

An Adventure/Short Story for *TORG*<sup>TM</sup>

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## CRUCIBLE OF PAIN



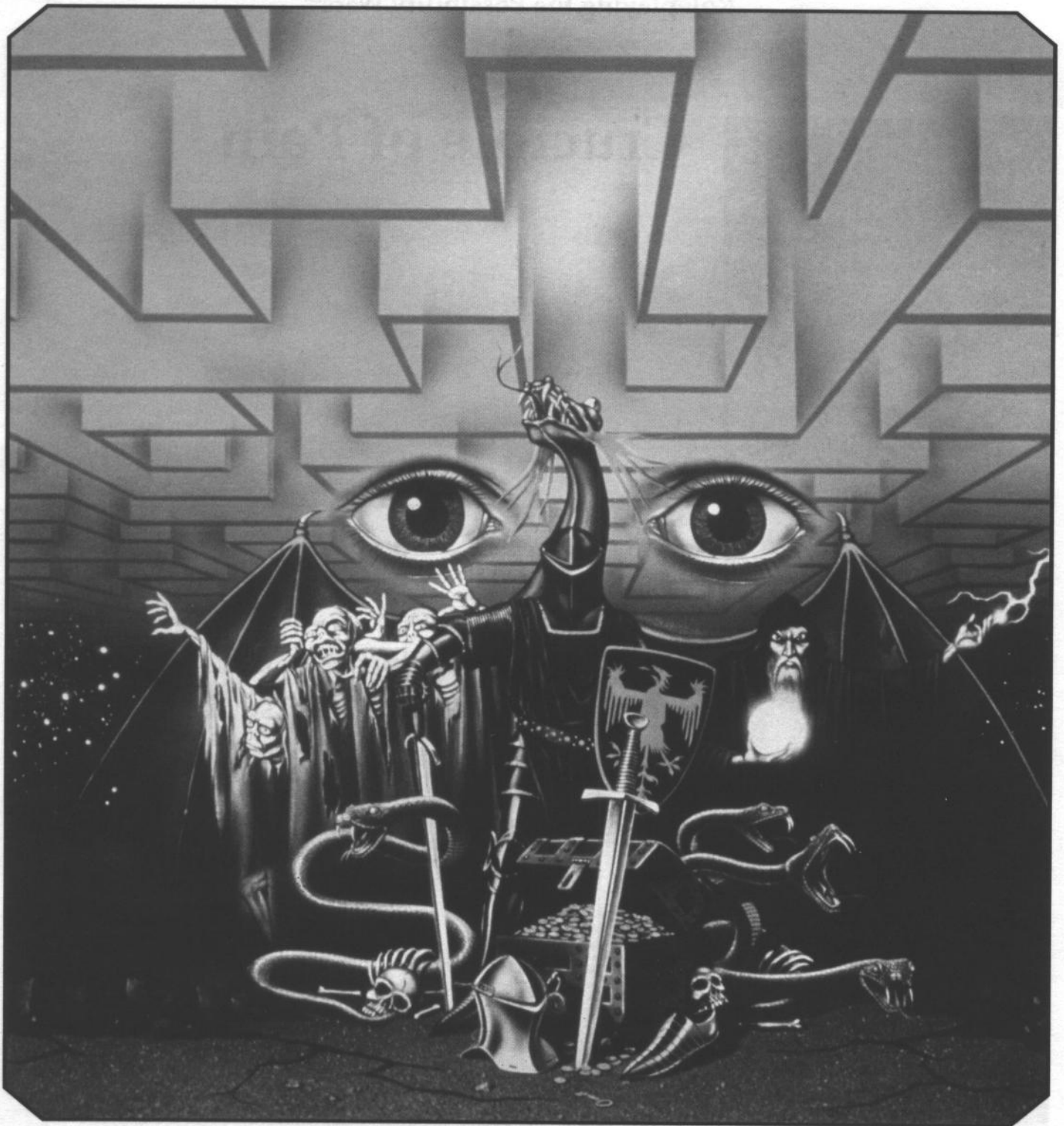
Murder, Madness, and Mini-Cosms

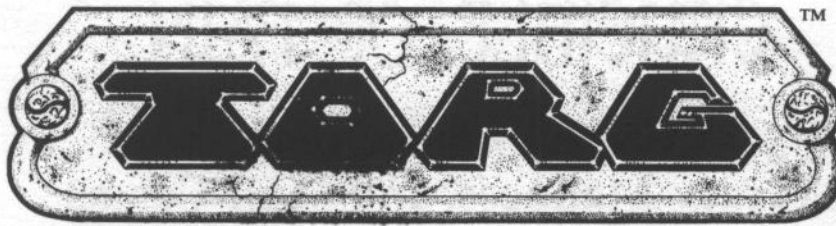


# CRUCIBLE OF PAIN

By Dan Greenberg

**Murder, Madness, and Mini-Cosms**





Roleplaying the Possibility Wars™

# Crucible of Pain



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# Crucible of Pain

## Introduction

*Crucible of Pain* is a novel concept in roleplaying games—an adventure story and *Torg* scenario in one pack.

While most roleplaying products are intended for the gamemaster only, the players are allowed to read the fiction section of this book. Game-master and players should read Part I of the short story, then play the adventure scenario, "The Nowhere Lands."

After completing the game section, both players and gamemaster can read Part II of the story and see how everything ended up.

## Part I

Maya raced through the shallow marsh, ankle deep in warm, murky water. Papyrus reeds slashed at her slender legs as she ran, and each jarring step sent shockwaves through her body.

Panic burned in her chest, but she hurtled forward, oblivious to the agony that racked her body. Her heart burned and her legs throbbed with a stabbing pain. Even though water splashed all around her, her mouth was dry and parched as the desert sands beyond the Nile.

The ground beneath her wheeled and spun in dizzying arcs. Behind her she heard the steady slap-slap, slap-slap of big, clumsy feet beating against the water in long, easy strides.

Their pace was slow, patient, and easy, as if they preferred to let their prey run itself to death rather than close for the kill. The rhythmic splashing of their gentle lope was horribly calming, like a steady heartbeat.

A breeze stirred behind Maya, and she suddenly gagged. The stench of the creatures made her choke and lose her stride. She stumbled and flailed her arms to recover her pace. The splashing noises behind her were louder now.

Her pace slowed. The pain and fatigue were too great for her to bear. If the creatures noticed her dwindling energy, they gave no sign of it. They seemed content to let her run until she gave up.

This is it, Maya thought. I'm finally crazy. I've finally lost it.

She struggled for control of her thoughts. She was sane once. It seemed so long ago now. When was it?

"Maya, listen to me when I am talking to you!"

The memory of her father's voice cut through her like a razor and slowed her pace. A burst of memories came unbidden, tumbling before her mind's eye.

She saw her family in their traditional places at their mahogany dinner table, smelled the customary Thai food, and felt a sweetly familiar discomfort. Her father was angry, her mother was patient, and her younger brother and sister were engrossed listening to the argument.

Maya could see her reflection in the ornate bronze-framed mirror that hung on the far wall. Her lip was curled into a sneer, and her oval eyes were rolled toward the ceiling. Her delicate Eurasian features were marred by an expression of utter contempt.

There was an all too brief period of silence before her father spoke again.

"Maya, for the last time, I forbid you to hang out with those ... local dropouts."

Maya exploded. "You only hate them because they're native Sudanese. Because they're black!"

Her father clenched his fists and breathed heavily, as if struggling to hold powerful, violent emotions in check.

Her mother replied softly, "Maya, dear, you know that's not true."

"You always take his side!" Maya complained.

Her mother shook her head. "No, dear. I want what's best for both of you."

"It's true! You always stick up for him! Even when he's wrong!"

"Maya!" her father barked. "You will have respect for your elders!"

"Oh! Sure!" Maya said, nodding contemptuously. "Like you really have respect for Grandma! Her Alzheimer's isn't bad at all, but you locked her up in that home in Florida rather than take her with us when we moved here!"

"Maya, you know that would be pointlessly prolonging the inevitable," her father began, pronouncing his words slowly, in the voice he reserved for explaining the obvious to small children. "Her condition will only get worse. Having her here would be stressful for the whole family."





E. Geier





"She was just a little forgetful," Maya retorted. "We could have had years with her before she became a problem. She didn't really start to deteriorate till she was in that home. You always give up on the important things without trying to work out a real solution."

"Don't take that tone with me, young lady!" he warned.

"Tone? Tone? You didn't even hear what I said!" she protested.

"I warned you once!" he replied sharply.

"I respect you more than you respect Grandma," she shouted, transported with rage. "And we all know how little that is!"

Then she shuddered, gasping uncontrollably. Everything around her slowed down to molasses speed.

Somewhere in the distance she heard her father's voice droning, as if at the bottom of a deep tunnel; so far away it took his voice forever to reach her.

The walls around her shimmered, and Maya felt light and giddy. The air was charged and exhilarating, like the electrified moments before a thunderstorm. The bronze-framed mirror across from her stood out in hyper-realistic detail, and slowly her reflection in it melted away, revealing an unearthly landscape. Gleaming pyramids and golden sand shimmered in the scorching light of a blazing noonday sun. Clanking war machines covered with exquisitely painted hieroglyphics rolled past obsidian statues of crocodile-headed gods. Great, bloated ships plowed through the open skies.

Maya stared in silence, marveling at the unutterable beauty of the image. It was as if ancient Egypt was new again, and gods walked the earth with men.

Then the crocodile statue's head turned toward her, as if it noticed her. Maya panicked, and reality came crashing back in on her. The mirror closed up, sealing the image away. Maya felt like she was falling into a murky void. Before she could hit bottom, her father's voice cut through the haze, and her awareness returned to the room.

"Are you listening to me? You pay attention, young lady —"

"Harold, hush," her mother said. "Maya, are you all right?"

Maya heard genuine concern in her mother's voice, which pleased her.

"I ... I," Maya began, faltering. "I saw the mirror ... melt. I saw ..."

"Drugs!" her father said with disgust. "She's on drugs! I knew those ignorant savages would — I give up! She's uncontrollable!"

"Harold!" her mother said sharply, in a clear warning. "Maya, what did you see?"

"I saw ... I saw ... old Egypt, but like ... new ... And gods!"

"That's it!" her father said, standing abruptly and throwing his linen napkin on the table. "I won't have drug use in this house!"

"She's not on drugs," Maya's mother said emphatically. "I had strange ... visions in Thailand when I was her age."

"She can go to Heritage if she can't fit in here," her father said, as if he hadn't heard.

"Maybe in the psych ward I'll find some intelligent conversation," Maya said, not feeling too rational after her experience.

"You need professional help, young lady! You are certifiable!" he said, and stalked from the room.

Maya's attention snapped back to the marsh; the pain of her memory more intense and biting than the pain in her legs and throat.

She glanced back. The creatures behind her were closer. So close she could see them clearly. They were shaped like men, but looked like plants. The horrible reeking stench that issued from them smelled like fetid bog water and rotting animals.

Maya put on another burst of speed, arms and legs flailing. As she vaulted a jagged stone set in the muddy ground, her foot caught on the top of the rock, and she crashed head first into the shallow water. She struggled to rise, gasping for air. Fear churned through her stomach, and she turned to see if the creatures had reached her.

They were circling her position, but had not closed on her. Maya used the precious seconds to take big gulps of air, and calm her pounding heart.

The creatures waited.

As her terror subsided, her despondency grew. What the hell were they waiting for? Were they trying to drive her crazy?

I'm really losing it! Maya thought. I'm crazy. Trapped. I'm stuck on this one way track and there's no way off, like the rat in the electrified cage in that horrible experiment in Professor Berofski's Psych class.

Through her pain and misery another memory rushed back. She saw herself in Psychology class at the Khartoum Lyceum Private High School. Professor Berofski was gleefully describing tortuous experiments to an uncomfortable group of students.

"Each time the rats were shocked," he said, relishing the word 'shocked,' "they would leap to the B side of the cage. When the B side was electrified, they would jump back to the A side. When both sides of the cage were electrified, they tried jumping back and forth, but soon just gave up jumping altogether. They would lay down to die."

He paused for dramatic emphasis and surveyed the room. Some of the students squirmed uneasily.

"Now comes the fascinating part," he said. "Even after the current on the other side of the box is switched off, the rats just stay where they are, suffering shock after shock. They never find out that the other side is safe, because they have given up. They have learned to be helpless."

"Once they are broken, they will generalize their helplessness to other situations, and never try to protect themselves again. For example, they drown in water-filled mazes rather than try to swim. They simply give up on life."

"Given properly crippling circumstances, any animal, even the human animal, can be completely broken," he concluded with great satisfaction.

Maya had heard enough. "That's ridiculous," she shot back. "Some people break and some don't. It's a matter of



will and self-esteem. Some people never give up."

"Oh dear," Professor Berofski said, sighing with mock concern, as if answering her was a great burden. "That is New Age psychobabble." He addressed the other students instead of Maya, which he often did when she made a good point.

"I trust the rest of the class is not suffering under the same delusions as Miss Dearborne. Willpower alone is not sufficient to counter the paralyzing effects of learned helplessness. It is true that some subjects take longer to break, and some search for more solutions than others, but anyone subjected to these conditions long enough will break. Besides, it's simple to lower a subject's perceived self-efficacy, making it easier to teach him to be helpless."

"Really?" Maya replied. "Can you cite an experiment, a properly documented experiment where all the human subjects were broken? If you can't, I think that's a bit of an over-generalization." The class laughed, enjoying watching the professor's discomfort.

"Miss Dearborne," Berofski replied, exasperated, "that sort of experiment would not be ethical." He glared at Maya and muttered, "though, in some cases, that's too bad."

"Well," he said, changing the subject quickly. "Open your textbooks to page 290. We'll examine intrinsic motivation, and learn how easy it is to manipulate what people think of themselves."

