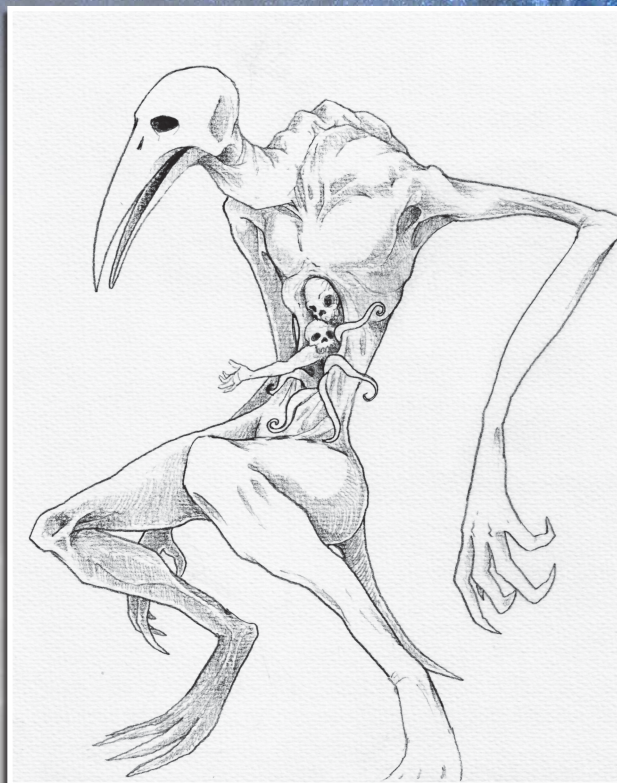
The tactics of fighting these monsters are simple – kill them before they crawl close enough to free their passengers. If they receive enough damage, they'll die, and no monsters will crawl from their insides. It's not clear why monsters only emerge from living hatchers. Maybe the orifices are some kind of portal to another place? Do the hatchers have the power to alter the shape and size of their innards?

Horizon: Occasionally, these creatures appear on the battlefield on Cor. The Horde's main front line troops are crawlers and reavers; hatchers are more often used as scouts. They sneak near fortified bases and release monsters there. Hatchers can also be found on Ash – at least three sects have managed to keep them in their bases. They use them during their rituals, usually sacrificing humans to these vile spawners.

Attributes: Agility d12, Smarts d6(A), Spirit d6, Strength d12, Vigor d10

Skills: Climbing d10, Fighting d10, Notice d10, Stealth d6, Swimming d8

Pace: 8; **Parry:** 7; **Toughness:** 13 (4)



Special Abilities:

- **Alertness:** +2 to all Notice rolls
- **Armor (+4):** Thick, callous skin.
- **Beak:** Str+d12 damage.
- **Carrier:** Inside the wound in its chest a hatcher can hide up to 12 human-sized monsters (such as crawlers). Up to 4 monsters can crawl out of the cavity in a round, but the hatcher must forego all its actions that round.
- **Fearless:** Immune to fear and Tests of Will.
- **Size +2:** Hatchers are over ten feet tall, weighing over 400 pounds.



SHRED

This thing was once human – a long, long time ago. Dozens of scars, torn skin and exposed muscles show that this creature has long been the servant of the dark gods. Just the sight of the monster's mutilated body makes you flinch,



but when it pierces its hand with a long, teathed blade, your hands are struck by a pain so strong it's as if it were your palms being mutilated.

Shreds were once fanatical followers of the Two-Faced Lord, chosen ones gifted with powerful abilities, for which they have to pay a terrible price. In the past, they were humans looking for beauty, harmony and perfection, but they found only pain and suffering. Even though they failed, they had another chance to serve their god, in changed bodies crippled by their master.

Shreds exist to tempt humans and convince them to follow their master. No one sane would follow a deity giving its followers nothing but pain, so shreds were given the ability to warp the souls of their victims and change them into faith-

ful servants of the Two-Faced Lord. They're occasionally used as assassins – apart from summoning madness they can also bring suffering and cause instant wounds on the bodies of their enemies.

Horizon: Shreds are found relatively often in the Horizon system. You might encounter them on Ash (where there are a lot of sects worshipping Zei-Aes), though they're also present on Bariz and in other places (like cult temples in deserted research stations on the uninhabited planets and moons of the system). They are particularly infamous among employees of Infinity – one powerful sect of the followers of the Two-Faced One uses shreds to obtain victims for rituals and to eliminate its opponents.

Attributes: Agility d10, Smarts d8, Spirit d8, Strength d10, Vigor d10

Skills: Climbing d6, Fighting d10, Intimidation d12, Knowledge (Occult) d12, Notice d8, Stealth d8, Swimming d6.

Pace: 8; **Parry:** 7; **Toughness:** 9 (2)

Special Abilities:

■ **Alertness:** +2 to all Notice rolls.

■ **Armor +2:** Tough skin.

■ **Beautiful Pain:** Each creature which has received at least Shaken status from the Shred must make a Spirit roll. If they fail, they become infected with a curse, forcing them to hurt and mutilate themselves. Whenever they encounter an opportunity to inflict damage on themselves causing great suffering, they must make another Spirit roll to avoid it, or else they will deal at least one Wound to themselves. After one month/Spirit level, the victim must make a final Spirit roll – a success means that the curse has ended, failure that they've been transformed into a Shred.

■ **Black Magic:** Shreds know the following spells: *aging, aggression, curse of pain, disfiguration.*

■ **Claws:** Str + d6.

■ **Combat Reflexes:** Receives +2 on Spirit rolls recover from being Shaken.

■ **Fearless:** Immune to fear and Tests of Will.

■ **Transfer Mutilation:** In an action a shred can inflict a Wound on itself, and transfer it to a body of a victim unless he or she makes a successful Spirit roll at -2. If the victim does pass the roll, the

shred keeps its Wound.

■ **Unfeeling:** Does not suffer from Wound modifiers.

COLLECTOR

This house-sized monstrosity crawls the battlefield slowly and ungracefully. It moves its massive body like a slug, helping from time to time with its atrophied legs. On its back you can see a few blisters filled with murky liquid – but it seems as if there's something moving inside them. Its huge, grotesque head ends in a mass of tentacles, arms and antennae constantly scanning its surroundings. Whenever it detects a piece of meat, it grabs it and puts it inside its immense maw.

Collectors are among the largest monsters found on the battlefield – the smallest are the size of large trucks, the largest can be ten times bigger. They're very slow, and relatively non-violent – which doesn't mean that they're harmless. These beasts were created to devour the bodies of humans and Horde beings, digest them inside their organisms, and transform them into new monstrosities. The blisters on the collectors' backs hatching tanks for such creations – when the collector devours a sufficient amount of raw material, the bubble bursts, creating another Horde monstrosity.

Usually the collectors devour the dead bodies of humans, Horde beasts or animals, but when their tentacles find a live target, they don't let it go to waste, and try to swallow it. The ooze covering its tentacles and inside the monster's mouth paralyzes the victim, which helps the collector to swallow and digest them. The few people who've managed to escape from the inside of a collector claim that the pain caused by this substance is so great that next time they'd rather just detonate a grenade than fight for their lives.

Until recently, people didn't know the purpose of collectors. They just seemed more of the Devourer's failed creations – big, hulking creatures encountered on battlefields and in areas controlled by the Horde. But when it was learned



that they create new monsters, the collectors became one of most avidly hunted creatures ever. For some years, humans have tried to capture a live collector – this has yet to happen. If humanity learns how exactly they transform dead tissue into the bodies of new beings, it could fight the Horde more effectively. Sadly, capturing a monster weighing hundreds of tons and surrounded by herds of other bloodthirsty monsters is not an easy task.

Horizon: It's not hard to guess that collectors are found solely on Cor, in regions swarming with Horde beasts. Fairly recently, the army discovered a major grouping of such creatures on a small archipelago in the north, far away from any major activity. The islands were instantly bombed, likely killing all such monsters. The senior officers still wonder why that many collectors were gathered in one place. It's said that they were rare mutants, able to breed monstrosities which could survive under the sea.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d4[A], Spirit d6, Strength d12+20, Vigor d12+4

Skills: Fighting d4, Notice d4, Tracking d6.

Pace: 4; **Parry:** 4; **Toughness:** 30 (8)

Special Abilities:

- **Armor +8:** Rock-hard skin.
- **Claws:** Str + d8.
- **Collecting:** When collectors devour living beings or dead bodies, they can produce new monsters. As a rule, one human is enough to produce one crawler, though if the collector has enough food it can produce more dangerous monsters (like reavers). Each pound of digested matter equals one pound of the spawned beast. Gestation takes about a day.
- **Fear (-2):** Everyone who sees a collector has to make a Fear roll with a -2 modifier.
- **Gargantuan:** Collectors are Huge and suffer +4 to all attacks against them.
- **Meat-smeller:** +2 to all Tracking, Survival and Stealth rolls in the wilderness.
- **Size +12:** They're hundreds of feet tall and weigh many tons.
- **Swallow Whole:** A collector can swallow a man-sized opponent: to do so, it must succeed at a Fighting roll with a -4 modifier. A swallowed victim receives a Wound every round. When they're Incapacitated they automatically die – the collector's ooze has melted them completely.

SPIKER

Spikers are a new creation of the Horde – using an entirely different tactic than the other beasts. They attack isolated outposts or small patrols in small groups, incapacitate the opponents and take them alive to Horde territory. What happens to them is one of the mysteries of Nemezis, but it's possible that they're used as food or incubators for the larvae



of other spikers or some as yet undiscovered monsters.

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d6 (A), Spirit d4, Strength d8, Vigor d10

Skills: Fighting d12, Intimidation d6, Notice d6, Stealth d4.

Pace: 10; **Parry:** 8; **Toughness:** 9(2)

Special Abilities:

- **Armor +2:** Spiky skin
- **Bite:** Str+d6
- **Low light vision:** Spikers ignore penalties for dark and dim light (but not for total darkness).
- **Tongue:** Str+d4, Reach 2. A tongue of a spiker is covered by bony hooks, secreting a powerful poison. Each victim that's been Wounded by this bite has to make a Vigor roll: a failure means paralyzing pain. Paralyzed victims are treated as if they were Shaken, and they can't recover for 1d6 minutes.
- **Quick:** Pace d10, rolls d10 instead of d6 as a running die.

MESU ZOMBIE

Corpses animated by the influence of Mesu can be encountered not only on Cor, but also on board abandoned spaceships. They aren't much different from zombies in other Savage universes.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d4, Spirit d4, Strength d6, Vigor d6

Skills: Fighting d6, Intimidation d6, Notice d4, Shooting d6

Pace: 4; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 13 (7)

Gear: Plasma pistol (15/30/60; Damage: 2d10; RoF 1 AP 5, double tap), plasma assault rifle (30/60/120, 2d10, RoF3, AP10, auto, 3pc), light infantry armor (+6).