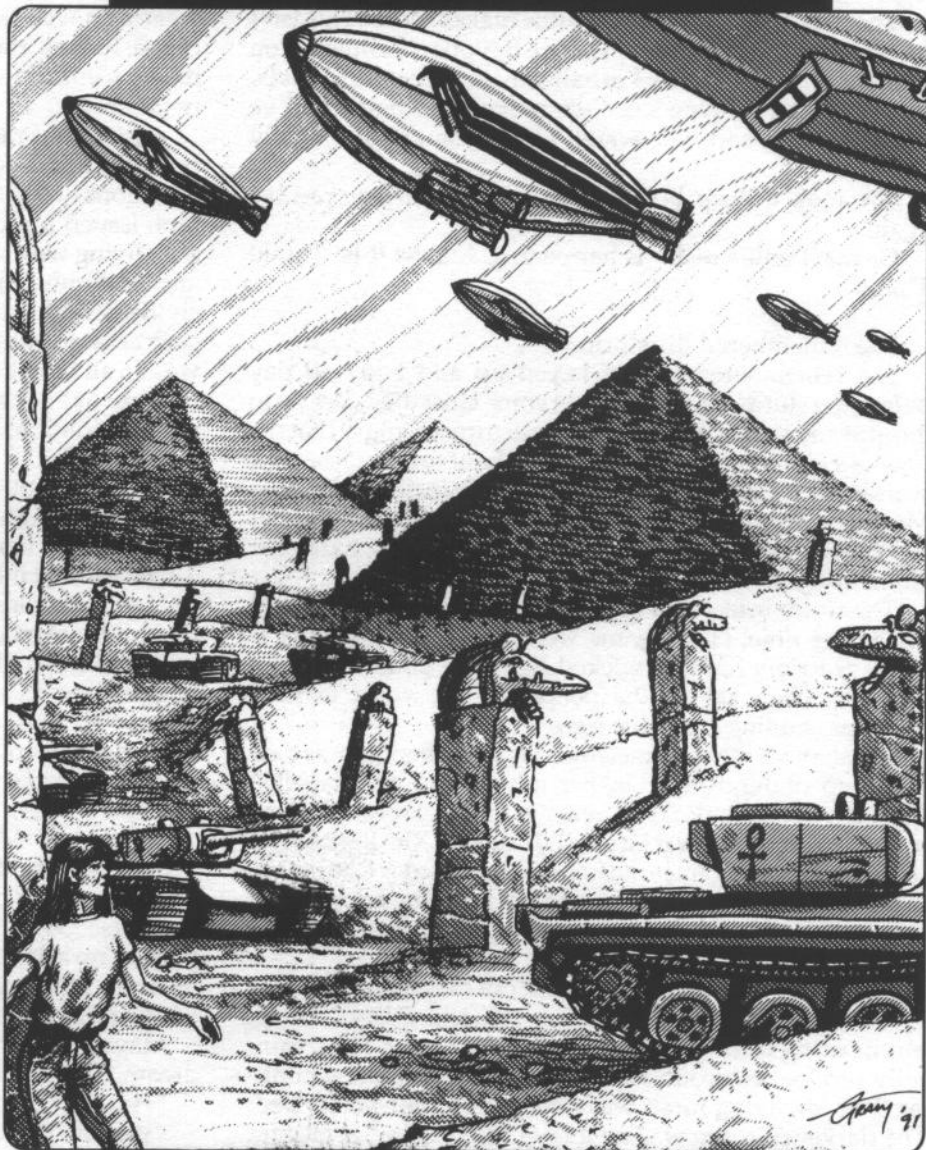
Maya's attention drifted back to the marsh, but her thoughts were still on the rats in the experiment.

Move over or be zapped, she thought forlornly. Zap, move over. Zap, move over. The rats kept moving over till they just didn't give a damn anymore. Till they laid down and died. Like I'm gonna do —

She clenched her fists with anger, and struck the rock she was leaning on. No! I refuse! They may have taught rats to give up, but damned if I'm gonna roll over and die.

Steely resolve crystallized in her. Her mind regained control, and she carefully examined the situation. They don't wanna catch me, she thought.

They wanna make me surrender. Give up. They wanna break my will. Taste my defeat. Now, wait, how did those experiments end? Wasn't there always a way out? Didn't they turn off the juice to one side of the cage, so it was safe again? Maybe all this is really safe. After all, they haven't



G. Goleash

attacked me ... I'll just go right past them and back to the city. Khartoum is only a few miles ...

Slowly, she approached the creatures. They were more frightening up close, and their stench was almost overpowering. They watched her approach, dead eyes surveying her.

Suddenly one leaped forward, and slashed at her with long, dirty claws. Maya leapt back, and saw the creature's hand trail a crimson streak through the air.

She turned and bolted like a jackrabbit, panic pounding within her.

Oh god, I was wrong! I was so wrong! They do wanna kill me.

She looked back. The creatures were right behind her.





She put on a burst of speed, her thoughts racing as fast as her legs.

That's it! I'm crazy. None of this makes sense! This isn't happening. First I got lost in that Egyptian hallucination with the mirror, and now I'm hallucinating this stuff. Maybe it's bad water. Maybe since we moved to Khartoum I've been drinking bad Nile water. Or maybe I'm just totally crazy.

She took a deep breath, and summoned her resolve again.

Or maybe this really is happening. Maybe it is! Think! Think!

She remembered the storm.

She remembered feeling keyed up and edgy all day before the storm hit. She was nervous. Unsettled. Ready to jump at any sound. Her father was also upset, angry that the news services had little information about some mysterious wars brewing in Europe and America. He furiously berated Maya for her erratic behavior, and she stormed up to her room. She threw herself on her futon bed without taking her clothes off and cried herself to sleep.

The storm broke that night. It rained hard and it rained for a long time. Her dreams were haunted by visions of brave warriors fighting wicked Egyptian gods who were trying to chew up all the people of the world in their sardonic, smiling crocodile jaws.

She slept for what seemed like days, and her dreams took her deep underground. In her mind's eye she travelled through long, dank passageways and narrow, twisting tunnels, until she saw a bright light ahead. The light shone from a great opal gemstone hidden deep under Khartoum. A tiny flame flickered within the gem. As she approached the opal, the flame burst into a roaring fire, crackling over her, and consuming her body.

She awoke with a start, and leapt out of bed in fright. Her heart wrenched as she found herself falling and falling, plummeting through a black void. She hit the floor painfully and looked around in a panic. Nothing looked familiar. Her low-lying futon was now a high four-poster bed. The darkened room was no longer filled with her elegant white, black, and red Japanese furniture, but was cluttered with old wooden chests and tables. Her Bob Marley posters were gone, and in their place were sets of faded black and white photos of severe looking people in turn-of-the-century clothing.

Maya sighed with relief, suddenly realizing what was going on. This had happened to her before. She had experienced lucid dreams before. But the room was so vivid it was hard to believe she wasn't wide awake.

She looked around the eerie dream landscape for a sign of anything that made sense. The only familiar object in the room was her battered cherry-red Walkman cassette player. She grabbed it, clipped it to her belt, and opened the door to the hall.

There was soft lighting at the bottom of the dark staircase, and Maya marvelled at the incredible sense of reality in the dream.

Her parents were sitting in a charming living room filled

with antique furniture, listening to a carved wooden radio that sat where the family TV used to be. Her father was wearing a well-tailored zoot suit, and her mother wore an old-fashioned pink dress. The room had an old, woody, musty scent. Maya paused for a moment on the stairs to take in the scene.

A pompous radio announcer intoned, "Fighting continues to rage on the eastern storm front as valiant shocktrooper battalions hold off barbarian Israeli attacks. The Holy Pharaoh issued a proclamation that he would protect all citizens living west of the Red Sea. He further declared that all ancient tombs and abandoned cities are now off-limits to civilians, and extra shocktroopers have been posted in all such areas to protect them from looters and hooligans. Well, we can all breathe a sigh of relief at that, as we listen to the number one song on the Nile Nine, the Mellawi Orchestra with 'Moonlight Walk.'" A hauntingly beautiful song began to play.

Maya was entranced and delighted with the eerie dream. She stepped lightly into the living room, almost afraid a heavy footfall would break the spell and wake her too soon.

"Hi Mom. Hi Dad," she said in a soft voice.

Her mother leapt to her feet and ran to Maya. Her father rose and looked on, concerned.

"Oh, I'm so glad you're awake!" Maya's mother said, hugging her close. "You've been asleep for three days! We were so worried about you. You were shaking and crying out in your sleep. We wanted to take you to the hospital, but with the terrible overcrowding we couldn't. How do you feel now?"

"Hmmm?" Maya asked, barely hearing her mother. "Fine. I'm fine. Much better." She let go of her mother and walked around the room, studying the old-fashioned furnishings. "Wow! Look at all this cool stuff," she said, picking up a delicate, hand-tailored quilt, and admiring the intricate stitching. "This is the coolest dream I ever had. Look at this place! It's so—"

Maya's father interrupted her. "Maya! This is not a dream. This is the way things really are. You must —"

"Harold," her mother said, interrupting him. "Gently."

"We can't coddle her," he fired back. "She's got to understand the situation, and adapt."

"There will be time for that later," Tia replied. "For now, let's be glad to have our daughter back."

Maya picked up the heavy wooden radio, and ran her fingers over its carved and lacquered surface, enjoying the sweet song it played.

"Put that down," her father said, exasperated.

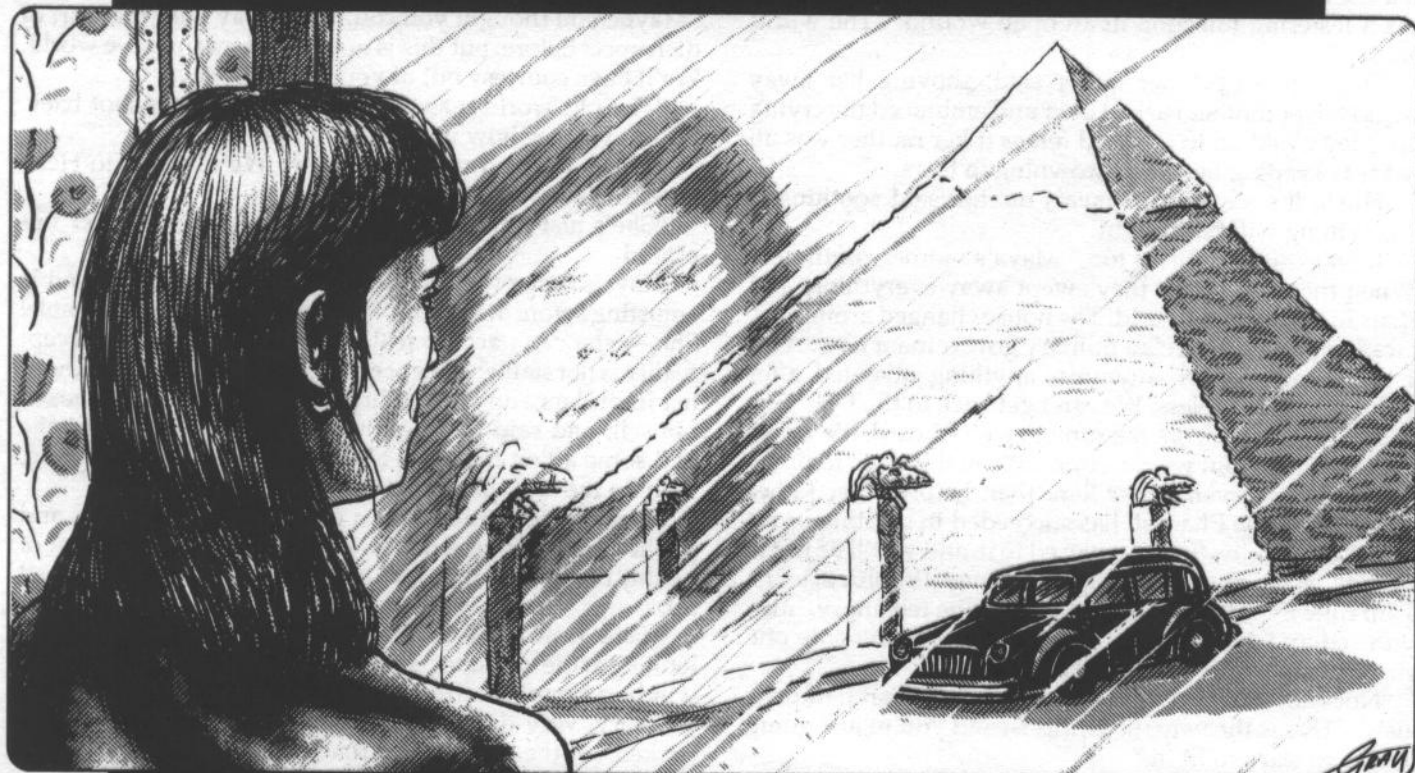
"It's my dream, and I'll do what I want to," Maya said, laughing. She gently tossed the heavy radio from hand to hand just to underscore her point.

"Maya!" her father shouted angrily.

"Maya, dear," her mother began. "While you were asleep, the world changed. Everything changed. Do you remember that terrible storm? It brought a change — a tremendous change. Everything is different now. Very different. It's been a difficult adjustment for us, but we will help you to —"

"It's not that difficult an adjustment," her father said. "Everyone else had to make it, and she's no exception."





G. Goleash

Maya, in many ways, this new world is much better than the old one. Ambition is rewarded here much more directly. There's a lot less crime. And those local thugs are slaves now, building pyramids for the glory of the Pharaoh!"

"Good old Dad," Maya said with a smile, willing to speak freely in her dream. "Still putting yourself above everyone else. At least you're being honest about your bigotry. That's a refreshing change. Too bad you can't be this honest when I'm awake."

"You will show some respect!" her father shouted, his face flushing red.

"Harold —" her mother began.

"Quiet, Tia! It's time she understood!" He rose from his seat and grabbed Maya's arms. "Listen to me!" he hissed. "You are not dreaming. You're awake." He shook her, as if to prove his point. "And you're trying my patience!"

"Okay, right. Definitely time to wake up," Maya said, feeling a little threatened. She closed her eyes and tried to wake up. She had often been able to escape nightmares by willing herself awake, so she concentrated on floating back up to her body.

Nothing happened.

She closed her eyes and forced herself awake. Again, nothing happened.

Her father shook her roughly. "Maya! Snap out of it! This is the world! Okay? Get used to it!"

She heard her mother's voice through the din. "Harold,

you're hurting her!"

"My god," Maya said slowly, her eyes still closed. "I can't wake up ... I can't wake up! I'm stuck!"

She felt her father dragging her through the room. She was vaguely aware of him yanking open the curtains.

"Look!" he said angrily, shaking her. "Dammit! Open your eyes!"

Slowly her eyelids parted, and she peered out the window. The skies were gray and overcast. The rainslicked streets were drying out in the spotty patches of sunlight. But the world was completely alien to her.

An unearthly pyramid rose high above a strange city skyline. Old style black motorcars drove through busy streets lined with old brownstone buildings and strange Egyptian iconography. There were sinister crocodile-headed pillars and statues everywhere. Khartoum looked like a 1930's movie set, perfect except for a few 1990 era cars abandoned by the sides of the roads. The city was completely transformed. And Maya knew she wasn't dreaming.

The strange, bittersweet music coming from the radio filled her with deep sadness. She felt light-headed and weak-kneed; flushed and chilled at the same time. Tears brimmed in her half-closed eyes and began to spill over.

"The world ..." she whispered. "What happened to the poor world ..."

"That is the world!" her father snarled "Do you under-





stand? That's the way things are now."

"The poor world ..." Maya repeated, trance-like. She felt as if the earth was in great pain; that the transformed city was a festering infection in an open wound. "The world hurts ..."

"Oh, I give up," her father said, shoving her away roughly. Her mother rushed over and embraced the crying girl. Maya held on to her, and felt as if her mother was all that was keeping her from drowning in tears.

"Hush, it's all right," Maya's mother said soothingly. "Everything will be all right."

"It was difficult for us too," Maya's mother continued. "When the rains came, they swept away everything, and left us in this strange world. The house changed around us. It was terrifying. There's a military government now. A lot of things don't work anymore; anything invented after World War II is useless. We can't get back to the U.S." She paused. "Though, from the rumors we've heard, it's worse there than here. But we can cope with all this. As a family."

"Things are even better here than before," her father interjected. "The Pharaoh has succeeded in creating order in this lawless city. So just get used to it, and you'll be fine!"

"No!" Maya snapped, shouting through the blur of tears. "I am fine! Everything else is wrong!" She felt angry, hurt, confused and suddenly very alone. Was she the only one who felt dislocated and out of place?

"Not another word out of you," her father said, imperiously. "This is the way the world is, and you're just going to have to learn to fit in."

Dazed and confused, Maya said nothing. She felt like she had never truly seen her father before.

"Here's where we begin," he continued. "Tia, get her into some decent clothes. Osiris only knows why her clothes didn't change along with everyone else's, but if the overgovernor's representatives see her in those clothes, I'll never get a post in the Finance Cabinet."

"What?" Maya asked, incredulously. She looked down at her clothes. She was still wearing the outfit in which she had fallen asleep: baggy white T-shirt with fluorescent swirls, multicolored purple, black and yellow tights, blue alligator shoes, bright earrings and dozens of bracelets.

"What is this?" Maya asked jokingly. "'Father Knows Best?' In tonight's episode, Harold loses a promotion because his daughter doesn't wear mutant clothes!"

She heard giggling from the stairs, and turned to see her younger brother and sister. They had been eavesdropping on the argument as they often did, and were thoroughly amused by Maya's joke.

"Get to your rooms, you wretched urchins!" her father shouted. They scrambled away in fear. The smile faded from Maya's face. Before she could calm herself enough to speak, her father bellowed, "Look at yourself! You're dressed like a cheap whore!"

"Harold —" her mother began, sharply.

He ignored her. "From now on, you'll wear nice dresses and only speak when spoken to. Just as the Pharaoh brought order and decency to the Nile, I'll bring it to my family."

Maya looked at her father. She barely recognized him. "You're insane," she breathed. "You've lost it."

"You will not speak to me that way!" he shot back.

"Harold, stop!" her mother said, trying to head off the war before it began.

"You will have respect for your elders!" he shouted. "Maybe you thought you could get away with that sort of disrespect before, but this is not the old, permissive world. We'll have courtesy out of your mouth, Maya."

"The old world was the real world!" Maya shot back. "Don't you see how wrong this world is?"

"That's it! I've reached my limit! We're going to Heritage! She's beyond my control!"

"She's just having trouble adjusting," her mother implored.

Maya's father was smoldering. "She was having trouble adjusting before the storm. Now she's totally unmanageable! She — she can't accept reality! Anyone who can't accept reality is not stable! I've got enough to worry about without her impudence and instability!" he shouted. He composed himself, and said in a tightly controlled voice, "Heritage had some ad on the radio about a readjustment program. They're the only place that can help her."

Harold Dearborne threw a coat over his daughter, and pushed her out of the house. He sat her in the back seat of a shiny black roadster. Once her mother was in, the car sped off.

Maya heard her parents arguing, but was too busy looking at the world to pay attention. The car drove through winding Egyptian streets which looked vaguely familiar, but very, very different. She saw a few more 1990s cars parked on the side of the road, alone, abandoned, and worthless. She felt like one of them.

The car drove out of the city and up a winding dirt road to a forbidding-looking building in the middle of the Nile river marshlands. This was clearly the site of the Heritage Psychiatric Institute; the place Maya's father threatened to take her during the worst of their arguments. But it was no longer a cheerful hospital. Now the building looked like a fortress surrounded by barbed wire fences, minefields, and half-naked armed guards in ancient Egyptian warrior costumes and gold headdresses. The sign at the entrance read "Heritage of Osiris: Khartoum Science Research Center." They drove through a defense checkpoint in the minefield to reach the main building.

Maya shuddered as the checkpoint gates slammed shut behind her. She felt completely trapped. Two armed guards ushered them through the sterile halls to an office filled with plush but worn furniture. Inside, Maya saw a familiar face.

"Professor Berofski!" Maya said in disbelief.

Her former psychology teacher stood up to shake hands with Maya's father. He was wearing a long white lab coat, and greasy spectacles. The two long tufts of frizzy gray hair that jutted out of both sides of his bald head were now completely uncombed and unmanageable. The leer in his eye was more manic than ever, but he was definitely the same man.

Still, he looked out of place in this strange era. Despite her fear, Maya felt an odd kinship with him. He actually looked like he understood her.

"Thank you for seeing us on such short notice," Maya's father said, shaking hands with the professor.



"For Natatiri's next Undersecretary of Finance?" Berofski replied. "Anything. What can I do with — for you?"

"It's my daughter, Maya. She's convinced she's in a dream, and has become completely unmanageable because of it."

"Oh?" Berofski said, amused. "This is no nightmare, young lady. This is real. You see?"

He pinched Maya's cheek viciously. She squealed, and his sallow skin flushed pink as a bit of his aged blood rushed to his face. He was enjoying himself tremendously.

"I know I'm not dreaming!" Maya said with disgust. "I know everything in the world is different! I know it's real! Jeeze!"

"See?" Berofski said with a saccharine smile. "Now she knows she's awake. Problem solved. Don't bother to thank me. Sometimes the simplest solutions are the best."

Maya's father looked irritated. "Look," he began. "She slept through the transition period, and can't adjust. My family can't deal with her like this. Can you take her? Help her make that ... adjustment?"

"Harold, she's only been awake an hour," Maya's mother began. He shot an angry look at his wife, but said nothing.

"I have adjusted," Maya said indignantly. "I know what's real and what's not. I do not need to be here."

"I'll be the judge of that," her father replied.

"We'll be the judge of that," her mother corrected. She looked uncomfortable, and did not relish a public fight with her husband.

"We do need consent of both parents to institutionalize," the professor remarked, looking uncomfortably from one to the other.

"What?" Maya's father said, exploding. "That doesn't sound like the Pharaoh. My word alone isn't good enough? I can't deal with her anymore! I've got too many things going on now."

"Well ..." The professor hesitated for a moment. "If I determined her grip on sanity was fragile, we could get around the two-parent rule for a 14-day treatment cycle," the professor observed, scratching his chin thoughtfully.

"Get around it?" Maya's mother asked in disbelief.

"Oh, come on, Professor," her father began, looking grieved. "Is that the best you can do?"

"Well, you can forget locking me up, then," Maya said. "I am stone cold sane. Got it?" She grabbed the headphones of her Walkman and snapped them over her ears. She turned up the volume so high the others could hear it, folded her arms and rolled her eyes. "Let me know when we're going home."

Harold looked imploringly at the Professor. But Berofski's attention was fixed on Maya. A cold grin spread across his face as he stared. He reached out to her and plucked the earphones from her head. The music spilled out into the room, louder now.

"Where did you get this?" he asked with a nervous intensity.

"At the mall," she replied sullenly.

"No, no, no!" he said rapidly. "Why is it working?"

"Excuse me?" Maya asked.

"Hand it to your father," Berofski commanded.

Maya looked at him for a long moment, then slid the tape

player off her belt and handed it to her father.

The music stopped.

"Now hand it to your wife," the professor said to Maya's father, a gleam in his eye. Maya's mother took the Walkman. It was still silent.

"Now give it back to Maya," he said with finality.

Maya reached for the tape player, and Peter Gabriel's voice spilled out of it again.

"Mr. and Mrs. Dearborne," Berofski began triumphantly, "your daughter is in grave psychological peril. She did not make the transition through the storm unscathed. Her psyche and nervous system are locked in the old reality. This is a very hazardous state of affairs. You were right to bring her directly here!"

"Say that in English," Maya's mother said skeptically. "What's wrong with her?"

"Don't you see?" the professor asked breathlessly. "No high technology should work anymore. None. Nothing made after World War II. But this tape player works when it's near Maya."

"So what?" Maya asked.

"So it means your father is right, and did a good thing to bring you here. Your mind, your very being is unstable, and you need special care to help you ... adapt."

"What can you do to help her that we can't?" Maya's mother asked suspiciously.

"A great deal," the Professor said. "This is one of the few institutions in the Nile Empire set up to handle such tragic cases. But have no fear, I've helped far more hopeless wretches along the painful, rocky road back to sanity."

"Well, that's settled," Maya's father said with satisfaction. "Let's go. Call us when you know anything." Maya's mother did not look convinced.

Maya felt her confidence slipping away rapidly. Her eyes darted around the room, seeking out anything that would help her.

Then she noticed Berofski's watch.

"Digital watch! You've got a digital watch! That's an after-World War II device. Right? It's working!"

Maya's parents looked at Berofski's battered black, plastic watch quizzically. The watch looked starkly out of place in the musty, old-fashioned office.

Berofski glanced at his watch, and then looked Maya in the eye. "This thing?" he asked coldly. "Oh, just a special device my research team cooked up. No doubt you've seen some of the miraculous devices the Pharaoh's science teams are cooking up. Can't talk about it. Classified. But I can see that little Maya is already exhibiting classic signs of delusional paranoia."

"Paranoia?" Maya said. "Are you crazy? You want to lock me up in this — this, um, death camp! And you say I'm paranoid?"

"Dear, dear," the professor said. "It's starting already. But never fear, Mr. and Mrs. Dearborne. I know she's curable."

"There is nothing wrong with my daughter!" Maya's mother said firmly.

"I'll be the judge of that," Berofski said mockingly. "As division head of the institute, I'm going to remand Maya to this facility for further study."





"No!" said Maya's mother.

"I'm afraid it's out of your hands. Or shall I call the guards to escort you out?"

"That won't be necessary," said Maya's father, visibly relieved. "Thank you for your trouble."

"No trouble at all," the professor replied reassuringly. He dismissed Maya's parents as quickly as possible, murmuring warm reassurances that he would prevent further decline in the young girl, and offering his enthusiastic support for Harold's speedy confirmation in Natatiri's finance cabinet. Maya's mother gave her a long, desperate look as she left. Maya knew her mother's heart was breaking.

When Maya and the Professor were alone, Berofski perched up on his desk, where he could look down on the seated Maya. He twirled the Walkman earphones in the air, half-listening to the song.

The young girl wanted to cry, but knew the professor would think it was a sign of weakness. She was determined not to be cowed.

"You know damn well there's nothing wrong with me!" she said accusingly. "You know damn well! What's the deal?"

"My, aren't you a clever one," he said with a menacing smile. "Well. You're quite right. There's nothing wrong with you, and a lot right with you. The 'deal' is ... you are a special threat to me and to the Pharaoh himself."

"You're crazy as a fruit bat," Maya said. "I don't even know the Pharaoh. I barely even know what's going on!"

"You are a Stormer, little girl. You carry the reality of Core Earth with you, and are not altered by the fickle winds of shifting realities. You can make technological artifacts from the past reality function in this one. That makes you

very, very dangerous."

"Wait. Okay, but you are too. Right? A Stormer? You have the watch. The digital watch. And the Walkman's working while you've got it!"

"My you are clever, aren't you? Fortunately, your parents are far more gullible. Yes, we are unique beings, we Stormers. A breed apart."

"So how come I'm a threat and you're not?" she demanded.

"Because I work for the Pharaoh. You see, the difference between us is that I am wise enough to adapt to the new order, and I'm sure that you would waste your energy trying to bring back the old one."

Maya bit her lip and said nothing. She knew he was right. This new world was wrong. Fundamentally wrong. In that moment she knew she would do anything possible to change the world back; to peel up the new reality at the seams, tear it apart, and send it packing.

"I can tell from your stubborn silence you agree," he said, taking great pride in his own cleverness. "Tut, tut. You're so predictable."

Maya said nothing, hoping he would keep filling in the silence with more precious information. He did not disappoint her.

"So predictable. Everyone I've met since the reality storm has either become properly and completely self-serving, like your father, or cloying, and sickeningly sweet, like your mother."

His eyes scanned her face for a reaction. Maya remained expressionless. Disappointed, he continued.

"But we, we can choose! We're the last people in the Nile with free will."

"Dad ... turned evil? That's goofy."

"It's a fundamental law of this reality! All people who tended toward selfishness are now completely despotic!"

For a moment Maya felt sorry for her father. She shook herself out of it, determined to be angry at him.

"And Mom is what?" she asked. "A saint?"

"She's absolutely incorruptible. And utterly predictable."

"But not me? Not you?" Maya said, more as a statement.

"Not quite. We aren't immediately transformed, but we also aren't immune to the forces pulling at us."

He paused, reflecting. His face softened. "I wonder if I have changed," he mused. "I don't feel different. And I know I'm not evil! Rather I feel ... free. Free to be myself for the first time. And do all the things I was constrained from doing in the old world!"

He laughed a piercing, manic cackle that startled Maya, but also made her smile. He sounded like a villain on a kid's cartoon.



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"What's that got to do with me?" Maya asked softly.

The professor stopped laughing abruptly and grabbed Maya's hair and pulled her face close to his. She could smell his nicotine breath, and see his huge, cratered pores. He was no longer smiling.

"I shall show kindly Doctor Mobius, or should I say, our Holy Pharaoh, the proper way to deal with you treacherous Storm Knights. Prisons don't help! Chains don't help! Torture won't help. Even death may not be a final solution! But I have the secret."

He released Maya and grabbed a battered copy of *Introductory Psychology*, the textbook she had used in his class. He held it above him like it was a sacred book.

"Look!" he said with utmost reverence. "This survived the reality storm with me! A treasure trove of esoteric wisdom about the human mind! I hold in my hands secret knowledge hidden from the Pharaoh himself! With it I shall become his greatest advisor! And do you know how? Through the power of learned helplessness!"