Special Abilities:

- **Claws:** Str.
- **Fearless:** Zombies are immune to Fear and Intimidation.
- **Undead:** +2 Toughness. +2 to recover from being Shaken. Called shots do no extra damage.
- **Weakness (Head):** Shots to a zombie's head are +2 damage, and piercing attacks do normal damage.

SCAB

A plague on the streets of Ash. Nobody knows that cultists are responsible for their appearance – everyone blames experiments by Infinity. This creature is one of the new wave of Horde beasts, intended to demoralize and terrify people.

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d8 (A), Spirit d6, Strength d6, Vigor d8

Skills: Climbing d8, Fighting d6, Notice d8, Stealth d10.

Pace: 6; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 5

Special Abilities:

■ **Bite:** Str+d6

■ **Immunity:** Scabs are immune to poison and disease.

■ **Size -1:** Scabs are about as big as a small dog.

■ **Infection:** Anyone Shaken or Wounded by a scab's attack has to make a Vigor roll. Failure means infection with a serious disease. An hour after infection the fever starts; the victim loses consciousness and is treated as Incapacitated (as in the Fatigue rules). A victim can make a recovery check once per week, and a success means a recovery – he starts out Exhausted, and can recover to being Fatigued. A day of rest allows him to fully recover. Failure on the recovery test means continued illness, and critical failure – death.

ENERGY VAMPIRE

These energy-draining beasts are probably creations of Lij. They mostly attack spaceships – some of the abandoned wrecks drifting in space are the results of their actions. They can also attack terrestrial vehicles – probably, one of them caused the greatest railway disaster on Ash: it caused the heating and engine to fail, causing hundreds of people to die.

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d4(A), Spirit d10, Strength d8, Vigor d6

Skills: Notice d6, Shooting d6

Pace: 2; **Parry:** 2;

Toughness: 5

Special Abilities:

■ **Energy Drain:** On board a spaceship the vampire instinctively senses all sources of electrical energy (including bioelectricity) and feeds on them. Everyone on board must make a daily Vigor roll. Failure means that a character receives one Fatigue level. This can cause Incapacitation and death.

■ **Immunity:** Vampires are immune to all plasma weapons and electricity-based damage.

■ **Shock:** A vampire can transform its own bioelectricity into a deadly missile. Its range is 4/8/16, it deals 3d6 damage with 1 ROF. If a vampire can drain energy from an outside source (a reactor or an engine), it can shoot missiles at will. If it doesn't have any external source of energy it can shoot one missile per point of Vigor (so 6 on average). It can exert itself to create additional missiles, but that means one Fatigue level for each extra missile.

■ **Slither Through:** Vampires are boneless and can squeeze into any opening over 1 centimeter in diameter. This ability allows them to move through vents or electric installations of a spaceship.

■ **Windswept:** Vampires float in the upper regions of the atmospheres of terrestrial worlds. They fly with Pace 6 and Climb -2.

SABRE-TOOTHED LANDSHARK

These monstrosities are so called because of the fins on their backs and because they frequently attack from the sea – and because they can apparently smell blood like sharks. This is another of the Horde's cannon fodder beasts, a distant relative of the reavers – used as “marine infantry” to attack beaches or boats.

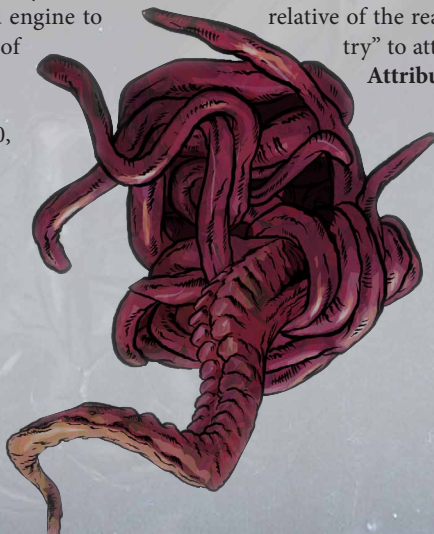
Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d6 (A), Spirit d8, Strength d12+4, Vigor d12

Skills: Fighting d8, Notice d8, Swimming d6.

Pace: 6; **Parry:** 6;

Toughness: 5

Special Abilities:



- **Aquatic:** Pace 6.
- **Bite:** Str+d10.
- **Claws:** Str+d6
- **Bear Hug:** If the shark captures the victim using Grappling and succeeds with a raise, the victim is pinned. The landshark receives a +2 bonus to attack rolls, as long as the victim stays grabbed. The only action victims can take is to attempt to escape with an opposed Strength roll.
- **Frenzy:** Landsharks can coordinate the attacks of their claws and teeth. They can make one free extra attack per round.
- **Size +2:** These monsters are above 8 feet tall and weigh over half a ton.

MUTANTS AND CREATIONS OF SCIENCE

Scientist toyed with the genes of all Earth's life. Here are a few creations that are the works of man.

GULTHANK

This monster is the result of military experiments on Cor. Their name reportedly is inherited from a gengineer who bred them and fed them. Sadly, he fed them with his own body. Now, gulthanks have been found hunting on Cor... and are also seen on Ash, apparently transplanted there by humans. Nobody knows why.

Attributes: Agility d10, Smarts d6(A), Spirit d8, Strength d12+2, Vigor d10

Skills: Fighting d8, Notice d6

Stealth d8, Swimming d6,

Pace: 12; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 15(2)

Special Abilities:

- **Armor +2:** Scaly skin
- **Bite:** Strength+d6
- **Large:** Characters attacking this monster add +2 to Fighting and Shooting rolls.
- **Rend:** If the gulthank strikes an enemy with a raise, it grabs them with its teeth. During the following rounds it starts rending their flesh, throwing its head around so that its teeth penetrate the flesh of the victim. Rending a grabbed prey deals 3d6 damage each turn. Freeing yourself from a gulthank's maw requires an opposed Strength roll.
- **Size +6:** Gulthanks are over 10 yards long.

ICE WORM

Infinity created ice worms in secret, so that Ashites would start to fear the real monsters of Nemezis and mobilize against them. Much like the render, they exist to force the Horizon system into the hands of the Ancient One. Right now they're terrorizing the icy deserts of Ash. While hunters on Bariz have killed smaller worms, and they might go on vacations to Ash, the icy wasteland is unwelcoming to tanks – and the really large worms are hard to hunt without heavy weapons.

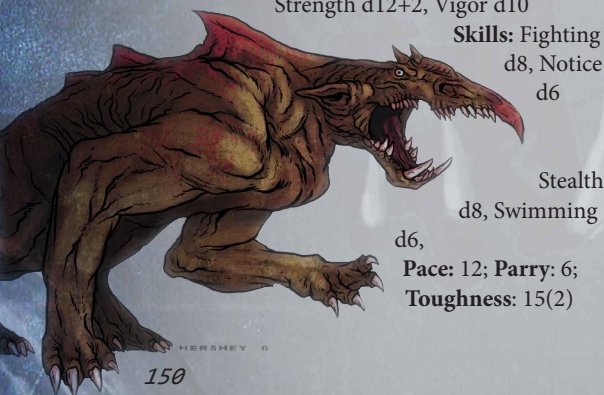
Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d6(A), Spirit d10, Strength d12+10, Vigor d10

Skills: Fighting d6, Intimidation d10, Notice d10, Stealth d10.

Pace: 6; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 21(2)

Special Abilities:

- **Arctic Organism:** All Vigor rolls involving resistance to cold are made with a +2 modifier.
- **Armor +4:** Thick fur and layers of fat
- **Bite:** Strength+d8
- **Burrowing (20"): Ice worms can disappear underground and emerge within 20" of the entrance during their next action..**
- **Hardy:** A second Shaken result does not cause Wound.
- **Gargantuan:** Characters attacking the monster add +4 to Fighting and Shooting rolls. When crushing a victim, it deals d12+20 damage, and the attack is treated as a Heavy Weapon.



■ **Size +10:** Ice worms are over 50 feet long and 10 feet in diameter.

SHARPHORN

These creatures are herbivorous reptiles, bred for the rich nobles of Bariz – reportedly using the DNA of dinosaurs. While they're supposed to provide food for the feudal subjects of the noble families, some of them have been set free to roam the large plains of Bariz. These days, nobles hunt them, just as ages ago people hunted bison or buffalo, since their meat is very tasty and nutritious – but the claws and horns of these carnivores can cut flesh like butter.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d4(A), Spirit d6, Strength d8, Vigor d8

Skills: Fighting d6, Intimidation d8, Notice d6.

Pace: 6; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 6

Special Abilities:

■ **Berserk:** When a Sharphorn is Shaken, it can become enraged. An enraged Sharphorn receives a +2 to Fighting and Strength rolls, and its Toughness rises by 2 points, while its Parry decreases by 2. It ignores all Wound penalties while enraged.

■ **Charge:** If the creature runs at least 6" in a turn, it charges, adding +4 to the damage dealt.

■ **Claws and Horns:** Str+d4

RENDER

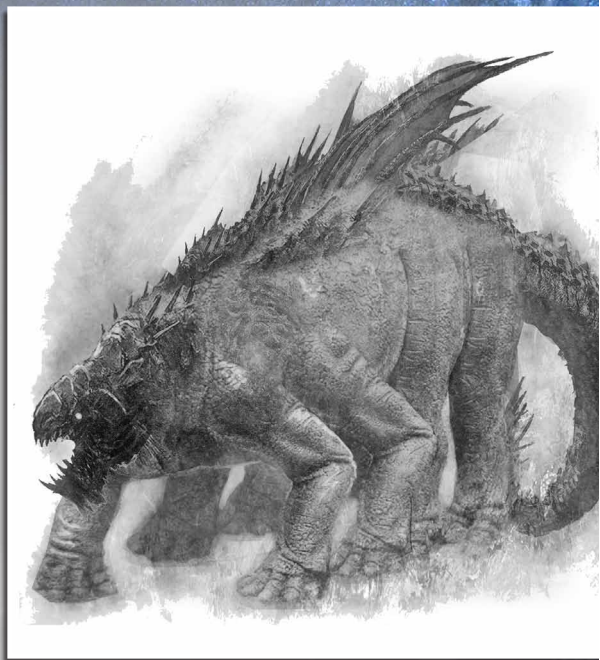
Even though it looks like a spawn of the Horde, this is actually a creation of human hands. Infinity created renders, and then let them loose on Cor and Bariz to fulfill the plans of the Ancient One – and mobilize humans to fight Nemezis. It's not yet known whether this plan will succeed, but the attacks on small military or hunting parties have been noticed. Interestingly, Infinity refers to them as an answer to the Devourer's bioweapons.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d8, Spirit d8, Strength d12+6, Vigor d10

Skills: Fighting d6, Intimidation d8, Notice d6, Stealth d6.

Pace: 10; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 6

Special Abilities:



■ **Fangs and claws:** Str+d8

■ **Quick:** Pace d10, rolls d10 instead of d6 as a running die.

- **Large:** Characters attacking the monster add +2 to Fighting and Shooting rolls.
- **Size +7:** Renders weigh over 3 tons.