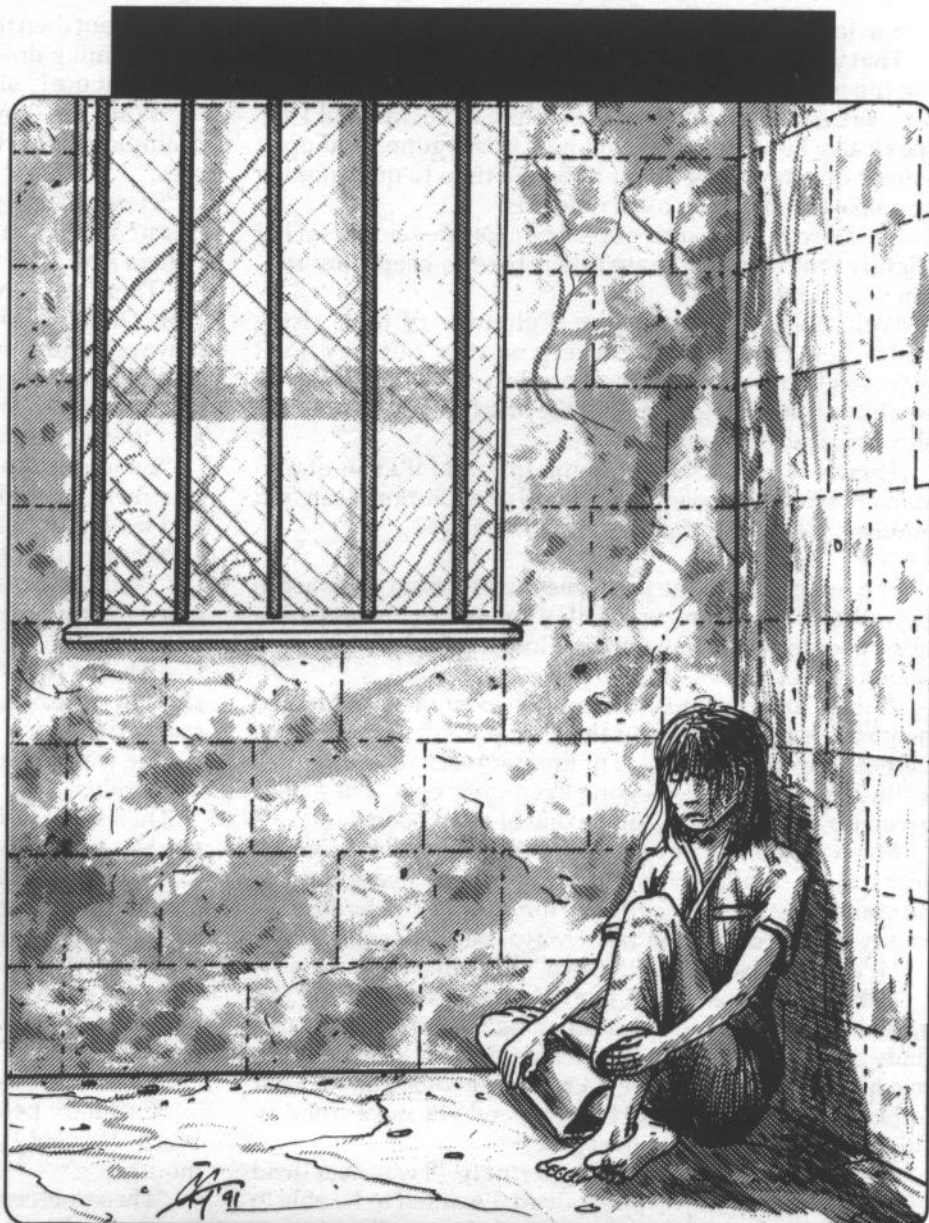
He looked straight at Maya, and she felt very small and afraid. "Do you remember that?" he asked accusingly. "Our discussion about learned helplessness? Do you remember how you mocked me? Well now we shall have an answer to your question as to whether anyone can learn helplessness. I think so! And you shall be my proof. My greatest accomplishment."

"I will succeed where the Pharaoh failed! I will give him a Storm Knight broken! Robbed of will and no longer a threat!"

"Yeah, right," Maya said, and ran for the door. She fumbled with the heavy brass knob, and yanked the door open. The professor caught her by the arm just as she was about to dash out into the hallway. She drew one leg back, and kicked him in the groin as hard as she could.

Berofski sank slowly to the floor, face ashen and eyes bulging. Maya dashed out into the hall and headed for the nearest exit. Just as she reached the outside door and grabbed the knob, she heard a loud mechanical clank, and a huge metal blast door dropped like a massive guillotine blade in front of her. She leaped back in time to keep from being crushed. The blast door landed with a crash, sealing off the hall door.

Maya trembled, realizing she had almost been killed. Two huge, sweaty, bare-chested guards in full Egyptian soldier regalia grabbed her. Maya suddenly felt very small



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and frightened. Wordlessly, the guards pinned her arms and carried her back to Professor Berofski's office. Inside, the Professor was just regaining his composure. He was still pale, and his hands were trembling slightly.

"T-take her to a holding cell. I'll d-deal with her later!"

Maya felt her heart sink with the memory of her capture. She closed her eyes to stop the flood of painful recollections. The slap-slap, slap-slap noise still followed her through the marsh. She felt utterly alone, abandoned and lost in madness.

Wait! she thought vehemently. I'm not crazy! I'm scared so bad I feel crazy, but I'm not! All this stuff really is happening.





She looked down at her arm. It was still bleeding.

That is definitely real, she thought emphatically, squeezing the wound to stop the bleeding.

There's no way this is some simple hallucination! I can see clearly how I got here, and how this is gonna end up, if I don't do something about it. So it's time to quit moping and take charge! I can overcome this!

She slowed her frantic pace. The creatures closed on her slightly, but then moderated their pace to keep from running her down.

Well, okay! Maya thought, a glimmer of hope rising within her. They want me to keep moving, but they don't want to kill me outright. She was pleased to see her theory work, and she was grateful for the breathing space that the slower pace allowed her.

There's a reason they're doing this, and if I can understand it, I can find a way out! I found one solution. I can find another! Now, how did that experiment go?

She remembered the first time the professor took her to Zero Ward. The ward was full of miserable, listless, half-dead people. Maya remembered looking in their eyes, and seeing no one there.

"These are my most successful examples of learned helplessness," he said proudly. "My star pupils. Every one of them was brought in full of life and resistance, and look at them now. The fire is gone from their eyes. They have given up all hope. You will be one of them soon."

Maya remained impassive, even though her stomach was coiling and uncoiling with terror. She just looked at him, and listened, trying to keep him talking. In the absence of any horrified reaction from Maya, Berofski continued.

"It's your destiny to join them," he said.

"And that's what I love about this new cosm, Maya!" he added, happily. "The most amazing things happen on a daily basis! I had no idea where I would get a Storm Knight to experiment on, but I knew I would get one, and lo! Your father walked in with you! I love it here! The most wonderful coincidences happen every day!

"Oh, little Maya," he said imploringly. "I was near dead before the reality storm. Spirit-dead. I wanted to be able to play with human minds. To unravel them and put them together differently! But my true calling was determined to be unethical, merely because some squeamish, narrow-minded scientists lacked the vision to see the value of taking all ethical restraints off me!"

"So you're just a sadist," Maya replied.

He exploded with anger, making the trembling residents of Zero Ward jump and cower in terror. Maya cringed and stepped back. "I have no mental dysfunctions!" he shouted fiercely. "None! Do you understand that?"

Maya trembled. "Okay," she said in a whisper.

"I just like manipulating human minds," he added, as if justifying his actions to himself. "It really doesn't matter how."

Maya said nothing. She was afraid to speak.

"Do you understand that?" he asked severely.

"Um ... yeah, okay," said Maya, "But if you really like playing with people's minds, why don't you do it to help them instead of hurt them?"

"Ah, but then the Pharaoh would have no use for me," he said, calming down.

"What use?" she asked.

"Why, breaking his enemies! Stopping those freakish champions who violate the laws of reality! Crushing heroes!"

"Heroes?" she said with a nervous laugh. "What do you mean? You're cra —" She stopped herself in midsentence. "There's no such thing."

"There are heroes," he said resolutely. "They fight Our Holy Order every step of the way! Always under our feet! Always ruining the Pharaoh's plans! Well, not for long! You shall be my first proof that a Storm Knight can be turned into one of these wretches with my process!" He waved an arm toward the frightened subjects.

"Enough of this idle chatter! It's time for some shock treatment, my little Storm Knight!" He grabbed Maya's arm and led her out of Zero Ward and back toward the offices. Two huge guards followed them.

"Wait!" Maya said, stalling for time. "What is this hero crap? I'm no hero! I'm no threat to anyone! I just wanna be left alone!"

"Ah, but there's no room for that in this world," he said sadly, a trace of sanity and sympathy back in his voice. He stopped walking and said, "Everyone must choose sides. It's the way things work here. It's part of this realm's Law of Morality."

Then his face darkened; his cruel smile back again. "So you see, even a useless little thing like you can be a threat."

"Law of Morality?" Maya asked quickly. The professor's lucid moment gave her some hope, and she was eager to evoke a sane human reaction again.

"Exactly," he replied. "This realm is filthy with heroes. They are everywhere. Our old reality was very low in true heroes. You know, truly selfless people who dedicate their lives to helping Ords."

"Ords?" she asked.

"Ordinary people," he replied, motioning toward Zero Ward. He said the words like they left a bad taste in his mouth.

"These 'heroes' take on impossible challenges and sometimes actually win, just like in those tawdry motion pictures on which your teen-aged ilk wasted so much money. But in this realm, such idiocy is not mere cinematic fantasy. It is very real. And very dangerous to the rule of the Pharaoh.

"So you see, whether you actually want to become a pest is irrelevant. You have the potential to become one, and that is reason enough to stop you now."

"But you said you and I are different," Maya protested. "You said we can choose."

Berofski reflected on Maya's words. "Yes. True. But I can't afford to take that chance."

He struggled with his own thoughts, and Maya saw some dark part of him extinguish the small light of reason in his eyes. His madness returned.

"So, are you ready to learn some helplessness?" he asked, and laughed wildly.

He grabbed Maya's arm, and led her into a maze of testing chambers. She struggled, but the guards quickly restrained her. They carried her screaming through the



testing rooms, and put her in a small, windowless cell with mirrors on all the walls. Harsh light flooded from a single fixture in the ceiling.

The only feature in the room was a thin rubber insulating stripe that ran down the middle of the floor, dividing the room into two halves. On one side of the stripe a huge letter "A" was painted in red on the floor. On the other side of the stripe was the letter "B."

The guards took away Maya's shoes and marched out, slamming the door behind them. Maya fidgeted nervously, feeling alone and forlorn. She knew what was coming, but waiting for it was anguish.

Without warning, a burst of pain seared her bare feet and ran up her legs. She screamed in pain and suddenly found herself on the other side of the stripe. She had jumped to the other side of the line, almost without thinking. With a groan of misery, she sank to the floor, and lay there panting. She knew another shock was coming, and the fear was almost unendurable.

She tried to balance on the rubber insulating line, but it was too small to keep all of her foot off the electrified floor. When the burst came, its intensity was worse than before.

The shocks continued all day long, coming at random intervals. Some were a few minutes apart, and some were hours apart. The longer the delay, the greater Maya's fear and anguish grew.

It was dark when the shocks stopped. The guards escorted Maya to a crowded cell in Zero Ward. The experiment left her drained and miserable. She wanted to tell the professor that she surrendered, and would do anything to stop the pain. But she knew the treatment would continue no matter what she did. It would continue till her spirit was broken.

That night Maya huddled in an empty corner of the cell and cried herself to sleep. Again she dreamed of the beautiful gem buried deep within the earth. The flame in the gem seemed small and weak. It was withering and closing in on itself. Impulsively, Maya grabbed the gem and held it close to her heart. She gently coaxed its flame to brighten, holding it like a mother holds an injured child.

Safe in her embrace, the faint light grew, until the flame was large enough to warm her. Maya felt peaceful and grateful for the warmth. The gentle light did not soothe Maya's pain, but it firmed her resolve, and strengthened her determination to take care of herself.

The next day, Maya approached her cell with a new attitude. She decided not to resist the treatment, but to experiment with it. Pain was inevitable, and she would accept it. But she would not give in to suffering and despair.

She sat down in the corner of the A side, as far from the rubber dividing line as possible. When the shock came, she forced herself to stay on the electrified side, and really experience the pain. The charge blasted through her, searing her inside and out. The taste and texture of the jolt was unlike any of the earlier shocks. She was aware of the shock as sensation rather than pain.

For several agonizing moments, Maya writhed on the electrified floor. When she could finally take no more, she summoned her strength and crawled toward the safe side

of the room. When she got to the B side, she lay on the floor, panting and sweating.

When she could move again, she sat up and smiled. Now that she had willingly swallowed a large dose of pain, she was far less afraid of little tastes of electricity. The next shocks seemed mild in comparison. Maya even laughed out loud during one. She was no longer a mere victim.

Her burst of confidence gave her another idea. She summoned all her courage, and stepped from the safe side of the room to the electrified side. The shock made her spasm with pain, but it didn't seem to hurt as much as one of the random shocks. And for the first time, Maya felt a strange sense of control. The electricity stopped abruptly, and she heard a loud cry through the walls of the torture room. Professor Berofski was shouting and swearing with rage and helplessness.

Over the next few days, Maya continued to play with the room, determined to be master of her fate. Berofski turned the voltage up, but Maya forced herself to keep playing. And every night she dreamed of the fire opal, its light slowly growing.

One day, Maya made a discovery. The electric shocks were severe and frightening, but the pain seemed to vary based on her state of mind. The worst shocks were the ones that were the furthest apart. The severity of the pain seemed to grow with the terror that built up within her between the shocks.

With nothing to do but stand in the tiny room and wait for the next burst of agony, her anxiety and fear increased. When the shocks came, they were almost a relief, because they meant the horrible suspense was finally over.

By relaxing her body and keeping her mind fixed on the fire opal of her dreams, she found she could avoid anticipating the shocks. This diminished her pain dramatically. When she was very relaxed, the pain was little more than an annoyance, to be dealt with as necessary.

Her pride and satisfaction grew with each day. The only misery she felt came in the evenings, when she saw the other prisoners brought into their cells, after a bitter day's torment. She ached to reach out to them, to help them. But the stronger she looked, the more they feared her. She knew that she would have to save herself before she could help them.

At first Maya kept strict control of her mind to keep from anticipating the pain. But soon she found she got the same results just by letting her mind roam at will.

She began imagining what was going on in Berofski's control room. In her mind's eye, she could see him watching her through a one-way glass in one wall of the torture room. She had no idea if Berofski was really behind the mirrored wall she selected, but she liked to think he was.

She imagined him shouting at cowering assistants, smoking cartons of cigarettes, and trembling with rage. She imagined him reaching for the B side button to shock her.

A sudden shock jolted her out of her reverie. She jumped to the A side to escape the pain. And then she realized it.

She had really seen him!

She closed her eyes and imagined again. She pictured him smiling, glad to see her lose her composure for the first





time in days. She imagined him chortling and stomping his feet, his face contorted with happiness. He looked in on her through the one-way glass, and reached toward the A side button. Before he could press it, she stepped over the rubber line to side B.

Berofski looked startled, and reached for the B button. Maya stepped back over to the A side. Each time Berofski reached for a button, Maya stepped to the other side. In rage and desperation, Berofski pressed both buttons. Maya stood her ground, letting the pain of the shock course through her.

The professor held down both buttons with trembling, white-knuckled fingers, and glanced around Maya's cell, waiting for her to cringe and cower. He looked crazy enough to shock her to death. Defiantly, she stared directly at him. She saw her reflection in the mirrored one-way glass, and behind it she saw Berofski.

Slowly his nervous, blinking eyes scanned up her body until they met her steely gaze. He gasped, lurched backward, lost his balance, and toppled over onto his nervous assistant. At the same instant, the pain of the shock stopped, and she heard a crash from the control room behind the wall, followed by violent swearing.

She pictured Berofski again, and saw him sitting on the floor of the control room, shaking and making gurgling noises as he stared blankly into space.

Her session ended early that day, and the guards did not come for her the next day.

For the first time, she ended up spending the whole day with the forty other prisoners in Zero Ward. They looked gray and empty. They smelled bad. And it seemed like their conscious minds were far away. Maya felt drained just being around their bleak depression. She found her days with them in some ways worse than her shock sessions.

A few prisoners put up a struggle when the guards came to take them away for a session, but most did not. Occasionally a very listless prisoner did not come back at all.

Maya tried to talk to the prisoners, but her enthusiasm and vitality still frightened them, and they tried to avoid her approach. When she spoke to them, they averted their eyes, mumbled a few words and turned away. She felt helpless, and unable to teach them how to resist the treatment. She wanted so badly to help bring them back to life, but she didn't know how. It hurt her to watch them deteriorate, and she suffered along with them.