SCORPIGER

Imagine a tiger after a visit to some horrible dentist. Now, change its fur into chitinous armor. And finally throw in a long tail ending in a poisonous spike. Hard to imagine? Apparently not for Infinity's engineers, who bred such a creature. Reportedly scorpigers were supposed to protect the research labs on Cor and Ash, and they escaped only accidentally. Currently, they're one of the favorite animals for the impressionable rich to hunt, and the scourge of soldiers. There's an upside – herds of scorpigers attack and eat beasts of the Horde.

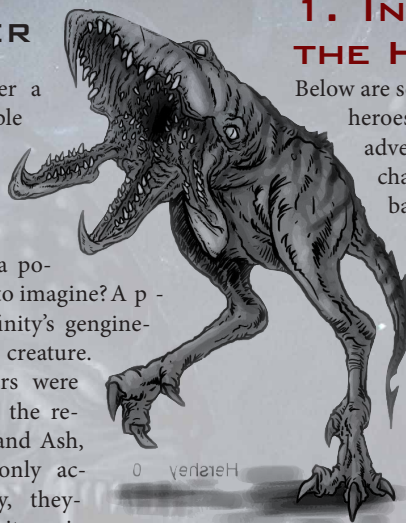
Attributes: Agility d10, Smarts d6 (A), Spirit d8, Strength d8, Vigor d8

Skills: Fighting d8, Intimidation d6, Notice d8, Stealth d10.

Pace: 6; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 8(2)

Special Abilities:

- **Armor +2:** Hard skin
- **Bite:** Str+d8, AP1
- **Fear:** Scorpigers are nightmares incarnate. Everyone who sees one for the first time should make a Fear check.
- **Paralysis:** Each victim Shaken or Wounded by a scorpiger's tail must make a Vigor roll: a failure means a Wound, success – only a level of Fatigue.
- **Tail:** Str+d4, paralysis.



THE UNUSUAL SUSPECTS

1. INHABITANTS OF THE HORIZON SYSTEM

Below are some examples of NPCs – people the heroes can encounter during their many adventures in the Horizon system. The characters below have been created based on the stats of Cor humans.

If your games are set on a specific world or one where genetic modifications are an important element, modify their racial traits.

* means an Edge, Hindrance, power or ability from this book.

CITY SLICKERS



BOSS

Maybe his family isn't the most powerful in the city, but everyone started out small, right? An average mob boss is not only an experienced fighter and skilled tactician, but also a good businessman. They take care about family matters thanks to their instinct, street smarts and people skills, rather than formal education – a single look and a couple of minutes of conversation, and they know whether a man is to be trusted or should receive a pair of concrete shoes.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d10, Spirit d8, Strength d6, Vigor d6

Skills: Driving d6, Fighting d8, Gambling d10, Intimidation d10, Investigation d6, Notice d10, Persuasion d10, Shooting d8, Stealth d6, Streetwise d10, Taunt d10, Throwing d6

Charisma: +2; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 6;

Toughness: 5

Hindrances: Vengeful, Cautious

Edges: Command! Hold the line!, Inspire, Charismatic, Connections, Combat Reflexes.

Gear: Katana (St+d6+2, AP2), plasma pistol (15/30/60; Damage: 2d10; RoF 1 AP 5, double tap), standard force field, jack.

HOBO

Standard issue homeless from the streets of Ash. Dirty, smelling of unwashed bodies and cheap booze, they hide in ruined and abandoned dwellings. You can often meet them on streets, begging for change or food. Some of them are actually former veterans, remembering a couple of tricks from their glory days – and these are sometimes hired by various gangs.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d6, Spirit d4, Strength d6, Vigor d6

Skills: Fighting d6, Intimidation d4, Notice d6, Shooting d4, Stealth d4, Survival d6.

Charisma: -2; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 5

Hindrances: Mean, Dirt Poor

Edges: -

Gear: Brass knuckles (St+d4), switchblade (St+d4, -2 to Notice when folded).



LIEUTENANT

If you manage to rise above the average Syndicate troops, you have to be someone special. Smart, aware, and ruthless, the lieutenant sees enemies – but also opportunities – everywhere. He's loyal to his boss, but he well knows that at the first failure the don will get rid of him, and that's why he constantly tries to increase the size of his troops – or assume a boss' position.

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d8, Spirit d6, Strength d8, Vigor d6

Skills: Driving d6, Fighting d8, Gambling d6, Intimidation d8, Notice d6+2, Persuasion d6, Shooting d8, Stealth d6, Taunt d6, Throwing d6.

Charisma: +2; **Pace:** 6;

Parry: 5; **Toughness:** 5

Hindrances: Vengeful, Arrogant,

Edges: Command, Hold the line!, Alertness, Combat Reflexes, Martial Artist.

Gear: Dagger (St+d4), plasma pistol (15/30/60; Damage: 2d10; RoF 1 AP 5, double tap), standard force field, jack.



STREET THUG

Some people don't have much choice – they might dream of becoming VR stars, politicians, or respected citizens, but deep down inside they know that they're going to live their lives at the bottom. This guy is one such person. Uneducated, taught from an early age that might makes right. Give him some Eagles, point him at the target, and he will teach them this truth.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d6, Spirit d4, Strength d6, Vigor d6

Skills: Fighting d8, Gambling d4, Intimidation d6, Shooting d4.

Charisma: -1; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 5

Hindrances: Habit (Major, addiction to alcohol, drugs or VR), Poor.

Edges: Combat Reflexes

Gear: Switchblade (St+d4, -2 to Notice when folded), 9mm pistol (12/24/48, 2d6, RoF1, AP1, double tap), jack.



SYNDICATE KILLER

Young, skilled, ambitious – but he has more chance of dying horribly than climbing to the top. Every Syndicate gun dreams about climbing up: to be a bodyguard to a boss, or the leader of his own cell. But very few of them manage to become even a lieutenant. Mostly, they are shot by their enemies, arrested by the cops (sometimes being sold out by their fellow gangsters), or end up in the morgue after a failed attempt to implant some kind of illegal device or experimental military nano. But this is one that's still alive, and about to cross paths with Player Characters – but the latter can probably rectify the former.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d4, Spirit d6, Strength d6, Vigor d8

Skills: Driving d4, Fighting d8, Intimidation d6, Notice d4, Shooting d8, Stealth d4, Taunt d4, Throwing d4.

Charisma: 0; **Pace:** 6;

Parry: 6; **Toughness:** 5

Hindrances: Overconfident, Loyal.

Edges: Combat Reflexes, Martial Artist.

Gear: Dagger (St+d4), plasma pistol (15/30/60;

Damage: 2d10; RoF 1 AP 5, double tap), standard force field, jack.

FREELANCERS



INDEPENDENT PSIONICIST

In the Horizon system, psionics aren't under any compulsion to join a psychic trust, but free psionics aren't welcome, especially to rulers afraid of independent, uncontrollable psis. And there's a good reason for that – the untamed psis often use their powers to control the minds of others. Sometimes they work for themselves, sometimes for the Syndicate, or (surreptitiously, of course) corporations or noble families.

This character is treated like Seasoned character for the purposes of determining his psionic abilities. The powers described below are the ones he uses most often – this character can use all basic and warrior powers.

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d8, Spirit d8, Strength d6, Vigor d6

Skills: Driving d6, Fighting d10, Intimidation d6, Investigation d6, Notice d6, Persuasion d6, Psionics d8, Streetwise d6, Shooting d6.

Charisma: 0; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 7;

Toughness: 5

Hindrances: Cautious, Greedy (minor).

Edges: Arcane Background: Psionics*,

Psionic School: Psychic Swordmaster

Powers: *boost/lower trait, deflection, dispel, detect/conceal arcana, smite, telekinesis,*

Gear: Plasma pistol (15/30/60; Damage: 2d10; RoF 1 AP 5, double tap), standard force field, jack, stress controller.

Power points: 15



INDEPENDENT MERCHANT

A modern entrepreneur has to be brave, resourceful, and ruthless. The competition does not sleep – and if you drop your guard for a moment, your own enterprise can turn into a pile of ashes. This kind of independent merchant is in equal parts a businessman, a smuggler, a pilot and a braggart. You can use him as a potential employer looking for a group of people to do some suspicious work in his name – for instance eliminating a competitor.

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d10, Spirit d6, Strength d4, Vigor d4

Skills: Driving d6, Fighting d4, Gambling d10, Intimidation d4+2, Investigation d4, Notice d4, Persuasion d10+2, Piloting d8, Repair d6, Shooting d6, Streetwise d4, Taunt d6+2.

Charisma: +2; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 4; **Toughness:** 6(2)

Hindrances: Pacifist (minor)

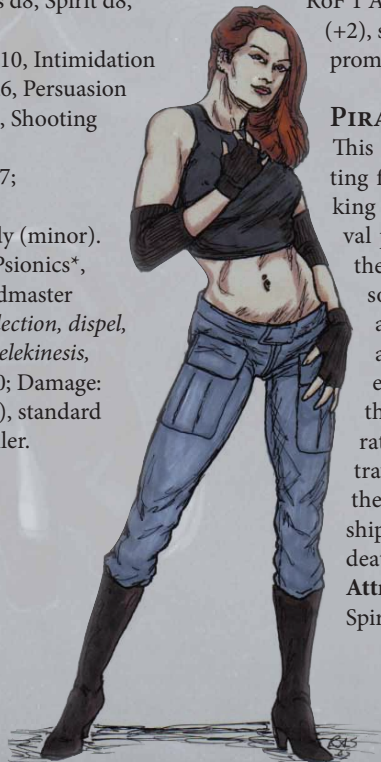
Edges: Rich, Connections, Independent Merchant*, Starship*.

Gear: Paralyzer (3d6, requires reloading – 1 action), plasma pistol (15/30/60; Damage: 2d10; RoF 1 AP 5, double tap), flight suit (+2), standard force field, jack, social prompter, voice modulator.

PIRATE

This is not an ancient sailor fighting for freedom and justice, attacking the sea ships of corrupt naval powers. No, this is just one of the brutal, primitive thugs who somehow gained control over an old starship and now make a living robbing ships as they exiting hyperspace. There's nothing romantic about these pirates – they're criminals, robbing travelers of any valuables, and then damaging the hull of their ship and leaving them to certain death.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d4, Spirit d6, Strength d6, Vigor d6



Skills: Fighting d6, Gambling d6, Intimidation d6, Piloting d6, Repair d6, Shooting d6.

Charisma: -2; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 7(2)

Hindrances: Greedy, Bloodthirsty, Vengeful.

Edges: Starship (at least one of the crew)

Gear: Switchblade (St+d4, -2 to Notice when folded), plasma pistol (15/30/60; Damage: 2d10; RoF 1 AP 5, double tap), flight suit (+2), standard force field, jack.