In her mind's eye, Maya saw Professor Berofski being pleased with the turn of events, and pictured him saying "Well, well. The prisoners may well succeed in making her helpless where the shocks failed. We'll just leave her with those miserable creatures for awhile, and let them drag her down to their level!"

The image of him gloating crystallized her resolve. The next day she tried a new approach.

The prisoners spent a lot of time huddled together, swaying, and making moaning noises. Maya quietly sat with them, and mimicked their noises. At first they were afraid of her, but gradually they responded, and began to accept her as one of them. By the end of the day, they no longer avoided her. That night, her patience paid off. A few of the prisoners began to talk to her.

Their speech was halting and nervous, like that of bat-

tered children. They all seemed to have a horrible, unreasoning fear of life. The shocks kept them so panicked that they were afraid of all change. They could not believe anyone was on their side, and had no hope that anything they did would ever succeed.

Surprisingly, Maya was not depressed by hearing the hopelessness in their voices, and found the prisoners' will-power grew stronger after they spoke out about their tragedies. The prisoners came to look forward to her time with them, and she became the one bright spot in their desolate lives.

By day, she listened to their horror stories, and by night, she preached revolution.

Maya made sure to set aside a few hours each morning for herself, to let her mind roam free. The whole complex opened like a flower within her mind's eye. She could see every corner of it, from the science labs to Berofski's office; from the guards' quarters to the concealed access hallways; from the emergency steel blast doors over the exits to the lush marsh beyond the minefield and barbed wire fence.

The more she practiced sensing with her mind, the better she got. She listened in on the scientists' conversations, and learned important details of the Pharaoh's tactics. She heard them talk about the reality bombs, horrific devices used before the Pharaoh's invasions to lower the technology level of the area to be attacked. All technological devices invented after the early 1930s would simply not work in the area affected by the bomb. With a defender's modern technology rendered useless, the Pharaoh's low-tech, pre-World War II style armies could sweep in with ruthless efficiency.

When she learned that some researchers had created prototype reality bombs that could simulate the primitive reality of someplace called the "Living Land," she knew she had a means of escape.

"We are going to get away from here," she announced one night. The prisoners trembled and muttered, suddenly very agitated.

"One day soon I'm going to give you a signal, and we're all going to flee. All the defenses here will shut down. All we'll have to do is overpower one guard, get his keys, and head for the exits! We can lose any pursuers in the marsh and run to Khartoum! Their trucks and tanks will be useless!"

The prisoners were clearly upset at the idea of fleeing, but Maya thought they also looked more alive than usual.

She planned to give the signal at the end of the week, after she had made a complete study of the research center, but her dreams that night made her change her mind.

As she was falling asleep, she dreamed of a dark, ugly, gray cloud hovering over the prisoners. Tentatively she reached out into it with her mind. It felt like death.

The cold, dead sensation overwhelmed her, but she reached deeper into the black cloud. In her mind's eye she saw Berofski, madness etched in his face. He was raving to his nervous assistants.

"Nothing is working! Damn her! Well, it's time for desperate measures! Tomorrow morning, I'll tell that little minx to deliver shocks to a prisoner herself! She'll refuse, of course. So I'll execute the prisoner she was supposed to



torture! The next day, I'll ask her to shock another prisoner. She'll refuse again! So I'll kill two more! And so on! And so on! I'll kill them all if I have to! Natatiri will get me more prisoners from the labor camps! She's got more Ords than she knows what to do with. I'll kill half of Khartoum if I must, but I'll make Maya torture people! That will break her. Then I'll make her start choosing who will live and who will die! And that will destroy her!"

Maya pulled her thoughts away so abruptly, that a spasm whipped through her body. She lay on the floor of her cell, sobbing and racked with convulsions. Near dawn, she found refuge in the enfolding comforts of sleep.

Abruptly, she pulled awake, and leapt to her feet. She was relieved to see it was still dark, though a soft haze of light was filtering in from the east.

"Now," she hissed to the prisoners. "Now! Come on, we're going now!" They looked up at her, black dread in their hollow eyes. An unearthly moaning arose from them, but they did not move.

Fear broke loose in Maya, constricting like a hot clamp around her throat. She fought it back, combatting tension with no greater weapons than relaxation and serenity.

Calmly, she set her mind free to arch over the building. In her mind's eye she saw the research chamber which held the reality bomb prototypes. Casually, almost tenderly, she reached forward and touched it with her thoughts.

A tremendous explosion rocked the compound. A whipcrack wave of energy pulsed through the building, shaking the walls and rumbling the floor. The energy snapped through Maya as well. All electric lights winked out, plunging the dimly lit Zero Ward into utter blackness. The prisoners howled like terrified animals. Dust and silt fell from the ceiling, as weakened mortar gave way. Thin shafts of light filtered through the cracks, illuminating the swirling dust.

Maya listened to rest of the compound. She heard no sirens. No steel blast doors sliding into place. No tell-tale grinding of gears of battle equipment. Only the shouts, cries and desperate prayers of terrified guards.

"We're free!" Maya shouted triumphantly. "Out! Out! Let's get away!"

The prisoners fidgeted tensely. Some stood up, some sat down, and some hobbled in circles.

"Come on!" she cried. "We don't even need a guard's keys! The walls are coming loose!"

It was true. The strange energy wave that had followed the explosion had transformed the walls of Zero Ward from steel to stone, and the blocks looked like they would give



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before enough pressure. Maya pushed on the wall to demonstrate. The heavy blocks scraped against each other and began to give way. Maya grabbed a prisoner by the arm, and threw him up against the wall. "Push!" she cried. "Push, damn you!" Tears began to well up in her eyes. She was so close.

The prisoner began to push. More dust fell from the cracks. Another prisoner reached out toward the wall, and then another. Soon the stone blocks were loudly grinding against each other.

The wall groaned and collapsed, sending a cascade of huge grey rocks crashing to the ground. The prisoners scattered, howling and covering their heads. The ceiling buckled, but did not fall. Soft sunlight poured in through the hole in the wall. The green of the Nile marsh at dawn was the most beautiful sight Maya had ever seen.

"Come on," she breathed softly. She stepped out over the huge pile of collapsed stone blocks, and into the fresh morning air. She began to run, exhilarated. The prisoners followed her, tentatively at first, but then faster. They looked like they did not recognize the world.

Eagerly, Maya crossed the short stretch of scrub leading to the outer defenses. She took a deep breath and stepped out onto the minefield. On her third step a mechanical lever clicked under her toes. She froze in terror, and slowly released it. Nothing happened. She cried out with joy, and began leaping through the minefield, stomping over every part of it to show it was safe.

She beckoned the prisoners to follow, coaxing them like







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they were a flock of broken-winged birds. She praised their slow, tentative footfalls as they gingerly stepped out onto the minefield. The bewilderment on their faces was slowly replaced by terrified grins; the clumsy, inept happiness of people who had forgotten how to smile.

Maya grabbed two prisoners and linked arms with them. More prisoners linked arms as well, forming a long human chain as they stumbled, lurched and skipped through the dormant minefield.

They reached the far side and stopped, suddenly very unsure. Only a thin chain link fence, topped with barbed wire, stood between the prisoners and the freedom of the Nile marsh. Maya noted that the barbed wire assembly angled outward, not inward. The research center was designed to keep invaders out, not keep prisoners in. She took a look back at her friends, grabbed a handhold in the metal links, and scurried up the fence. Gingerly, gracefully, she perched on the top, and then leapt over the barbed wire assembly. She landed like a cat on the outside of the fence.

"Not a scratch!" she announced proudly, as she jumped to her feet and proudly pirouetted back to the prisoners. She showed them her unscathed arms and smiled. "So come on," she said invitingly.

The prisoners stood still, looking lost and forlorn. It was if they no longer knew her.

"Come on," she repeated, fear creeping into her voice. "Please!" She pointed to the verdant Nile river bed. "Look! We're almost there! We're almost free!"

The prisoners turned away, slowly. Some sat down, and sank their heads in their hands.

Maya kicked the fence savagely. "Goddamn you!" she shouted. The prisoners jumped, startled.

"We're free!" she implored. "Please climb!"

They didn't budge.

Angrily, Maya climbed back up the fence. "I'll carry you jerks over if I have to, but we are leaving together!"

Her head scraped against the jutting barbed wire assembly. She felt sharp pain and warm blood pool on her head. Slowly it trickled down the side of her face. She could not get back in.

"Climb up!" she shouted. Then she froze in terror. Guards were running out of the research compound, armed with clubs and spears. She slid down the fence, and backed away. The prisoners sat docilely as the guards approached, and began kicking and clubbing them. The prisoners moaned



under the attack, but did not resist.

Blistering hot anger raced through Maya's body. She felt capable of murder. She wanted to tear the guards apart with her bare hands. She wanted to see them suffer. She screamed in anger, rattling the fence savagely.

"One got over the fence!" the captain of the guard barked, pointing at Maya. She leaped off the fence.

"I'll get her," a guard replied, almost bored with the task. As he started to climb the fence, his eyes widened. "That's the Stormer!" he said hoarsely, sliding back down the fence.

"Have the science team dispatch some gospog!" the captain commanded. The guard ran back to the research compound, relieved.

The prisoners were slowly shuffling back to Zero Ward. Those that did not move were clubbed and speared till they could not move at all. Maya watched it all, her body numb and immobile. She felt her mind tucking itself away; closing off from the world.

Suddenly, a horrible stench cut through the morning air. The overpowering strength of it shocked Maya back to her senses. She saw three huge, hulking, creatures, seemingly more plant than man, shambling toward her. She backed away from the fence. The creatures bumped into the fence, and effortlessly tore it down. Maya whirled and ran.

She dashed off toward Khartoum, but the creatures had circled around her, and drove her deeper into the marsh, away from civilization. Soon she was running with no

destination in mind. She was just running to stay away from the creatures.

And I'm still running, she thought forlornly. I'll run till I die. Or till I give up, like those creeps. Those damn prisoners! I hope they all die! Oh, god! Why couldn't I save them?

She tried to banish the jumbled, hateful thoughts from her mind, but the anguish overwhelmed her like a wave of choking seawater.

In the midst of her pain, she remembered Berofski's words. He said there were heroes in the world now. Real heroes.

She clamped her eyes shut, and concentrated. Okay, Storm Knights! This is Maya calling! I want all Storm Knights right here, right now!

She looked around. Nothing was stirring but the gospog. Please! she thought. Please help me!

Nothing.

I don't deserve to be rescued anyway, Maya thought, in abject misery. They followed me out into the minefield. Forty men and women believed in me, and I killed them. I deserve to die! If I had left them alone, this would never have happened! Oh, god, I don't deserve to be rescued. I deserve to die.

Finally, she collapsed in the water, sobbing and coughing. Her heart felt like a heavy gray stone.







## Introduction

# The Nowhere Lands

## Introduction

Two-thirds of the way through the story, when the gospogs are closing in, and Maya's inner strength is at its lowest ebb, the players stop reading the short story and start playing the adventure. The players will think the gospogs got Maya, and their Knights have to go rescue her, either from the marsh or the Weird Science Institute. Their suspicions are confirmed when Maya's mental summons takes them into the Institute.

They'll be quite sure that Maya is in desperate need of rescue. When they escape the Nowhere Lands and burst into Berofski's office, they'll be surprised to find Maya in charge of the situation.

At the end of the game, after the Knights win and flee to the refugee center (or after they fail miserably and end up as Wasting Spirit food), the players get to read the end of the story, and see how Maya pulled off her triumphant return to the research center.

## Adventure Background

The Heritage of Osiris: Khartoum Science Research Center is a lesser "weird science" center. Little of the research done here has paid off in military hardware. Consequently, its defenses and complement of guards are less than those of other facilities.

Heritage is run by Professor Berofski, a Possibility-rated character who loves the Nile Empire and yearns to please Doctor Mobius. Unlike other "weird science" center managers, Berofski keeps in close contact with city officials in nearby Khartoum.

Berofski is interested in psychology, which is a lost science in the Nile

Empire. He needs Storm Knights for his experiments, but knows Mobius would be unlikely to provide him with any. So he relies on the Khartoum officials to send him any they might come across. Consequently, he keeps his center open to high-ranking bureaucrats, and even has VIP accommodations for them at his center.

## How I Learned to Love the Bomb

Despite Doctor Mobius' lack of faith in the place, Heritage has done some extraordinary research in the field of reality bomb technology. The technicians' goal was to create a reality bomb that would be permanently self-sustaining, and never allow its reality to be eroded by the local axioms. Core Earth areas and other realms could thus be transformed permanently and more easily conquered.

They started by increasing the reality bomb's base duration from three hours to three weeks. But what they gained in time they lost in distance. Instead of a two kilometer radius, the bomb only affects an area in a 200 foot radius. They attached huge banks of possibility capacitors to the experimental bombs and prepared to detonate them. They knew if they succeeded, they would be able to conquer the world in relatively short order.

And they did succeed — but not in the way they expected ...

## Kingdoms in a Bottle

The scientists set up their experiments in seven sealed underground testing chambers. The tests were designed to create seven miniature realities based on each of the six invading realms and Core Earth, and maintain



them over time.

The technicians filled each testing chamber with tools, equipment, animals, and prisoners from the labor camps and "learned helplessness" experiments. Also included was at least one person from the reality to be created by the bomb. The prisoners were essential to the work not only in their roles as human guinea pigs, but as a source of possibility energy for the capacitors. The self-sustaining reality bomb prototypes would draw their energy directly from their victims.

The bombs exceeded all expectations. They detonated with a bright flash and unleashed a furious shower of silvery streaks throughout the test chambers.

The axiom wash rapidly transformed the chambers, binding all the prisoners to the reality of the mini-cosm. The powerful forces even bent spatial reality, making the seven chambers larger on the inside than on the outside.

## The Lords of Nowhere

The prisoners that were caught in the reality bomb explosions were often transformed by the gizmo's power. Those test subjects who were native to the reality provided by the bombs took advantage of this to seize power in these new kingdoms. Each turned his mini-cosm into a private fiefdom, and they dubbed their homes the "Nowhere Lands."

When Berofski's scientists came to study them, these powerful beings challenged their authority. Tempers flared, and the Lords of the Nowhere lands attacked the scientists. Berofski barely escaped with his life. After a few running battles, it became clear that the psychologist had lost all control over his experiment, and had no hope of getting it back.

The Lords of Nowhere consolidated their power by conquering all the other prisoners and persuading them to strap themselves to the possibility capacitors or "Soul Drain Elements," as they were now called. Due to the na-

## Purity of Information

Since the players get to read the short story before they play the game, they know some relevant information their characters don't know. Stuff like the exact nature of the experiments, and the fact that the Learned Helplessness prisoners are in Zero Ward.

There's not a lot of sensitive information in the story that can destroy the surprises in the game, but it can taint the play to have a player say "I ask the guards where Berofski is," when the Knights have clearly never heard of Berofski.

Most players are conscien-

tious, and will not have their Knights act any information that the Knights did not learn. If a player slips, or forgets the source of his information, simply ask him where his character got the information he's acting on. Usually that's all it takes. If the player persists, remind him the information came from the story and not from the game.

If the player commits an egregious breach of information, you may have to overrule the action. This is a severe step, and is hardly ever necessary. The disapproval of the other players is often quite sufficient.

ture of the gizmos, only those people who volunteered to surrender their possibility energy could feed the reality bombs.

Berofski sealed off the underground testing chamber, and commanded that no one from Heritage venture there again. He also forbade them from mentioning the results of the warped experiment. He hoped that the mini-cosms would simply vanish at some point, but the hope was a futile one.

The Lords of the Nowhere Lands are still very strong, but they yearn for subjects to rule, enemies to battle, and people to talk to. They know their victims are running out of possibility energy, and are desperate to get more "donors." Without a constant flow of possibilities, their realms are doomed.

## The Wasting Spirit

Presiding over this den of madness is a powerful horror from the Orrorsh mini-cosm, a test subject who was so thoroughly corrupt that he transformed into a monster once under the influence of that realm's axioms. This

being, the Wasting Spirit, uses the micro-cosms as a power base and a playpen.

Although the other Lords could travel between the mini-cosms if they wished to, only the Wasting Spirit has done so up to now. He keeps watch over the Nowhere Lands, and exerts a subtle influence over all the Lords of Nowhere.

When the Storm Knights arrive in the mini-cosms, this Wasting Spirit directs the Lords in their testing of the heroes.

## The Bombs

Each of the seven chambers still contains a functioning reality bomb and Soul Drain gizmo. The devices are continually working to dampen or enhance a particular set of axioms.

These new realities are rather fragile, depending, as they do, on Nile talismans to keep the reality bombs functioning. If the talismans are removed, the bombs cease to work and the dominant reality at work in Heritage at the time, will take over.

Got it? Good. Let's go!







## Act One

# The Road to Nowhere

### The Major Beat

The Storm Knights are on their way to Khartoum to join the Mystery Men. They get sidetracked by Maya Dearborne's insistent psychic call for help, and head for the Heritage Research Center.

They find that the center has been ravaged by a reality bomb that has imposed Living Land axioms upon the area. At first, the Storm Knights easily roll over the center's shocktroopers. On the verge of defeat, one of the scientists triggers an experimental teleportation grenade that transports the invading Knights to the depths of the Nowhere Lands.

The power of the Nowhere Lands draws each Knight to the area which resembles her own home cosm (Nile Empire Knights go to the Nile Nowhere Land, Orrorsh Knights go to the Orrorshan Nowhere Land, Core Earth Knights go to the Core Earth Nowhere Land, etc.)

The act ends with the Knights reviving in the strange new worlds.

### SCENE ONE: Only a Scream Away

#### The Situation

**Standard.** The Storm Knights are driving south from Cairo to Khartoum. If they have their own transportation, they can use that. If not, they have one Senehem jeep per three Storm Knights. Once you have selected a character to receive Maya's summons, and briefed

the appropriate player on the accompanying vision, you're ready to begin.

Read aloud or paraphrase:

The western Nile road to Khartoum is flat and dusty, as it winds along the banks of the river. To your left, the lush green fields slope gently down to the rushing water. To your right, parched sands and scrub-covered hills seem to stretch on forever.

You are heading south to Khartoum to meet the Mystery Men, and coordinate tactics with them. Also on your agenda is contacting the leaders of the secret refugee camps in the hills of Sudan, where anti-Mobius forces train for the day of liberation. But for now, the drive down the dusty road is long and boring.

It's been two hours since you've seen another person, and the road is quiet. Suddenly ...

(Take a dramatic pause here to let the chosen player fill the silence with his best scream, then read:)

... (name of screaming character here) screams.

### The Action

With the aid of Maya's mental summons, the Storm Knights will be able to find the Heritage of Osiris: Khartoum Science Research Center.

If the screamer is driving, another Storm Knight must perform a multi-action — grab the wheel (a *Dexterity* total of 6) and keep the jeep on the road (a *land vehicles* total of 10). If the Knight fails, the jeep will careen off the road and into a marsh. The Knights will suffer no damage from this, but it



## P re-Game Warmup: Psychic Scream Therapy

This is probably the first adventure you've ever played where the surprise threat that begins the game comes from within the party of Storm Knights.

At the start of the adventure, the Storm Knights' leisurely drive is interrupted by a blood-curdling scream from one of the Knights.

The scream is prompted by the excruciating mental pain experienced by the Knight as he receives Maya Dearborne's loud and desperate psychic call for help. Maya is new to her career as an incredibly powerful Storm Knight, and doesn't know that in the world of psychic phenomena, a little goes a long way. She just knows she's in trouble, and would very much like someone to help her out.

The Storm Knight's pain makes him shriek and leaves him *setback* for the next round. The blast has a mental damage value of 12.

The trick is to select the right

Storm Knight to receive the mental summons. It really doesn't matter which Knight you chose. You might want to chose the Storm Knight who acts as the group's leader. Or the one with the highest *Spirit*. Or you might want to chose the Knight who's currently behind the wheel of the jeep. Won't that be fun? If a *Personal Stake* card or *Romance* card has recently been played, choose the Knight tied to that subplot.

Just before the game begins, have a private huddle with the chosen player, and tell him this:

"I'll start the game with an explanation of the Storm Knight's trip to find the Mystery Men. When I come to the word 'suddenly,' please emit a bloodcurdling scream. Not so loud you hurt your throat, but just loud enough to get everyone's attention.

"The scream is prompted by a jolt of extreme psychic pain that sears through your character's mind and is gone a

moment later, leaving the Knight badly shaken. (Be sure to moderate the volume and severity of the anguished cry depending on the proximity of people who are not playing in the game).

"Along with the scream comes a vision. You see a young, female Storm Knight sending out a psychic plea for help. In an instant, you understand everything you just read in the short story. The girl's name is Maya, and she's being tortured in a 'weird science' institute somewhere northwest of Khartoum. You see multitudes of innocents suffering there as well. And beneath it all, you feel a black pit of despair that grows and grows until it begins to take on a life of its own.

Your Storm Knight now knows everything that happened in the short story. Remember, your cue to scream is the word 'suddenly.'"

will require 10 minutes to push it out of the muck.

The pain in the chosen Knight's head will dissipate in one round. He is now motivated to get the group to the research center. Unfortunately, he doesn't know exactly where it is. The directions provided by the vision were extremely vague ones.

The Knight who is driving must generate a *Perception* total of 10 every 10 minutes during the trip to stay on course for the center. If he fails a roll, the Knight who is in mental contact with Maya will receive another mental blast of the same power, which will serve as a beacon and enable the party to find the right direction. A Toughness total of 11 will allow the receiving Knight to suppress his scream.

It takes 50 minutes for the Knights to come within sight of the center, a heavily fortified building sitting atop a hill roughly a quarter of a mile away.

### Scoping Out the Place

When the Knights reach this point, they will be within a Living Land pure zone, due to the explosion Maya set off in the center. Should the Knights disconnect while performing an action not normally a contradiction in the Nile Empire, they should take it as a hint that things are a trifle bizarre in this region.

On a *Perception* or *evidence analysis* total of 12, the Knights will notice that the greenery around the center is far

more lush and verdant than is standard in the vicinity of Khartoum.

When the Knights reach the outskirts of Heritage, they can take some time to survey it and plan their attack. Show the players Map 1.

The first thing the Knights will notice is that the place is deathly quiet, and appears almost deserted. The few shocktroopers manning the compound are carrying clubs and throwing spears, their rifles lying all over the ground. They are also carrying gongs and large bells.

On a *Perception* total of 13, they see that there are no electric lights on in the building, but there do seem to be torches ablaze in some sections.







G. Goleash

## Bombed into the Stone Age, or There's a New Reality in Town

The Heritage of Osiris: Khartoum Science Research Center is currently operating under Living Land axioms, thanks to the reality bomb detonated by the power of Maya's mind. The current axiom levels are:

Magic: 0  
Social: 7  
Spirit: 24  
Tech: 7

Most of the personnel in the research center have disconnected, and so much of the mechanical equipment has ceased to function. In addition, the heat beams, infrared beams, electrified barbed wire and minefields on the perimeter of the facility no longer work.

Those who have disconnected have

lost some of their social skills, and are having difficulty functioning in groups. It is for this reason that the guards' patrols seem to be a bit disorganized. But no one has transformed as yet, the new axioms having only been in effect a very short time.

Those scientists still in touch with Nile Empire reality are hard at work in the lab, attempting to modify a bomb to restore their axioms. They are meeting with frustration, as their colleagues keep disconnecting and forgetting how to use their knowledge of *weird science*.

### The Fence

The compound is enclosed by a chain-link fence approximately four meters high (*Toughness* of 9). The main gate is padlocked (lock-picking difficulty of 9). The gate is flanked by two 10 meter high black obelisks that house the electrical circuitry.

The barbed wire assembly at the top of the fence is normally electrified, but currently the voltage is not functioning.

**Electrified Barbed Wire:** Tech 21, range touch, damage value 25. Voltage currently not present, so damage value 9.

### The Minefield

Research centers, including Heritage, are surrounded by a 500-meter "dead zone," with the outer 250 meters comprised of a minefield. Due to the imposition of a Living Land pure zone, Heritage's mines are not functioning at this time.

**Mines:** Tech 20, burst radius 0-3/8/15, damage value 20.

### Heat Beams

Past the minefield is a 250 meter stretch of scrub and grassland. It looks empty, but it is covered by a grid of infrared beams that trigger alarms and heat beams mounted in nearby rocks and trees and programmed with a random firing pattern. An *acrobatics* total of 8 per round of walking or 18 per round of running is required to avoid the infrared beams. Neither the infrared beams nor the heat beams are functioning at the beginning of the adventure.

**Heat Beams:** Tech 23, damage value 23, range 2-10/100/300

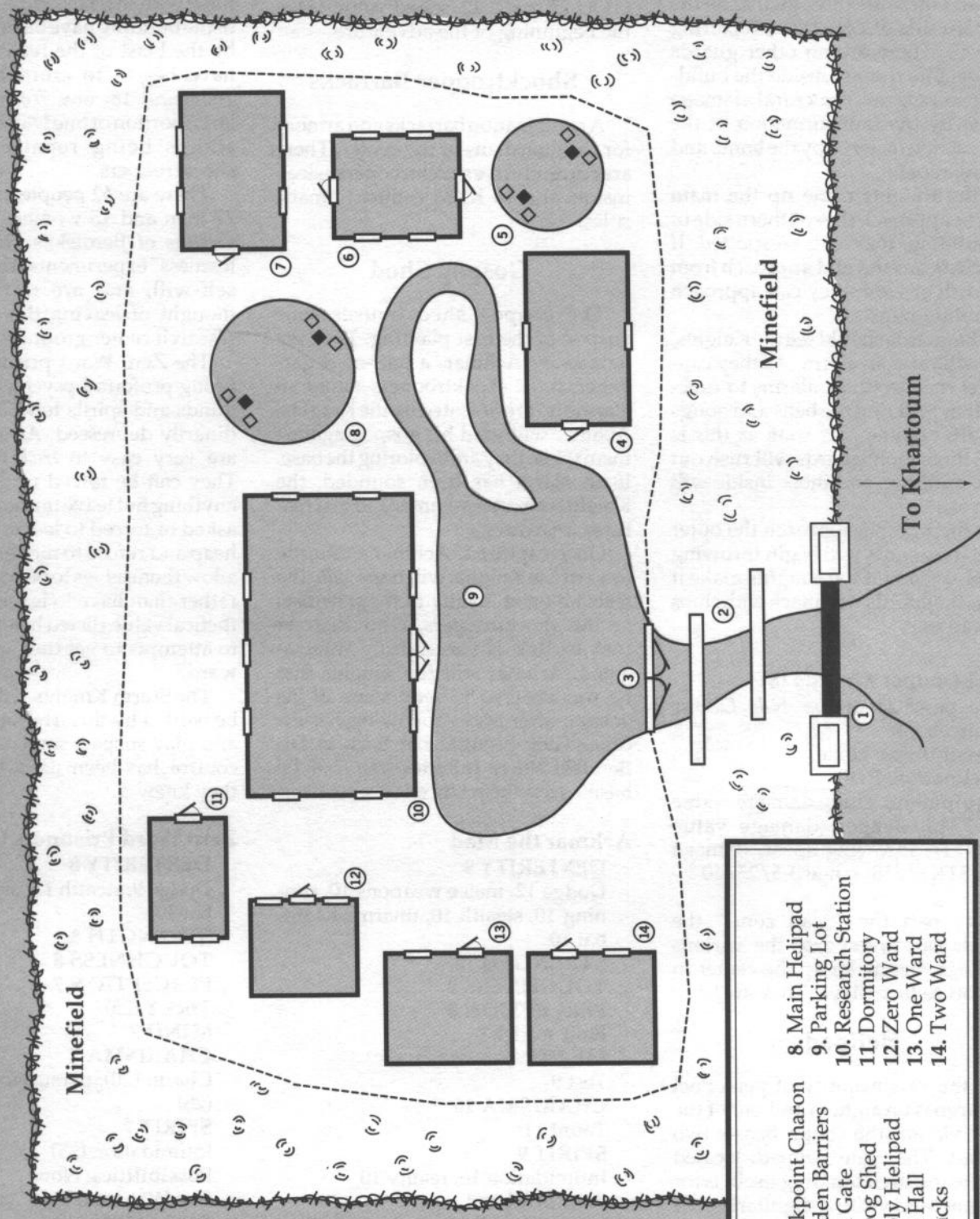
### Checkpoint Charon

The only clear path through the minefield is the main road, which is currently blocked by a chain link gate, and two wooden barriers. The fronts of the barriers have thick spikes and nails protruding from them, so as to puncture the tires of cars that pass over them. Two people can move a barricade off the road in two rounds. It takes one person four rounds to move it. There are five shocktroopers here: three at the front gate and one at each of the wooden barriers. If legitimate visitors arrive, the shocktroopers lug the barriers off the road. If unauthorized visitors arrive, the guards duck behind the barricades and shoot.

If the Storm Knights approach the checkpoint and are unable to convince the guards that they have permission to enter the center, the guards will defend their post with clubs and spears.



**Crucible of Pain: Map 1**  
**Heritage of Osiris Base**



- Key**
- |                      |                      |
|----------------------|----------------------|
| 1. Checkpoint Charon | 8. Main Helipad      |
| 2. Wooden Barriers   | 9. Parking Lot       |
| 3. Main Gate         | 10. Research Station |
| 4. Gospog Shed       | 11. Dormitory        |
| 5. Supply Helipad    | 12. Zero Ward        |
| 6. Mess Hall         | 13. One Ward         |
| 7. Barracks          | 14. Two Ward         |





## The Guards

There are three guards at the main gate, and there are three guards on the southern side of Zero Ward repairing the wall. There are no other guards outside. The rest are inside the building, checking on structural damage caused by the transformation of the construction material by the bomb and making repairs.

If the Knights come up the main road, or approach the southern side of the building, they will be spotted. If they circle around and approach from the north or west, they can approach the building unseen.