NOBLE

A small mansion, half of a thousand slaves working for his pleasure, a golden signet ring, fancy clothes and an unwavering conviction in his own superiority – in the imaginations of many an inhabitant of the Horizon system, this is an average noble. In reality, he is more likely to be a well educated, reasonable man, who does indeed have a small fortune – but not necessarily thanks to back-breaking slave labor by his miners. He might have some problems with the neighbors, though, and that's why he's willing to hire inconspicuous agents for a delicate mission.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d8, Spirit d6, Strength d4, Vigor d4

Skills: Driving d6, Fighting d6, Gambling d4, Healing d4, Investigation d6, Knowledge (science) d6, Notice d4, Persuasion d8, Piloting d6, Riding d4, Shooting d4, Streetwise d6, Taunt d6.

Charisma: +2; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 6;

Toughness: 4

Hindrances: Pacifist (minor)

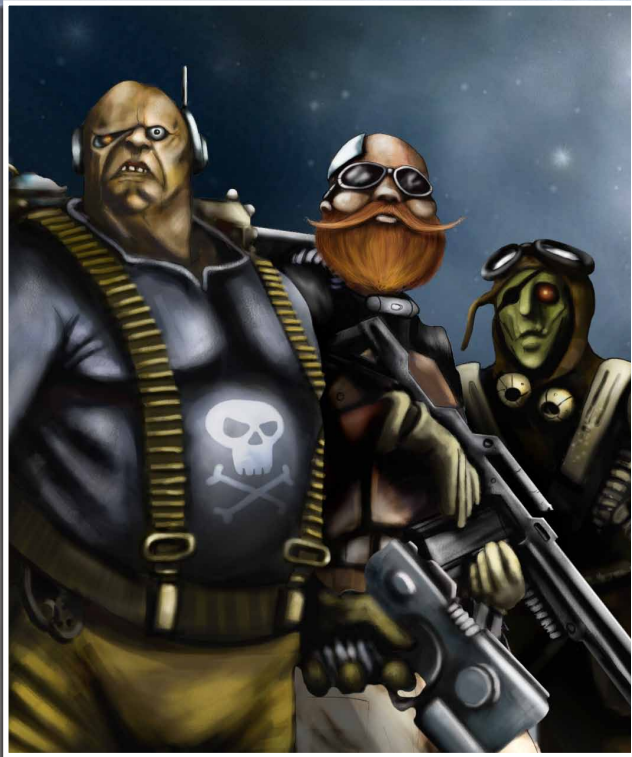
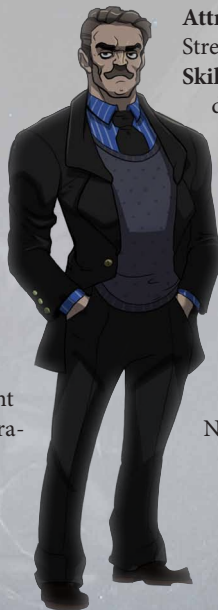
Edges: Noble, Filthy Rich, Connections.

Gear: Rapier (Si+d4, +1 to Parry), plasma pistol (15/30/60; Damage: 2d10; RoF 1 AP 5, double tap), miniaturized force field, jack, independent advisory system.



VALARI ASSASSIN

Artists in the art of silent killing. They're not just tra-



ined in combat – they have received training in a wide variety of skills and are able to infiltrate any community, impersonating one of their members. You could find one at a noble masquerade, or in a pirate crew or even a group of Devourer cultists.

Attributes: Agility d10, Smarts d10, Spirit d10, Strength d6, Vigor d6

Skills: Climbing d8, Driving d8, Fighting d10, Intimidation d6, Investigation d6, Lockpicking d10, Notice d10, Pilot d8, Persuasion d6, Riding d6, Shooting d10, Stealth d12, Streetwise d8, Survival d4, Swimming d6, Throwing d6, Tracking d8.

Charisma: +2; **Pace:** 8; **Parry:** 7;

Toughness: 11 (6)

Hindrances: Arrogant

Edges: Ambidextrous, Acrobat, Charismatic, Combat Reflexes, Dodge, Level Headed, Martial Artist, Mighty Blow, No Mercy, Quick, Two-fisted.

Gear: Dagger (St+d4), 9mm pistol (12/24/48, 2d6, RoF1, AP1, double tap), .50 rifle (45/90/180, 2d10, RoF1, AP2, snapfire penalty, increased range**), assassin's armor (+6, +2 to Stealth and Climb, Pace +2), standard force field, jack, stress controller, syntheskin.

FOR POWER AND MONEY

CORPORATE AGENT

Infinity needs people like these. Well-educated, well-trained and well-equipped, with a couple of very useful implants, they're able to achieve a lot without any support. The corporation doesn't keep them on a short leash, and so a lot of them co-operate with the Syndicate or the noble families on Bariz.

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d8, Spirit d8, Strength d6, Vigor d6

Skills: Climbing d6, Driving d6, Fighting d6, Intimidation d6, Investigation d8, Lockpicking d6, Notice d8+2, Piloting d6, Persuasion d6, Shooting d8, Stealth d6, Streetwise d6, Swimming d4.

Charisma: +2; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 5

Hindrances: Overconfident

Edges: Alertness, Charismatic, Combat reflexes, Danger Sense.

Gear: Plasma pistol (15/30/60; Damage: 2d10; RoF 1 AP 5, double tap), standard force field, jack, stress controller.

CORPORATE SECURITY

An ex-grunt clever enough to quit the army at the right time to find himself a safer, surer and better paid job. He knows that he's never going to fully recover his fitness after his service on Cor, but he has no need to do so: currently his only problems are desperate ex-workers wanting to break into the corporate buildings.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d4, Spirit d6, Strength d6, Vigor d6

Skills: Driving d6, Fighting d6, Gambling d4, Intimidation d6, Notice d6+2, Shooting d6, Taunt d4.

Charisma: 0; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 9(4)

Hindrances: Varies (typical ones are Greedy,

Loyal, Cautious, Stubborn, Coward)

Edges: Alertness

Gear: Baton (St+d4), paralyzer (3d6, 1 action to reload), plasma pistol (15/30/60; Damage: 2d10; RoF 1 AP 5, double tap), scout armor (+4), standard force field, jack, cufflinks, short range communicator (corporate frequencies).



BLUE

Blues are the real elite among the agents of Infinity, versatile people able to handle any complicated task. Their loyalty is reportedly derived not only from massive compensation and training (including VR sessions enhancing their connections to the corp) but also a cortex bomb implanted in all Blues, detonated whenever the agent betrays his employer.

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d10, Spirit d8, Strength d6, Vigor d8

Skills: Climbing d6, Driving d8, Fighting d8, Gambling d6, Healing d6, Intimidation d8, Investigation d8, Knowledge (computers) d6, Knowledge (tactics) d8, Lockpicking d8, Notice d10+2, Piloting d8, Repair d6, Persuasion d6, Shooting d10, Stealth d8, Streetwise d8, Survival d6, Swimming d6, Throwing d6.

Charisma: +2; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 6

Hindrances: Loyal (Infinity).

Edges: Agent*, Alertness, Combat Reflexes, Dodge, Rich.

Gear: Plasma pistol (15/30/60; Damage: 2d10; RoF 1 AP 5, double tap), standard force field, jack, social prompter, stress controller.

TO PROTECT AND SERVE

BEAT COP

Beat cops can either be dumb, bribable and open to persuasion by the criminal elements – or really smart guys who care about their community and want to clean up the streets. These good cops add Smarts d6, Persuasion d6, and Notice d8.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d4, Spirit d6, Strength d6, Vigor d6

Skills: Driving d8, Fighting d6, Gambling d4, Intimidation d4, Investigation d4, Notice d4, Persuasion d4, Shooting d6, Streetwise d6,
Charisma: +0; **Pace:** 5; **Parry:** 4; **Toughness:** 7 (2)

Hindrances: Greedy or Vow (protect and serve, minor)

Gear: Baton (St+d4), protective suit (+2), 9mm pistol (12/24/48, 2d6, RoF1, AP1, double tap), standard force field, jack, cufflinks, short range communicator (police frequencies).



VETERAN COP

The veteran cop has been served for several years. He knows who has real power in the city, who has whom in their pocket, where can you meet good people for the right task – and when to leave your badge in the drawer. He has a lot of friends who'd really be interested if he disappeared – and that's the reason why the Syndicate hasn't eliminated him. He can be a valuable companion for the PCs – or a pain in the ass.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d10, Spirit d8, Strength d6, Vigor d6

Skills: Driving d6, Fighting d6, Gambling d8, Intimidation d6, Investigation d10, Notice d10+2, Persuasion d8, Piloting d4, Shooting d6, Stealth d4, Streetwise d8, Taunt d6.

Charisma: +2; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 5

Hindrances: Heroic, Vow (protect and serve, minor)

Edges: Alertness, Charismatic, Combat Reflexes, Connections.

Gear: Switchblade (St+d4, -2 to Notice when folded), 9mm pistol (12/24/48, 2d6, RoF1, AP1, double tap), standard force field, jack, cufflinks, short range communicator (police frequencies).

SWAT

The cops have to have some of these: special weapons squads, anti-terrorist units, stormtroopers. These are essentially soldiers working in the police force, dealing with the worst crimes in any metropolis: cybernetic crackpots, religious fanatics. They're consummate professionals – usually well-paid and well-equipped. They can

be ideal support for the characters or their enemies – depending on where the PCs stand.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d10, Spirit d8, Strength d6, Vigor d6

Skills: Climbing d6, Driving d6, Fighting d10, Healing d4, Intimidation d6, Knowledge (tactics) d6, Notice d8, Piloting d4, Shooting d10, Stealth d6, Swimming d4, Throwing d6.

Charisma: 0; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 7; **Toughness:** 15 (8)

Hindrances: Loyal.

Edges: Brawny, Combat Reflexes, Martial Artist, Quick.

Gear: Plasma pistol (15/30/60; Damage: 2d10; RoF 1 AP 5, double tap), plasma assault rifle (30/60/120, 2d10, RoF3, AP10, auto, 3pc), plasma grenade (5/10/20, 3d10, AP 10, MBT), light tactical armor (+8), standard force field, jack, stress controller, cufflinks, medium range communicator (police frequencies).

IN THE FORCES



OFFICER

Twelve years in school, eighteen months of boot camp, another five years in the academy... and now he's being sent to some god-forsaken hell-hole, commanding a band of primitive thugs on an "extremely important" mission, which will have no importance in the war anyway. Many officers on Cor feel this way – as if someone pulled a fast one on them, and ended their careers. In fact, most of them are going to get killed, but those few who manage to survive have the potential to become the best commanders in the Galaxy.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d8, Spirit d8, Strength d6, Vigor d6

Skills: Driving d6, Fighting d6, Intimidation d6, Knowledge (Battle) d6+2, Notice d6, Persuasion d6, Piloting d4, Shooting d8+2, Stealth d6, Swimming d4, Taunt d6, Throwing d4.

Charisma: +2; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 5

Hindrances: Arrogant.

Edges: Charismatic, Command, Hold the line!, Inspire.

Gear: Plasma pistol (15/30/60; Damage: 2d10; RoF 1 AP 5, double tap), plasma assault rifle

(30/60/120, 2d10, RoF3, AP10, auto, 3pc), plasma grenade (5/10/20, 3d10, AP 10, MBT), military force field, jack, battlefield analyzer, cybernetic eye, targeting mod, MREs for seven days.

VETERAN

He's seen more dead bodies than the Syndicate executioners. He's been murdering Horde spawn for months, dreaming about the day when the high command will decide to press the button and burn everything in purifying, nuclear fire. Sadly, nothing suggests that the army is going to save Cor, so the vet is doing what he's best at: complaining at everything, from the rations and to the newcomers. Each veteran has one additional skill at d6: either Piloting, Repair, Tracking or Knowledge (tactics).

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d6, Spirit d8, Strength d6, Vigor d6

Skills: Climbing d4, Driving d6, Fighting d8, Gambling d6, Healing d4, Intimidation d6, Notice d8, Shooting d10, Stealth d8, Survival d6, Swimming d4, Throwing d6.

Charisma: 0; **Pace:** 6;

Parry: 6; **Toughness:** 11 (6)

Hindrances: Stubborn, Vow (minor, based either on military or personal beliefs – like Kill the Horde or Get home alive or just be a loyal soldier)

Edges: Brawny, Combat Reflexes, Martial Artist, Right Between the Eyes*.

Gear: Plasma handcannon (10/20/40; Damage: 5d8; RoF 1 AP 15), plasma assault rifle (30/60/120, 2d10, RoF3, AP10, auto, 3pc), plasma grenade (5/10/20, 3d10, AP 10, MBT), light infantry armor (+6), military force field, jack, stress controller, MREs for 7 days..

TROOPER

An average private who's spent a few weeks in the Corite army knows more about war than many veterans from another star system. Just

basic training is enough for him to be placed on the battlefield without the risk that he's going to escape being paralyzed by fear. The soldiers of Cor are heroes, ready to fight and die for their homeland – and for decent wages, of course.

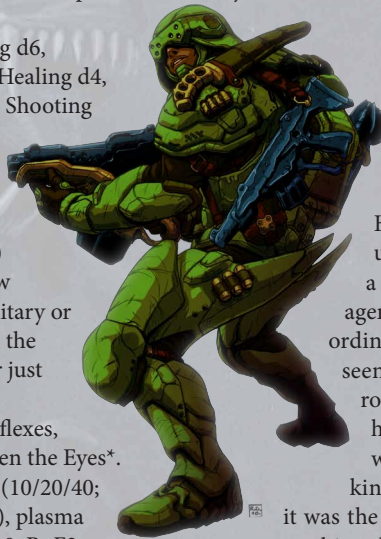
Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d4, Spirit d6, Strength d6, Vigor d6

Skills: Climbing d4, Fighting d6, Healing d4, Intimidation d6, Notice d8, Shooting d6, Stealth d6, Survival d4, Swimming d4, Throwing d4.

Charisma: 0; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 5; **Toughness:** 11 (6)

Edges: Combat Reflexes, Martial Artist.

Gear: Plasma pistol (15/30/60; Damage: 2d10; RoF 1 AP 5, double tap), plasma assault rifle (30/60/120, 2d10, RoF3, AP10, auto, 3pc), plasma grenade (5/10/20, 3d10, AP 10, MBT), light infantry armor (+6), military force field, jack, MREs for 7 days.



ENEMIES OF MANKIND

CULTIST

He can be anyone, a cop, a famous journalist, a homeless bum, a businesswoman or a corporate agent. But what separates him from ordinary people is the fact that he's seen the power of evil, the full horror of the dark gods, and lost all hope. The decision to join forces with the greatest threat to mankind was the hardest in his life – but

it was the only possible choice. Unless something shows him that there's still a chance for the survival of the human race...

Attributes: Agility d4, Smarts d4, Spirit d6, Strength d4, Vigor d4

Skills: Driving d4, Fighting d4, Investigation d4, Knowledge (occult) d6, Notice d4, Persuasion d4, Shooting d4, Spellcasting d4, Stealth d4, Streetwise d6,

Charisma: -2; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 4; **Toughness:** 4

Hindrances: Loyal, Traitor

Edges: Cultist*

Powers: *Curse of pain*, *Curse of vermin*.

Gear: Dagger (St+d4), plasma pistol (15/30/60; Damage: 2d10; RoF 1 AP 5, double tap), standard force field, jack.



HIGH PRIEST

He isn't afraid of the lies of politicians and generals. He knows the full power of the black magic of the dark gods, and that human technology is as nothing compared to it. Soon, the new order will come, an age of darkness, when the Devourer will swallow the last star and the Milky Way will be extinguished. When that time comes, he'll be on the winning side, and his masters have already bestowed many wonderful gifts upon him.

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d8, Spirit d10, Strength d4, Vigor d6

Skills: Driving d4, Fighting d8, Healing d4, Intimidation d6, Investigation d6, Knowledge (occult) d10, Notice d6, Persuasion d6, Shooting d6, Spellcasting d10, Stealth d6, Streetwise d6,

Charisma: +2; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 5

Hindrances: Stubborn, Traitor

Edges: Charismatic, Cultist*

Powers: *Aging**, *curse of fear**, *Curse of pain**, *disfiguration**, *summoning**

Gear: Dagger (St+d4), plasma pistol (15/30/60; Damage: 2d10; RoF 1 AP 5, double tap), standard energy shield (110 P/A 1/1, power 100), jack, two standard batteries.



ADDITIONAL MATERIALS:
ADVENTURE ABC

The Horizon system is a setting ready for thousands of adventures. To fan the flames of the GM's imagination, here is a random adventure generator.

To create an adventure, draw five cards, which will create the adventure outline. The suits of the cards will determine the setting, scenery, identity of the main opponent, and the reward the team can expect. The values will determine the kind of threat, the beginning, development, plot twist and finale.

Place the cards in a row. Check the suits first, to create the background of the story. Then, check the values of cards to create an outline of the scenario, from the introduction of the characters to the denouement. Remember that the joker has no value or suit - draw an extra card to determine these, depending on how you want to use the joker.

1. THE SUITS: ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

FIRST SUIT: THE PLACE

The first card describes in which part of the system the adventure is set. You can ignore this result if your campaign focuses on a single planet of the system, and you don't want to force the team to travel.

■ ♠: **Ash.** The adventure will be set on the slowly freezing Ash, among agents of Infinity, Inc. and brutal Syndicate thugs.

■ ♥: **Bariz.** The action will be on Bariz with its flying cities, unspoiled nature and decadent nobles.

■ ♦: **Cor.** The heroes will wade through the steamy, monster-haunted jungles of Cor.

■ ♣: **Space.** The adventure will take place in space in the Horizon system - on a space station, in a lunar mine, on a space cruiser or in the asteroid belt.

■ **Joker: Beyond Horizon.** This time the characters will leave the Horizon system and travel among the stars!

SECOND SUIT: THE SCENERY

The second card narrows down the exact place of the scenario. This might be the first information you'll give your players. The adventure will start with a sentence like „Your ship just landed in port,” „You're sitting in a smoke-filled nightclub in a seedy district,” or „You're cutting through the jungle.”

■ ♠: **Good District.** The adventure is set in one of Horizon's metropolises and the PCs are going to see the pretty side of it. Ash will welcome them with the luxury apartments of Infinity directors or the luxurious villas of Syndicate bosses. They'll visit the exclusive restaurants, art galleries or flying cities of Barizian nobles, or the headquarters of the high command in the old resorts of Cor. They might even find themselves on board a luxury liner. This is the perfect setting for intrigues, crime dramas or tales of vengeance where cleverness and a silver tongue matter far more than Shooting and Survival skills.

■ ♥: **Slums.** The big cities of Horizon have a darker side: alleys avoided by honest citizens, seedy dives, dirty, run down factories or devastated ruins where the lower classes try to survive in horrible conditions. Ash will terrify the team with cold, poverty and constant threat from ban-

23
15
7
dits. Among the slums of Bariz they'll see the suffering caused by the corrupt nobles. In camps of Cor they'll going to get hazed by veteran troopers, while in a smoke-filled miners' bar on the moon of Dys they'll learn what really bad beer tastes like. This is a good setting for stories about defending the weak, or hunting a dangerous Horde beast - but it's also a good opportunity for an investigation.

■ ♦: **Settlement.** The adventure will take place in an isolated community, far away from any major towns. Such a settlement can be a railway station or a camp in the freezing ruins of Ash, a noble's manor on the surface of Bariz, a guard post or research station in the jungles of Cor, or any kind of space station. The most obvious adventures will tell stories about the grim secrets of the community and the depraved habits of its inhabitants - but such a settlement can also be the goal of a journey, a place to defend or at least evacuate.

■ ♣: **Wilderness.** Here, the player characters will face savage, untamed nature. On Ash, the team will have to deal with the deadly cold, biting the flesh and cutting to the bone.

While idyllic landscapes of Bariz might look picturesque from a flying city, you are still cut off from civilization when you crash out there.

Trying to survive in Cor's jungles is certain death, while asteroid belts, the surfaces of moons, or starship cemeteries are just waiting for fools who will jump into a spacesuit and brave the void. A typical scenario set in such place will be about the exploration of the unknown, but many adventures can also be built around a trek through dangerous wastelands, a chase or a search for missing people, technology or information.

■ Joker: **Cut Off.** This adventure sees the team isolated in a small, claustrophobic space. The heroes can be stuck in a small repair station during a terrible snow storm on

Ash, the secluded residence of an eccentric aristocrat from Bariz, or a small research station on Cor, attacked by waves of Horde beasts. And when they're trapped on a damaged spaceship, where life-support systems will break down in a few hours, they'll remember that in space no one will hear you scream. This is a perfect setting for horror, or at least a murder mystery.

THIRD SUIT: THE OPPONENT

The suit of this card will determine the identity of the main opponent. Sometimes the entire adventure will be about a constant struggle with his vile intrigue. At other times, she will appear only at the very end, for the heroes to fight her evil. In any case, determining the identity of the opponent is the first task the heroes will face.

■ ♠: **Brute.** Such a villain is a very direct threat: you need to defeat him in combat. This could be a Horde beast haunting the area, which the PCs need to blast with their plasma weapons, or a

powerful guardian patrolling the ruins the heroes need to explore. A brute could be a tattooed Syndicate boss, a nimble fencing champion, a heavily armored mercenary captain, an insane cyborg or a powerful space cruiser. She could be even a telepath, using her powers to boost her combat skills. The basic conflict is about locating the enemy and defeating him, or perhaps fleeing.