If the guards should see the Knights, they will raise an alarm. As they cannot get the electronic alarms to function, they will ring the bells and gongs they are carrying. As soon as this is done, three more guards will rush out of the building, and those inside will go on alert.

As the Knights approach the outer fence, the guards will begin throwing spears at them. If the Knights make it inside, the guards will attack with clubs and knives.

### Shocktrooper Guards (8)

See page 23 of *The Nile Empire* sourcebook.

**Possibilities:** None

**Inclination:** Evil

**Equipment:** club, damage value STR+3/18; dagger, damage value STR+3/17; throwing spear, damage value STR+4/18, range 3-5/25/40

Once past the "dead zone," the Knights can investigate the various buildings that make up the center in an effort to find Maya. They are:

### Helipads

As the vast majority of personnel and cargo is brought in and out of the center via air, the center boasts two helipads. The main helipad, located near the research building itself, is for personnel and visiting dignitaries, the smaller one for equipment and supplies.

Due to its ties to the civilian world, this research center does receive more ground traffic than most. The parking

lot near the main helipad features two roadsters, a troop truck, and an Xfz 311-Aaka halftrack troop transport (TOU 25, pass. 12, speed value 11) at the beginning of the adventure.

## Shocktrooper Barracks

A combination barracks and armory for the guardians of the center. There are currently five shocktroopers asleep inside, and 10 KK81 semi-automatic rifles.

## Gospog Shed

The gospog shed houses four gospog of the first planting. They are tended by Achmar, a half-mad gardener. If the shocktroopers sound an alarm and are defeated by the Knights, Achmar will send his gospog against them while they are exploring the base. If no alarm has been sounded, the Knights can catch Achmar and his creatures unawares.

Once captured, Achmar's attitude toward the Knights will be *friendly* (he feels no great loyalty to the scientists or the shocktroopers, who all treat him badly). If successfully interrogated, Achmar tells the Knights that he was ordered to send some of his gospog after Maya following her escape. They brought her back to Dr. Berofski thirty minutes ago, but he hasn't seen them since.

### Achmar the Mad

**DEXTERITY** 9

Dodge 12, melee weapons 10, running 10, stealth 10, unarmed combat 10

**STRENGTH** 10

**TOUGHNESS** 9

**PERCEPTION** 8

Find 9, trick 9

**MIND** 7

Test 9

**CHARISMA** 10

Taunt 11

**SPIRIT** 9

Intimidation 10, reality 10

**Possibilities:** 1

**Inclination:** Evil

**Equipment:** hunting knife, damage value STR+3/19

## Zero Ward

Zero Ward is a prison building, filled with shackles and cells. The walls of the building have been transformed by the blast of the reality bomb and have begun to crumble (normally *Toughness* 18, now *Toughness* 12). A large portion of one wall has collapsed and is being repaired by three shocktroopers.

There are 42 people in Zero Ward, 27 men and 15 women. They are all victims of Berofski's "learned helplessness" experiments. They have little self-will, and are terrified at the thought of leaving the ward or the research center grounds.

The Zero Ward prisoners are suffering profound psychic shock. Their minds and spirits have been extraordinarily depressed. As a result, they are very easy to *trick* or *intimidate*. They can be forced to do just about anything but leave the building. When asked or forced to leave, they fall in a heap and refuse to move. They would allow themselves to be beaten to death rather than have to leave. The parenthetical values listed below relate only to attempts to get them to depart the ward.

The Storm Knights will most likely be baffled by this irrational behavior, and may suspect some form of mind control has been used here. If only they knew ...

### Zero Ward Prisoners (42)

**DEXTERITY** 8

Dodge 9, stealth 11, unarmed combat 10

**STRENGTH** 8

**TOUGHNESS** 8

**PERCEPTION** 7

Trick 8 (25)

**MIND** 7

**CHARISMA** 7

Charm (20), persuasion (25), taunt (25)

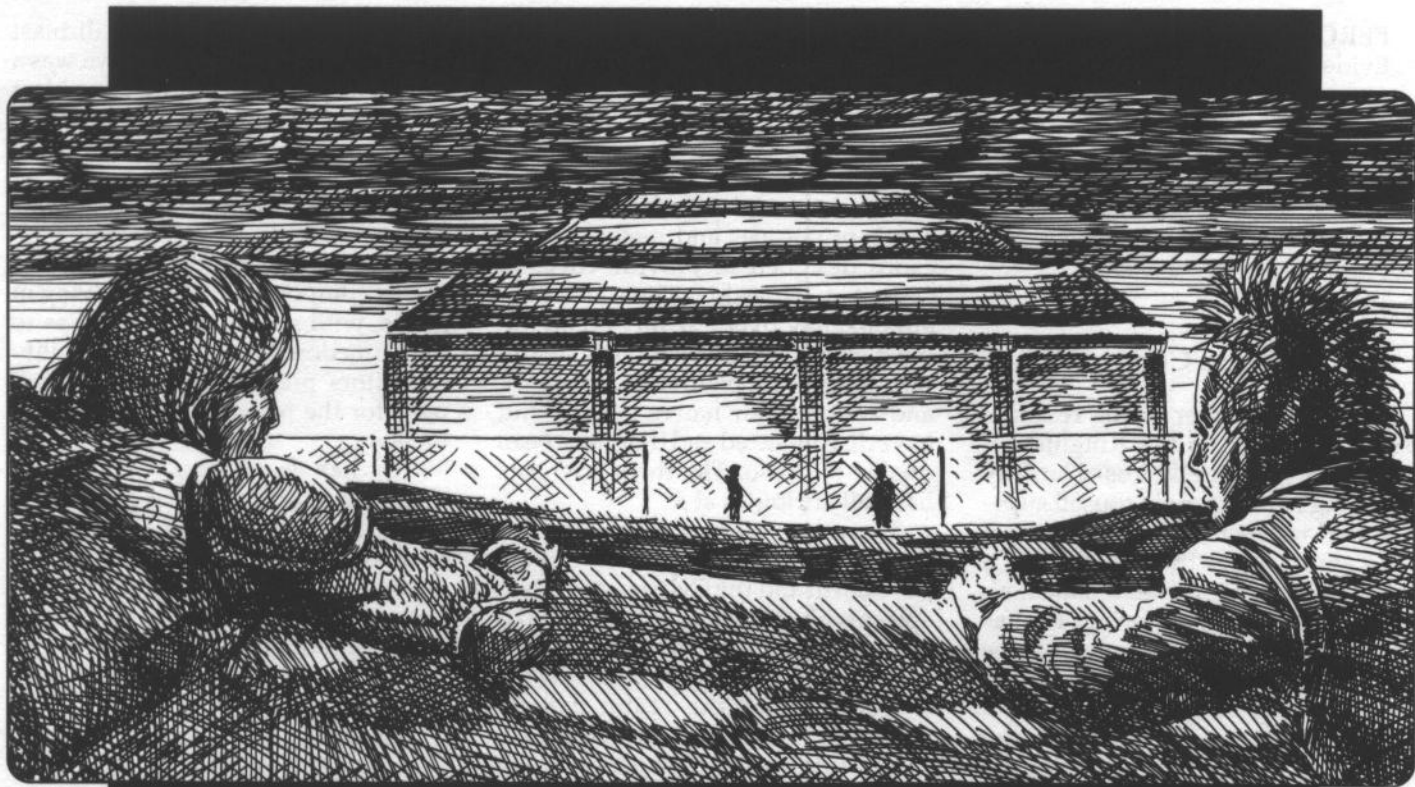
**SPIRIT** 7

Intimidation (25)

**Possibilities:** None

One Ward and Two Ward, adjacent to this building, are prison and hospital buildings, respectively, and are both empty.





E. Geier

## Heritage of Osiris

Dominating the center of the base is the Heritage of Osiris *weird science* research center, a huge, fortress-like building made of a substance designed to contain the force of explosions. It has huge carved pillars at each of the four outer corners equipped with security cameras.

The windows, doors, and some hallways of the building are equipped with cameras and steel shutters (*Toughness* 24). Currently, neither cameras nor shutters are functioning, and all window shutters are open.

Once the Knights gain entrance to the center, cut to "Scene Two: The Search for Maya."

## SCENE TWO: The Search for Maya

### The Situation

**Standard.** The Knights explore the Heritage of Osiris research center and see their first evidence of Berofski's horrible experiments.

### The Action

The Knights can enter the research center through the main entrance or through the windows whose shutters are frozen open. The descriptions of the various rooms are below.

#### The Great Hall

The main entrance opens on to a long hall flanked by rows of ornate columns. This room is used to welcome VIPs and to intimidate anyone

else. Two shocktroopers stand guard by the door.

Beyond the Great Hall is a vast lounge intended for the relaxation of welcome guests, and the possible ambush of unwelcome ones.

#### Administration Office

This office is run by two Nile bureaucrats who serve Berofski. They deal with locals who come to the center to report on Storm Knight activity and pass any interesting information on to the doctor.

If the Knights enter, a *find* total of 8 will reveal the bureaucrats, who are hiding under their desks. If questioned, they will admit that they did see a few gospog enter the building with a girl, but do not know what is going on. They will give directions (if asked) to Berofski's office.

#### Nile Bureaucrats (2)

**DEXTERITY** 8

Dodge 10, running 9, stealth 10

**STRENGTH** 7

**TOUGHNESS** 7





**PERCEPTION 10**

Evidence analysis 12, find 12, language 11, trick 11

**MIND 10****CHARISMA 8**

Charm 11, persuasion 12, taunt 10

**SPIRIT 9**

Intimidation 10

**Possibilities:** None

**Inclination:** Evil

**Security Central**

The nerve center of the research base's defenses, as the Knights approach they will see the guard on duty reporting to his recently roused superior. A *Perception* total of 9 will allow the Knights to see that the captain is using a functioning walkie-talkie, although no one is answering. He has not disconnected as yet, and would be capable of reactivating many of the base's security devices.

If the Knights do not attack and defeat the shocktrooper captain, he will return all security devices to life in six rounds.

**Captain Khali Hafji****DEXTERITY 10**

Beast riding 11, dodge 12, fire combat 12, maneuver 11, melee weapons 11, unarmed combat 12

**STRENGTH 10****TOUGHNESS 11****PERCEPTION 10**

Evidence analysis 12, find 12, land vehicles 11, tracking 11, trick 13

**MIND 9**

Test 12

**CHARISMA 10**

Charm 14, persuasion 13, willpower 11

**SPIRIT 9**

Intimidation 14, reality 14

**Possibilities:** 2

**Inclination:** Evil

**Equipment:** KO8, damage value 15, ammo 8, range 3-10/25/60; grenades (2), damage value 19, range 1-6/15/40, blast radius 0-3/8/15; radio

**Eternium Synthesizer**

This room contains banks of monitoring equipment and a huge concrete chamber designed to refine eternium, the crucial ingredient in the creation of reality bombs. A guard is currently

present in the room, trying to remember how to put his field-stripped rifle back together.

**Reality Bomb Chamber**

This large room is full of reality bomb prototypes and metallic barricades designed to provide cover in case of an explosion. Three scientists are puzzling over a reality bomb imbued with the axioms of the Nile Empire. They were planning to trigger it and restore their native axioms, but have disconnected and thus have been unable to do so. The three scientists have all attributes at 8.

There are reality bombs here with the axioms of the Living Land, Nippon, Core Earth and the Cyberpapacy, two apiece with Orroshan and Ayslish axioms, and four with Nile axioms. The bombs are not labeled.

Determining the realm axioms simulated by the bombs requires a *weird science* total of 10 or a *science* total of 15. An *intimidation* total of 10 against a scientist will frighten him into revealing the information.

If the Storm Knights wish to try and carry off a bomb, they will find it a little much to handle (the average reality bomb is roughly 1.5 meters long and weighs 600 kilograms. If they wish to try and set one off, they must generate a *weird science* total of 18 or a *science* total of 25 to do so. The scientists can not provide any aid in this, as they have temporarily forgotten the procedure.

**Reality Bomb Prototypes****TOUGHNESS 20**

Reality 35

**Damage Value:** 23

**Blast Radius:** 0-4/10/25

**Duration:** 29 (one week, unless hooked up to Soul Drain element).

**Description:** A reality bomb blast is marked by a wave of pure force (which does damage value 23) followed by shower of light as the new axioms take hold in the area of effect. The reality bomb creates a *pure* zone during the time in which it is active — those who generate *reality* totals greater than that of the bomb can treat the area as a *dominant* zone.

These particular bombs, similar to the ones used in the Nowhere Lands,

have long durations but small blast radii. The bomb set off by Maya was a more standard type, with a large blast radius and a relatively short duration (six hours).

**Test Labs and Storage Area**

These areas are filled with *weird science* components. Most are lying in heaps, with no immediate clue as to their function. There are no possibility capacitors present, as they were all used for the Nowhere Lands experiment.

Test Lab #6 contains notes on the construction of a teleportation grenade which imply that such a thing has been done successfully. There is a working Synapsitron in Test Lab #4 (*weird science* total of 15 to determine its method of operation).

**Synapsitron**

Damage value 20, ammo 12, range 3-10/40/50

**Description:** The Synapsitron scrambles the electrical impulses in the target's brain. Compare the damage total to the opponent's *Mind* or *willpower* value. For each level of success above Minimal, the victim's *Mind*-related skills are reduced -1 for five minutes. At the end of that time, all skill levels return to normal.

When the Knights reach the test labs, cut to "Scene Three: Black Smoke and Mirrors."

**Control Room**

Berofski's dim, cluttered, smoky perch from which he monitors his victims. It is dominated by a large control panel featuring sound equipment attuned to the test cells and an electroshock device, the device of which can be adjusted to administer jolts of damage value 8 to 20.

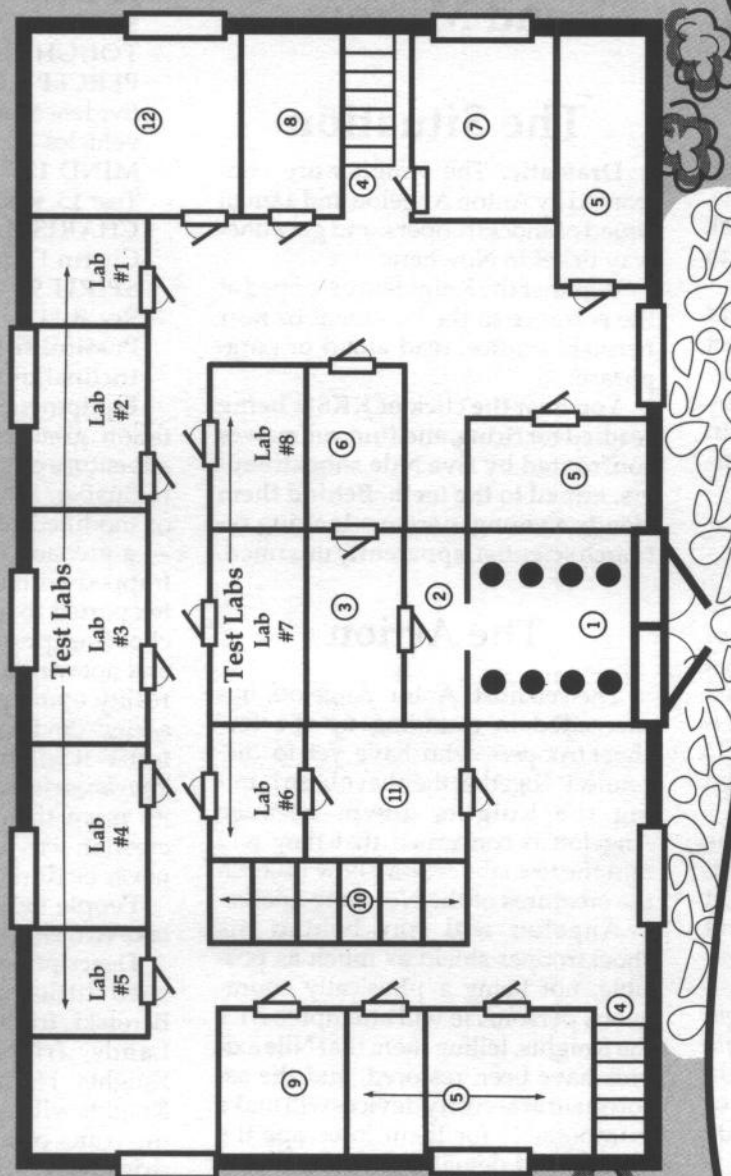
Two shocktrooper guards are posted here.