■ ♥: **Schemer.** This enemy wants to trick the heroes, rather than massacre them. He or she makes complex plans intended to give them power, money, success, or vengeance. This might encompass a seductive manager trying to manipulate an entire branch of a corporation, a sneaky serial killer, a gang leader, an ambitious, sneaky and impoverished noble heir-



ess, or the leader of a mysterious cult of dark gods. Often, the schemer's identity is unknown, and sometimes the team treats him like an ally. Psionicists are often found in this category, when they're using their strange powers to meddle in their victims' minds, change their memories and force them to commit deeds against their nature. To defeat the schemer, you need to decipher their plots first.

■ ♦: Mogul.

Here, the problem is not discovering the identity of the villain, but confronting him. The mogul's strength is his immense wealth: he surrounds himself with faithful bodyguards ready to lay down their lives for him, she might hide herself in the penthouse apartment of a fortified skyscraper, or on the deck of a private star frigate. A mogul has the most advanced toys, an entire foundation of telepaths, and an army of lawyers ready to take any case to court. A mogul can be a corrupt Barizian baron, a heartless corporate agent getting rich on human suffering, the leader of a Syndicate clan, a sadistic Colonel and so on. If he or she has access to black magic, she can use it to control servants: an army of enslaved agents or Horde beasts. At the first sight the mogul seems untouchable; to defeat him, you need to cut him off from his seemingly infinite wealth.

■ ♣: Group/None. Life isn't always simple, and not every adventure is about a conflict with a single villain. Sometimes the problems of the PCs will be the effect of many people interacting with each other and with them: a group of conspirators, a local community secretly worshipping the dark gods, or a group which is completely clueless about the effects of their activities. Examples might be scientists investigating an ancient arti-



fact which brings madness, or a gang of spoiled youths unaware that their ritual is in fact a monster-summoning spell. Sometimes the heroes will have to face the environment itself: save people who have suffered in a natural disaster, cross the Horde-infested jungle to deliver a message, or evacuate a mining station before it's hit by a giant meteor.

■ Joker: Dark Gods. The evil deities are constantly present, and their vile, complex intrigues are like webs, entangling the entire Horizon system. This time the heroes will face the agents of one of the Enemy, and will have a chance to thwart the plans of the incomprehensible enemies of mankind. Remember that a single team will never be able to defeat a god, but it can stop one of the dark power's many plans.

FOURTH SUIT: THE PROBLEM

Often the central problem of the adventure is related to the motivation of the main opponent: the heroes have to stop the villain from completing his nefarious plans. Occasionally, the heroes have to face the effects of an unsolved problem - for instance, defeating a monster summoned by cultists.

■ ♠: Revenge. Before the adventure started, someone got hurt - and now he wants revenge. Usually the avenger is the main villain - this way the players will understand his motives, and the story will be about a growing spiral of hatred. The main theme of the conflict will be stopping the vendetta, but the heroes can also help the avenger or even take revenge themselves. Finally, the team can be involved in a conflict between two rival factions and try to solve it peacefully, while one (or both) factions try either to persuade the PCs to take their side - or eliminate them. You can

avenge your own suffering (real or imaginary), the loss of your honor, or the deaths of your relatives, loved ones, or spiritual guides.

■ ♥: **Passion.** The characters of this tale are driven by a heartfelt passion, whether love or hate. The villain will do whatever it takes to win his beloved or destroy the object of his hostility. The heroes can also protect their children, spaceship or home planet. The problem for the heroes is often a conflict between passion and duty: the hero must decide whether to kill his hated foe or perhaps allow the lovers to unite despite their harsh, aristocratic parents – or follow orders.

■ ♦: **Ambition.** The main problem in this adventure is caused by a sense of self-worth. Perhaps someone wants to prove at any cost that they deserve more than they have, and gain power, wealth or fame by any means necessary. Or perhaps the team will struggle to fight a problem too big for them, or be motivated by greed for riches, new technology or social status. The threat the PCs will face can also be caused by excessive ambition: the result of a dark ritual which was supposed to elevate a warlock to supreme power, or a political intrigue gone too far. Adventures based on ambition can also be about a friendly rivalry or fear of public embarrassment.

■ ♣: **Necessity.** Some things simply can't be avoided. It's the duty of Cor soldiers to shoot crawlers, and the mob will always extort protection money. Some people are born and raised according to a strict code, others are trapped by circumstances. A villain following the rule of necessity is convinced that he has no choice: if he doesn't use black magic, he'll never get what he deserves, or if he avoids breaking the law, he will die a poor man. Perhaps he's being blackmailed, forced to obtain the cure for a fatal disease, or is simply insane.



Often the heroes have no choice - when the airlock of a run-down space station breaks down, a false accusation forces them to fight for their honor, or a deadly disease makes them search for an experimental medicine. Sometimes, the events haven't happened yet, and the heroes can fight against their destiny.

■ Joker: **Mistake.** Someone got it all wrong! The villain isn't truly evil, once you get to know him, or those young aristocrats aren't worshipping the Two-Faced Lord, but preparing for the carnival! The discovery of a past mistake might rekindle a bloody conflict, while a current mistake might lead to a comedy of errors. Mistakes in assessing the situation often have dramatic consequences: imagine the bosses of feuding families negotiating a ceasefire when someone confuses reaching for a handkerchief with an attempt to draw a weapon. If the PCs confuse a dark wizard with an eccentric scientist, they can become wanted murderers or even unwitting pawns of a villain wanting to summon the Devourer of Worlds.

FIFTH SUIT: THE REWARD

A successful team can count on a reward. Its exact value should reflect the adventure's mood, especially the difficulty of completing the mission and the experience of the characters.

■ ♠: **Technology.** After defeating the villain, the team will gain a new piece of experimental technology. It can be taken off the body of a defeated foe, or awarded by a grateful employer.

■ ♥: **Relationship.** This scenario will improve a relationship with an NPC. The group will gain a grateful ally or a regular employer - or maybe one of the heroes will meet the love of his life?

■ ♦: **Money.** Good work means good payment. This time the bank accounts of characters will gain a few extra Eagles.

■ ♣: **Fame.** The heroes will attract the media's attention, and all that brings: in-

itations to parties, medals, lecture opportunities or other expressions of public gratitude.

■ **Joker: Knowledge.** During the adventure, the heroes will gather some important information, which will come in helpful in the future, or reveal some mysteries from a PC's past.

2. CARD VALUE: THE ADVENTURE PLOT

FIRST VALUE: THE THREAT

The Horizon system is a dangerous place: a tangled web of the intertwined influences of gangs, corporations, noble families, and dark gods -

and the player characters. The first card will determine which one of these problems is the starting point for the adventure. If your campaign has a consistent theme, for instance a fight with the Horde or struggles between noble families, you can ignore this result.

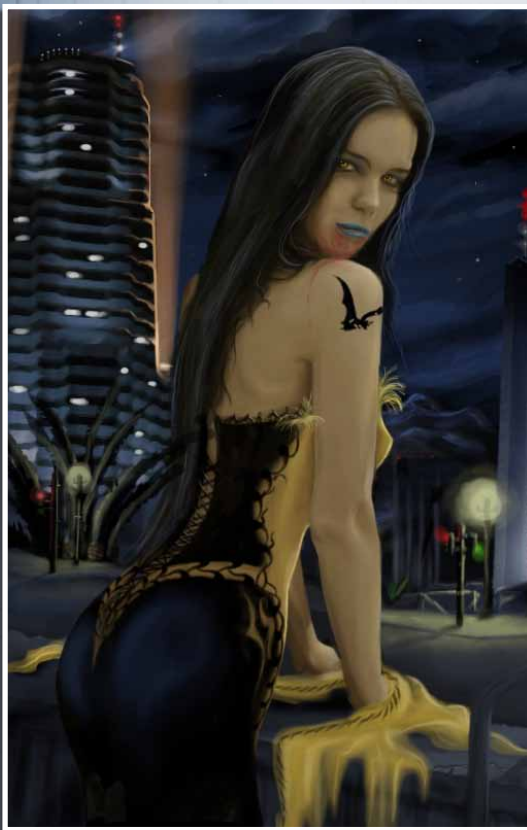
■ **2: The Little People.** The ordinary citizens of the Horizon system have their own problems - and this time the party will be right in the middle of them. This adventure could be about riots caused by racial or economical conflict, a church-sponsored persecution of cyborgs, a crime of passion, the defense of a residential block or pacifying striking workers and eliminating their leader. The party may have to protect people being evacuated from the endangered area, or try to muster the district to take on out-of-control gangs.

■ **3-4: Organized Crime.** This story takes place in the underworld of organized crime. The heroes can meet ordinary gang members or Syndicate daimyos, take part in a massive illegal scam, smuggle stolen works of art on the boss' private yacht, conduct a massive vendetta or protect their family from ancient feuds. The stakes of this game will be not only wealth but also honor, reputation and the prestige of gangs.

Note: If the adventure is set on Bariz, treat this card as a King (Elite). If its set on Cor treat it as a Jack (Army).

■ **5-7: Dark Gods.** Even though Nemezis offers many different kinds of adventures, the main thread is fighting the reawakened gods. This is the case in this adventure: the party will face a dark cult, a single warlock or a monstrosity straight from the dark heart of Nemezis. The heroes will have to gun down the monstrous hordes, or search for the source of the insanity sweeping more and more districts of the city. The heroes will have a chance to thwart the plans of powers conspiring against mankind, and understand why humans cooperate with the Enemy.

■ **8-9: Corporations.** The ruthlessness and greed of corporations in the Horizon system - particularly Infinity - matches that of organized crime. This time the PCs will fight for influence, profit, money, shares, sources of important minerals, prototypes of new products and registered



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trademarks. The opponents will be heartless managers, looking for any opportunity to win over rival departments, faceless enforcers in grey suits, and low-level corporate drones. The stakes in this game are profits and nothing else.

■ **10: The Law.** The heroes will have to deal with officers of the law - either help them in their difficult duties, or try to avoid the relentless (but often corrupt) cops. The group will face heavily armored anti-terrorist squads, clever detectives, experienced sergeants, attractive vice agents, psychic investigators or criminals trying to escape justice. The central problem is related to justice and its conflict with the letter of the law.

■ **Jack: The Army.** The military has the most influence on Cor, but that doesn't mean the army isn't present on other worlds. Heroes can be simple soldiers, trying to disintegrate Horde monsters or avoid being eaten by them. They can also investigate a case against an officer, recruit volunteers, find supplies, look for comrades listed as MIA or test a new weapon. The scenario will probably be about how much violence is justified, and the conflict between a soulless military bureaucracy and a living, feeling soldier.

■ **Queen: Scientists.** The adventure revolves around scientific research - legal, forbidden, gone wrong or horribly right. The story will take place in sterile laboratories, secret institutes or on a scientific expedition. The heroes will have to denounce a fraud, stop a vile experiment, test the newest technology or to fight the results of failed experiments: a runaway monster, a supercharged psionics, or a rogue AI. They could stop the theft of priceless data - or steal it themselves. And additionally they could catch a glimpse of the secret of immortality, or examine the ethical boundaries of science.

■ **King: The Elite.** The party will encounter the people on the covers of tabloids: nobles, politicians, sportspeople and other members of the social elite. The heroes will become pawns in the game of ambition, where the stakes are power and fame - they might conduct an investigation into a high-profile murder, protect a mogul, frame a leader of the opposition, try to find dirt on a celebrity, or represent a noble in a duel or a deadly race. They'll have a unique opportunity to improve their own station by cutting themselves a bigger slice of the cake. Among the omnipresent corruption, decadence and lies, the key question is who has the right to rule and what they must pay for it.

■ **Ace: Madman.** While the dark gods seem to revel in bringing insanity to humans, it can also result from misapplied psionics, trauma, various neurological factors or overdosing on pharmaceuticals. This adventure will force the party to visit the abyss of madness and stop a degenerate murderer, track down a psychopathic telepath, cover up an outburst of insanity in a noble family, or confront an insane military officer. This scenario will be focused on the horror of insanity, or the thin line between sanity and madness.



■ **Joker: Class Struggle.** Two environments are conflicted! Draw two cards, discarding any other jokers: these two groups are in conflict with each other. For instance, the heroes have to prevent a clash between the army and pacifist demonstrators, kidnap scientists for the Syndicate, take part in negotiations between a noble family and Infinity, or investigate whether a chain of macabre murders have been committed by a madman or a priest of the dark gods.

SECOND VALUE: THE HOOK

The value of the second card determines how the characters will get in trouble.

■ **2: A Mistake.** The characters accidentally stumble into the adventure by pure chance. Maybe someone confuses them with someone else: the mortal enemies of a local gang boss, a rescue group sent to find lost scientists, the heirs to a massive fortune, or ruthless mercenaries. Or maybe it's the heroes that fail to assess the situation correctly – they went into the wrong bar, or confused a local crazy hobo with an eccentric guru, reportedly able to awaken psionic gifts in people.

■ **3-4: Pit Stop.** The party reaches a place where something's already going on, and there's no possibility of escape. For instance the space station the characters visit is overrun by terrorists, the owner of the hotel they stay in is a cultist of the Devourer, or an annoying journalist is really a murderer working for the Syndicate.

■ **5-7: "I have a job for you..."** Perhaps the easiest way to begin an adventure: someone approaches the heroes, claiming that his village/city/planet is in great danger, and offering a reward. Or the party is forced into a limo, which drives them to the headquarters of a bald gentleman stroking a white cat, who mentions something about them owing him a favor.

■ **8-9: A Helping Hand.** This is similar to the previous example only without a payment or other bonuses. This time someone friendly – a relative, an ally met during the previous adventure, a bartender from the local watering hole or a pet – finds himself in trouble, and only the PCs can save him.

■ **10: Accidental Discovery.** One of the heroes accidentally discovers some interesting information. Perhaps a hero overhears a group of rogue mercs planning an expedition into Horde territory on Cor, or a gang planning a major heist. One of the heroes can also be attacked, discover an old hologram containing a call for help in the memory of an old robot, or perhaps during a soiree in Infinity Tower he spots an old enemy – or former love of his life – in the crowd.

■ **Jack: Shadows of the Past.** The past always follows us, and we can't free ourselves from its influence. This time the scenario is all about the consequences of the heroes' earlier adventures: it can refer to a previous scenario, or someone's background. If none of the players has described the past of his character, so much the better: an

adventure like this will give you an opportunity to fill in the blanks.

■ **Queen: Deepest Desires.** The hook is connected to the wants and needs of one of the heroes. They might draw the entire team in trouble to clear the good name of their love, their own honor or of their family. Or maybe they hear about the opportunity to obtain a valuable work of art, the only existing copy of a book rescued from Earth, or a unique, prototype cyborg implant allowing you to play video games while driving the car.

■ **King: Orders.** The heroes receive a direct order to take care of a problem. It might come from a nobleman owning the PC's base of operation, or obeying a ruthless mob boss might turn out to be the only way to save their lives. Or maybe one of



Cor's Generals will send an agent to make the heroes an offer they can't refuse?

■ **Ace: In Media Res.** The team reaches the entrance to a deserted bunker, pursued by the Horde. They try to find the last rescue capsule on a star liner under assault. They lie down on the edge of the roof, anxiously observing their target's bodyguards - or they're just about to deliver a passionate speech before the court, while the corrupt judge furrows his brow. Regardless, play out the action scene first, and later, when you calm down, let the players sort out how did they get into this mess.

■ **Joker: The Will of the Dark Powers.** The team has meddled with plans of a dark god, so it tries to deal with them once and for all. Maybe it terrifies them with nightmares, summons its agents or monsters to attack them - or maybe its servants arrange matters so that the players are considered cultists!

THIRD VALUE: THE GENRE

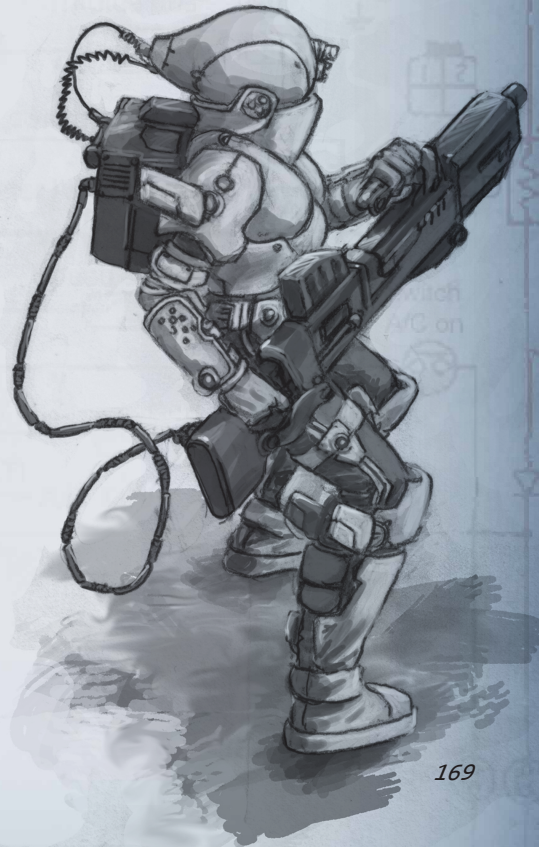
The actual plot development depends chiefly on the genre of the adventure. Each genre has each own way of presenting and solving the main issue. In some adventures the characters will have to wade through the black blood of Horde monstrosities, in others they will have to use their smarts, while others yet will test their psychic health to its limits.

■ **2: Journey.** There are multiple obstacles between the party and their ultimate goal. Such a simple plot can lead the team to forgotten ruins, a lost research station or a secret Syndicate base. Before you plan the obstacles, look at the players' character sheets - a good adventure of this sort should be varied and contain obstacles giving all the characters a chance to display their skills, or the team specialists will be the only ones able to solve the problem. Remember also that a steep cliff is often a more deadly opponent than a horde of crawler: players are more likely to invest in Fighting than Climbing.

■ **3-4: Horror.** The Horizon system is haunted by the presence of gods and infested with cultists,

which makes it a perfect backdrop for horror adventures. In role-playing games, fear derives from ignorance and feelings of helplessness: the characters must feel threatened, not knowing what's trying to take their lives or how to defeat it. Good horror should be surrounded by an atmosphere amplifying these feelings: mist, darkness, mysterious noises and grotesque vistas, or claustrophobic, narrow spaces.

■ **5-7: Investigation.** An unknown perpetrator has committed a great crime. This time the heroes have to discover which of the people with the necessary motive, opportunity, and predisposition have done the deed. There should be a fairly large group of suspects and a number of clues - some being simple red herrings, others pointing to the guilty party. Remember - gathering the information shouldn't be a serious challenge (that's why heroes have Notice, Investigate and Streetwise skills). The problem is figuring out where to look for the clues or how to interpret them when you finally find them.



■ **8-9: The Hunt.** The party must eliminate a threat, which is either hidden or actively evading the group. The heroes can hunt down a vile warlock, a psychopath on the run from a maximum security prison, a shred, or the rebellious daughter of an Infinity executive running away with a Syndicate soldier. This kind of adventure will probably make use of Streetwise or Tracking, and you will probably use the chase rules. The hunt is different from the investigation in that the former is about identifying the enemy, the latter about capturing them.

■ **10: The Heist.** To succeed in this adventure, the heroes are forced to break the law. Justice is often blind, and sometimes it serves the villains! The team will have to plan the crime and then set it in motion. Perhaps they will have to break into a heavily-guarded residence and steal a necklace with a cursed jewel straight off the neck of a pampered Barizian noble's daughter. Or maybe they will assassinate a corrupt police chief who secretly worships the Devourer, while avoiding contact with his subordinates. In such an adventure, the players' creativity is more important than their dice rolls: when preparing the adventure, remember that the plan most likely to succeed should be one that takes into account the PCs' best skills - a group of expert climbers will use windows and rooftops.

■ **Jack: Protection.** The team is responsible for saving someone or something: maybe they'll defend a fort against attack by the Horde, escort the two-year-old son of a famous scientist to his dad's new workplace, transport a cargo of unstable chemical substances or food for a marine

division. Whatever the object the PCs are protecting, there always is someone who wants to steal or destroy it. In combat, the players must remember that the stakes aren't just their own survival, so they'll need a good plan. The GM needs a good idea of the attackers' goals, and familiarity with the area of the adventure, so that both sides can use it to their advantage.

■ **Queen: Romance.** Love stories don't agree with all groups - some players aren't comfortable with roleplaying romance, others find it very enjoyable. The romance doesn't have to involve the heroes directly: maybe they have to assist a friend in winning someone's heart, or protect a young couple from the wrath of their families. A good romance contains a few canonical elements: a quarrel between lovers, a tragic mistake, or a misunderstanding about a loss or break-up - but a romantic plot rarely stands on its own. Draw another card, to contrast the romantic subplot with another genre, which will provide an interesting backdrop - and involve the players who aren't romantically involved.

■ **King: Intrigue.** The heroes are involved in a web of lies and deceit. The goal of intrigue is giving something value different than in reality, for instance getting in the Dean's good graces, framing innocents, saving the guilty from justice or selling contaminated drugs. This plot is similar to an investigation: the heroes have to discover the truth, and then prove it. The real difficulty is not discovering who the villain is, but convincing people that he is the real source of evil. The characters will have to use Persuasion, Intimidation, Streetwise and perhaps Taunt, if they publicly confront the bad



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guy with a sharp tongue. Also, Lockpicking and Stealth will be necessary to gather the evidence.

■ **Ace: Drama.** You can't always tell the good guys and the bad guys apart. The drama genre focuses on human motivations rather than the situation around them, and requires the characters to take sides in a serious conflict. This adventure will test their values: will they help the starving inhabitants of wind-swept Ashite ruins to attack a supply train, or will they warn the rightful owners about the ambush? Will they reach out a friendly hand to an enemy in trouble? Will they help an heiress of the Gray Wolf clan to escape with a young Black Dragon, or will they save innocent people from the gang war that would ensue? Sometimes it's possible to find a compromise that will keep everyone reasonably happy. At other times, every choice has negative consequences - then drama will become tragedy.

■ **Joker: War.** The Horizon system is currently at peace - except for the war with the Horde - but an armed conflict between humans can break out at any moment. It doesn't have to encompass entire planets or major factions: the heroes can get involved in a struggle between crime or noble families, a private war between megacorporations about access to uranium ore, or a campaign against pirates. What matters is that blood has been spilled and no one can stay neutral - you have to fight or spy for one of the sides. During such an adventure you'll probably need the mass battle rules and some ideas for an exciting backdrop for skirmishes with the enemy.

FOURTH VALUE: PLOT TWIST!

An adventure where everything goes just as predicted at the beginning is boring. You need an exciting plot twist, which should happen just when the players have determined the kind of problem and the identity of their opponent.

■ **2: Disaster.** The activities of the villain or the heroes will result in a catastrophe - serious damage to the entire area - an earthquake happens, the river overflows, or the terraformers start to malfunction. Or even worse, the inhabitants of

the district fall ill with a weird disease, cyborgizations cause madness, and insects rain from the sky. From now on, as well as fighting the villains, the heroes have to deal with this terrible event and protect ordinary people from it.

■ **3-4: A Change of Scenery.** This simple plot twist will lead the plot into new scenery: an unmasked plotter leaves for his village manor, the trail of the kidnapped victims leads to ruins, or a gangster hides in the canals, planning to get to the spaceport and off the planet. This shift allows new characters to move into the spotlight - in the jungle the marine can replace the detective to investigate matters in the military camp.

■ **5-7: A Change of Genre.** When this plot twist occurs, the kind of adventure changes. When the investigation ends, the guilty party escapes and a hunt begins. During the journey, the heroes are overwhelmed by a feeling of terror, or a teenaged runaway joins them, and they must protect her. Before the characters manage to expose an intrigue, a war breaks out. You can select any genre fitting the current plot of the adventure, or try a surprising random combination.

■ **8-9: Change of Villain.** The current opponent turns out to be just a front for the real foe: the gang works for a corrupt CEO, a serial killer attacks because his mind has been taken over by a warlock, the monsters have been summoned by political conspirators. The heroes need to determine how to defeat the new heavy!

■ **10: Helplessness.** When push comes to shove, the team discovers that it can't shove back - they are helpless. For now; there is a technology, person, or circumstance which they can use to defeat their opponent. And so, the group must search the slums for a brilliant scientist that has fallen in with bad company and convince him to finish an experiment he started years ago. Or maybe invite a conniving ambassador to the only place on the planet where he can be arrested and sent back to his home system, while riots break out throughout the entire city.

■ **Jack: Mystery.** Thanks to the events of the adventure, the heroes discover a secret which will change their outlook on past events. A wanted serial killer turns out to be an avenger eliminating

cultists. Helpless members of a pacifist community are revealed as the producers of a dangerous drug. Or perhaps the mystery throws some light on the history of the setting or the characters: a runaway psionic murderer reveals to the defeated hero that he's his father.

■ **Queen: Role Reversal.** The initial assumptions of the heroes turn out to be false, and they realise they have been helping the wrong side all along! Their allies turn out to be villains, and the heavies - innocent victims of the flim-flammed team. The characters don't just have to deal with the primary problem, but also clear up all the confusion and restore any damage they have done.

■ **King: Far Reaching Consequences.** The party has to stop for a while and think about the consequences of their actions. Eliminating a wicked aristocrat can cause political chaos, and stopping cruel experiments can slow down research into the weaknesses of the Horde. If no-one except the heroes knows that they're doing the right thing, the characters must struggle to clear their good name. Regardless, the group has either to step back and leave the situation alone, or prepare to cause serious changes in the region or in their own lives.

■ **Ace: A Dramatic Choice.** The Horizon system is a good backdrop for dramatic challenges, and sometimes it's good to confront the players with a difficult dilemma which will alter the future plots of adventures. When two enemies escape in opposite directions, you need to decide which one needs to be pursued and prepare for the consequences of the other one escaping. When the characters find enough evidence that the leader of a psionic foundation is a black magician, they need to decide whether it's better to make this public or eliminate him quietly. You can either work out two different paths of consequences, or draw two plot twists, and decide that depending on the actions of the group the adventure will go in one of these directions.

■ **Joker: Time Travel.** Not literally, of course - but during this adventure the players will be able to roleplay an episode using alternative characters living in the past, or their own heroes living ages ago. Perhaps their main characters are read-

ing the captain's log from a mysterious wreck, or investigating the first harbingers of the Horde invasion - they then can play the characters who played important roles in those scenarios. Perhaps an important event in the scenario will remind them of important events from their own past: hand them their character sheets and remind them what it was like to be a Novice.

FIFTH VALUE: THE CLIMAX

The final scene should be a memorable conclusion to the team's efforts, and a reward for their determined struggle to achieve their goals.

■ **2: Escape.** Perhaps the hardest task for any GM is convincing the party that they should run away. In this case, it's the only chance they have of saving their lives. Of course, they don't always have to retreat from the overwhelming enemy forces - the climax of the adventure can be escaping from an exploding space station, a crumbling corporate tower, or a jungle canyon flooded by a massive wave.

■ **3-4: Disclosure.** The identity of the current opponent is revealed. If the characters didn't already know who he was, in the final scene the villain reveals his face. If they had some suspicions, the climax confirms the identity of the evildoer: in this scene, he'll try to escape or confess. Maybe the heroes are the only ones to see his true face.

■ **5-7: Combat.** The most common, but also the most eagerly awaited, climax is fighting a powerful opponent: a Wild Card troubling the main heroes, or a large army of Extras. When the heroes' plasma blasters cool down, all problems have been solved.

■ **8-9: Chase.** The guilty party can't take it any more, and tries to escape. The heroes have to catch him, driving a motorbike through the narrow streets of a flying city on Bariz, fighting a blizzard on Ash, or sailing a canoe through rapids on Cor. Of course, when they will reach him, they'll have to fight, but the main conflict is based around the chase.

■ **10: Duel of Wills.** The opponent doesn't want to draw his weapon, or the heroes can't simply end

his life. They need to convince him to turn back from the wide road of sin, or that bloody vengeance won't solve his problems. Or at least frame him, or force him to blurt out his evil plan while the commissioner hides behind the curtain or in front of the key stakeholders.

■ **Jack: A Race Against Time.** The heroes have to perform a dramatic task in a given time. The time factor is a countdown on the bomb hidden in the sewers under Infinity Tower, or maybe they need to complete the mission before the Horde arrives. Or a cultist will end a dark ritual and unleash a horrible evil, or maybe a serial killer will lose his patience and murder the teenage hostage. Either way, the characters need to hurry and quickly dispatch any random encounters.

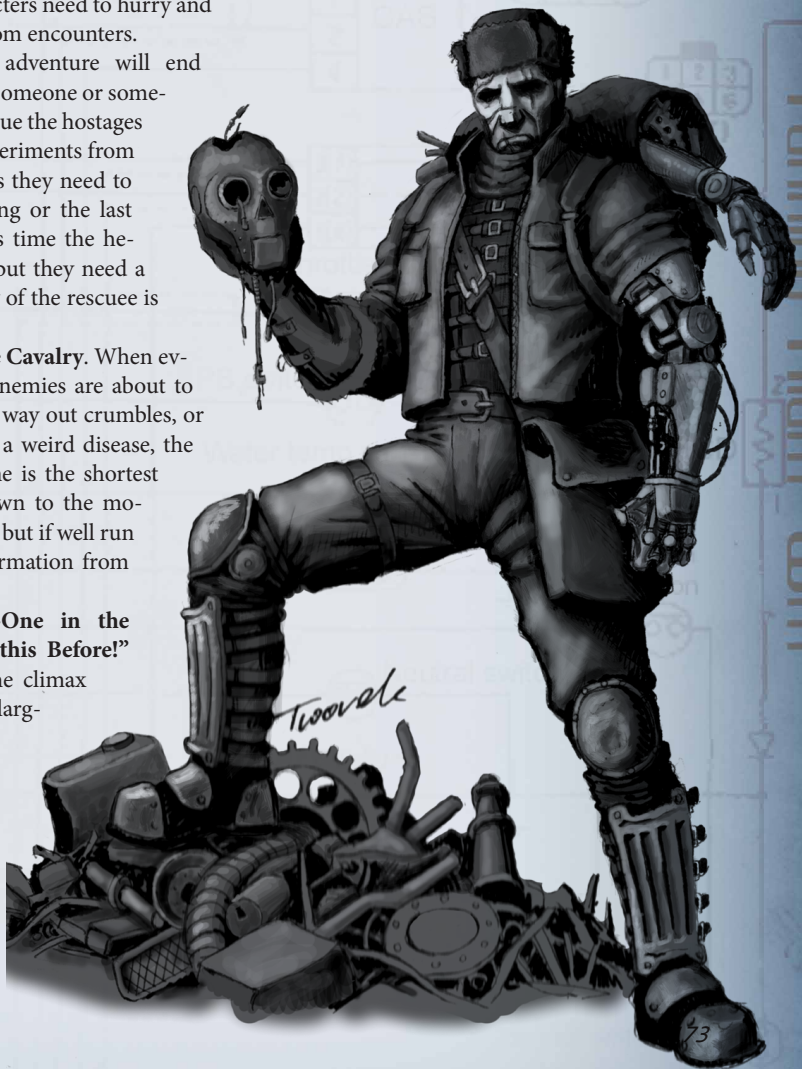
■ **Queen: Rescue.** The adventure will end when the heroes will save someone or something. Maybe they will rescue the hostages or victims of inhuman experiments from Infinity Tower. Or perhaps they need to recover a beautiful painting or the last bottle of a rare wine. This time the heroes don't need to hurry, but they need a good plan, since the safety of the rescuee is at stake.

■ **King: Here Comes The Cavalry.** When everything seems lost: the enemies are about to crush the heroes, the only way out crumbles, or everyone's overcome with a weird disease, the cavalry appears. This scene is the shortest kind of finale, boiling down to the moment the rescuers appear - but if well run it can guarantee a transformation from despair to elation.

■ **Ace: „Amazing! No-One in the Entire System has Seen this Before!”** Draw another card for the climax and give it an amazing, larger than life feel. A chase might use prototype teleportation devices, the PCs unmask the criminal at the Whitehall heiress' engagement party, or the final combat is fought in

the ruins of Cor's largest bridge. Most of the time these are just special effects, but if they're flashy enough, the players will remember them for a long time.

■ **Joker: To Be Continued...** Draw another card for the climax, but arrange things so that the players won't be able to bring the adventure to a complete end. The dishonest manager will be fired by the corporation but avoid imprisonment, one of the gang leaders will survive, or the team will recover a mysterious ancient artifact with unknown properties. This way the players will understand that the story isn't over yet, and the adventure will have a solid sequel.



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