A thick sheet of *megaglass* (TOU 25) in the south wall of the room serves as a one-way mirror to allow Berofski to monitor the activity in the test cells.

The cells themselves are tiny, with floors rigged for electroshock on either side of a thin rubber insulating strip. Each room has mirrors mounted on every wall, through one of which



*Crucible of Pain: Map 2*  
Heritage of Osiris Research Center



**Key**

- 1. Great Hall
- 2. Receiving Room
- 3. Administration Office
- 4. Stairs to Basement
- 5. Storage Rooms
- 6. Security Central
- 7. Eternium Synthesizer
- 8. Reality Bomb Chamber
- 9. Library
- 10. Test Cells
- 11. Control Room
- 12. Berofski's Office



Berofski can peer from his control room.

The test cells have metal doors (TOU 15) with simple padlocks (lock picking difficulty of 8). There's one Zero Ward prisoner in Cell #4.

### Berofski's Office

Berofski and Maya are in here, along with the gossip Maya now controls. Berofski is cowering under his desk while Maya tells him how it's going to be from now on.

(Note: The Storm Knights should not be able to reach the office until Act Three. Once they approach it from any direction, they will be confronted by Angelou and his shocktroopers. Cut to "Scene Three: Black Smoke and Mirrors.")

### Stairways to Hell

There are two staircases leading to the basement, one at the north end of the building and one in the southeast corner. The doors to both are boarded up, with large signs reading, "DANGER! KEEP OUT! AUTHORIZED PERSONNEL ONLY!" posted upon them.

If the Knights interrogate anyone on the Heritage staff about the area, they will be told that the basement was sealed off when an experiment went awry. It's considered to be very dangerous down there.

The barricaded doors have a *Toughness* of 14, and it requires a *Strength* total of 16 to tear the boards off without the use of a tool (with a crowbar or something of the sort, it requires only a *Strength* of 11).

If the Storm Knights break through the door, they will be spotted by Angelou and his shocktrooper squad. Cut to Scene Three.

### Closing In

As soon as the Knights reach the corridor between Test Labs #7 and #8, they are confronted by Angelou, who has arrived there seeking Berofski. Cut to Scene Three.

## SCENE THREE: Black Smoke and Mirrors

### The Situation

**Dramatic.** The Knights are confronted by Anton Angelou and a small squad of shocktroopers, and get a one-way ticket to Nowhere.

Whether the Knights are stopped at the entrance to the basement or near Berofski's office, read aloud or paraphrase:

**You hear the click of KK81s being readied for firing, and find yourselves confronted by five Nile shocktroopers, armed to the teeth. Behind them stands a young, nervous-looking research scientist, apparently unarmed.**

### The Action

The scientist, Anton Angelou, has succeeded in rounding up the few shocktroopers who have yet to disconnect. Together they have been hunting the Knights down, because Angelou is concerned that they will raid the test labs or somehow unleash the creatures of the Nowhere Lands.

Angelou will stay behind his shocktrooper shield as much as possible, not being a physically courageous person. He will attempt to *trick* the Knights, telling them that Nile axioms have been restored, and the assortment of security devices will make it impossible for them to escape the facility, and demand their surrender.

If the Knights give in, Angelou and his men will lead them to a test cell. Once inside, Angelou will toss his ring (with the concealed teleportation grenade) into the cell, and the Knights will be whisked off to the Nowhere Lands.

If the Knights go into combat, Angelou will stay out of it, letting his shocktroopers do the fighting for him. If the Knights are defeated, the result will be the same as if they had surrendered. If the Knights are victorious, cut to "Et Tu, Angelou?"

### Anton Angelou

#### DEXTERITY 10

Dodge 14, maneuver 12, running 12, stealth 15

#### STRENGTH 8

#### TOUGHNESS 9

#### PERCEPTION 11

Evidence analysis 14, find 13, land vehicles 12, trick 13

#### MIND 12

Test 13, weird science 15

#### CHARISMA 9

Charm 11, persuasion 10

#### SPIRIT 9

Reality 13

#### Possibilities: 7

#### Inclination: Evil

**Equipment:** miniaturized teleportation grenade (concealed in ring), adventure cost 5, effect value 25, burst radius 0-4/10/25. This is another piece of modified *weird science* equipment — a grenade which causes anything trapped within its burst radius to be teleported to a place of the thrower's choosing (providing it is within range, and not within a solid object). Like the reality bomb prototypes, this one-of-a-kind device sacrifices range for effect — it will transport anyone whose *Toughness* its effect value can beat, but no more than 100 meters away. Its creation was an accident, which may never be duplicated.

People teleported automatically take two shock points.

**Description:** Angelou is a frightened little man — frightened of Berofski, frightened of the Nowhere Lands, frightened of the Storm Knights. He is most afraid that the Knights will loot his test labs and take the fruits of his labors. It is for that reason he is willing to take the risk of teleporting both himself and the Knights into the Nowhere Lands.

### Angelou's Shocktroopers (5)

#### DEXTERITY 10

Beast riding 12, fire combat 13, heavy weapons 13, unarmed combat 13

#### STRENGTH 10

Climbing 11

#### TOUGHNESS 10

#### PERCEPTION 9

Find 11, first aid 11, tracking 11, trick 11

#### MIND 8

Survival 10, test 10, willpower 13



**CHARISMA 9**

Taunt 11

**SPIRIT 8**

Faith (Egyptian) 11, intimidation 11, reality 11

**Possibilities: 2****Inclination: Evil****Equipment:** KK81, damage value 19, ammo 24, range 3-40/400/1k; bayonety, damage value STR+4/17

## Et Tu, Angelou?

If the Knights defeat the shocktroopers, Angelou will throw his hands up and surrender. A *Perception* or *find* total of 11 will reveal that he is wearing a large gold ring on his left hand.

Angelou will begin to babble, saying he was forced to attack them, and will offer to lead them to Berofski. At some point during his hysterical monologue, Angelou will attempt to use his *stealth* to fold over his ring finger unnoticed. When he does so, the teleportation grenade will go off.

If Angelou is spotted, he will offer to let the Knights take the ring. As soon as contact is made with it, the grenade will go off. If Angelou is killed or knocked out in the battle, the grenade will go off when he hits the ground.

Read aloud or paraphrase:

**You hear a muffled explosion, and sparks begin to dance off of your equipment. Thick tendrils of oily black smoke coil toward you, making it virtually impossible to see. There is a tingling sensation in your body and a feeling of movement, and then through the darkness you see a pair of piercing eyes regarding you coldly. Then the darkness returns.**

Cut to Act Two, "The Lords of Nowhere."



G. Goleash

## Variables

If the Knights should escape from the shocktroopers and make it into the basement, they will come upon a large metal door. It is the only immediately apparent exit from the basement. It opens automatically every five seconds, revealing bright white light. If the Knights go through this door, each will be transported to his or her own Nowhere Land.

Cut to Act Two, "The Lords of Nowhere."

## Flags

If an *Idea* card is played, a Knight recalls having heard of a *weird science* research center in the Khartoum area. He will be able to find it easily without using his *tracking* skill, sparing the

party member in psychic contact with Maya a certain amount of pain.

If a *Personal Stake* card is played, a Core Earth or Nile Knight had at least a nodding acquaintance with Maya prior to the start of the Possibility Wars.

If a *Connection* card is played, one of the two bureaucrats in the administration office is Belinda Corning, an old friend of a Knight and a secret sympathizer with their cause. She will answer the Knights' questions, telling them about layout and defenses at the institute and about rumors she's heard of an experiment in the basement that went awry.

## Act Awards

Award the Knights three Possibilities at the end of this act.







## Act Two

# The Lords of Nowhere

### The Major Beat

The Storm Knights find themselves transported to miniature versions of the invading cosms. These Nowhere Lands are maintained by the experimental perpetual reality bombs, while the Soul Drain Elements keep the bombs functioning and generate an energy barrier which surrounds each microcosm.

Once inside the Nowhere Lands, the Knights will be tempted to attach themselves to the Soul Drain Element. If they do so, their Possibilities will be drained to keep the Nowhere Lands in existence. In addition, they will fall prey to the true ruler of the Nowhere Lands, the Wasting Spirit.

Keep in mind when running these scenes that reality storms cannot be invoked against someone whose reality is the same as one's own.

### The Wasting Spirit

The Wasting Spirit was one of two Orrorshan natives who were locked in a testing for the explosion of a prototype reality bomb. Following the creation of the Orrorshan pure zone, both he and his comrade turned to the occult to gain superiority in the Nowhere Land. The Wasting Spirit was the more successful, so corrupted himself that he transformed into the dread entity he is today.

Of all the Lords of Nowhere, only the Wasting Spirit takes advantage of the freedom to move about among the various mini-cosms, and even the basement of the Heritage institute. He feeds on the fear and dread of those who reside in the Nowhere Lands, and so is determined that these realms should

remain in existence. For that reason, he is anxious to see the Possibility-rich Storm Knights attached to the Soul Drain Elements.

The Wasting Spirit has counseled all six Nowhere Lords on how best to lure the Knights into their traps. Should the Knights escape the Nowhere Lands, they will still have to confront this powerful creature.

Note that the "Flags" and "Variables" listed at the conclusion of Act Two can be applied to any of the seven scenes listed below.

### The Barrier and the Portal

The barrier around each Nowhere Land is impenetrable by normal physical means (TOU 50). It looks like a shimmering wall of solid gray, and is generated by the Soul Drain gizmos which maintain the effects of the reality bombs.

There are three 10 foot tall portals in each barrier. The portals open for five seconds once every half-minute. When they are closed, they resemble the rest of the barrier, but when they open, they look like huge, black fanged jaws. During the few seconds they are open, soft, diffused white light pours in.

From a distance, this seems like a great flash of light that is seen for only seconds and then disappears. (In some Nowhere Lands, the portals are disguised, or blocked).

Spotting the portals requires a *Perception* total that varies by mini-cosm. (Note that a second *Perception* roll immediately after the first will fail, since the portal is only visible for ten seconds out of each minute. Now you see it; now you don't.)



Leaping through the portals is an act of blind faith (or desperation). When a Knight enters one, he is enveloped by the bright light, and then lands on a solid surface, in total darkness. The air now smells musty.

The portals lead to the Institute's basement, which had been blacked out when the electricity went out. All three portals in each Nowhere Land lead to a single door in the basement.

## Soul Drain Element

Each Nowhere Land is the creation of an experimental perpetual reality bomb. Each bomb has a "Soul Drain Element," actually the gizmo's massive possibility capacitor. The Soul Drain Elements look different in each Nowhere Land, but they all do the same thing. They drain possibility energy at varying rates and transfer it to the perpetual reality bomb. This sustains the bomb's base duration, and keeps each mini-cosm open for business.

In each Nowhere Land, the Soul Drain Elements are stocked with those Stormers that were being held at the center when the experiment was performed. After two months of being drained, most of them have been virtually emptied of Possibilities. The Soul Drain Elements have been forced to ration the expenditure of Possibilities, so when fresh donors are hooked up, the capacitors will increase their leech rate to a Possibility per hour.

Since the Institute sealed off the Nowhere Lands, the Wasting Spirit has had no chance at gaining possibility rated people to drain. Even if Heritage were to send some Stormers down there (unlikely in any circumstances except for, say, an all-out attack on the institute), they would have to agree to be drained of their possibility energy for the Soul Drain to work.

Naturally, maintaining Nile bombs created through *weird science* in the pure zones of the Nowhere Lands is extremely difficult. Thus each bomb has affixed to it a Nile Empire talisman (a small scarab amulet) which maintains Mobius' reality in that spot. This area is usually marked by atmospheric disturbances. Removing the talisman will cause the bomb to stop working

## One-On-One Roleplaying

When the Knights are struck by the teleportation grenade, the group is separated, and each Knight is transported into the Nowhere Land that corresponds to his realm. Upon arriving, each is met and tested by an agent of the Wasting Spirit. Since the solutions to all these situations are similar, run each scene with each player individually, as a one-on-one adventure. That way the players won't be able to second-guess what will happen in their adventure. (If there are two characters from the same realm, they may participate in the scene together).

Dramatically announce that all the players save one have to leave the room. (They can make popcorn.) Once they are out of earshot, run the first player through his scene.

After the conclusion of that adventure, bring in the next player. The first player may stay and watch. Continue this way until you are ready for the Core Earth interlude. Before you bring in the player(s) with Core Earth character(s), brief the other players on their roles in that adventure.

As long as you save the Core Earth Knight(s) for last, the interludes may be run in any order. We recommend you run them in the order listed here.

If you prefer not to send the players out of the room during the one-on-one sections, make sure they don't have their characters act on information gained by watching the decisions of other players.

except in the "Newest Nile Empire".

When the Storm Knights are sent to the Nowhere Lands, the Lords try to trick them into surrendering their possibility energy. **Keep in mind that all attempts to convince the Knights to hook themselves up to the Soul Drain Elements involve some form of misrepresentation about the danger involved, and thus there is a +5 difficulty modifier to the Lords' persuasion attempts.**

If the Lords convince the Knights to help them, the Nowhere Lands gain a fresh burst of energy, and a new lease on life — at the expense of the Knight's freedom and, eventually, perhaps his life as well.

## Fight or Flight

In the following seven scenes, each Knight is faced with a trial; a test of his resolve and dedication, orchestrated by the Wasting Spirit and acted out by the Lords of Nowhere. If a Knight gives in, he will be attached to the Soul

Drain Element and drained of his possibilities. If he resists, the Lord of Nowhere attacks in anger.

When the Lords attack, they do not attack to kill. They want to force the Knight to change his mind and submit. They only use killing force if the Knight is on the verge of breaking the Soul Drain machine or removing the Nile talisman from the reality bomb.

If the Knights wish to flee, they can escape through the portals in each Nowhere Land to the Heritage basement. If they make it through a portal, the Lords will not pursue.

## SCENE ONE: The Living Nowhere Land

### The Situation

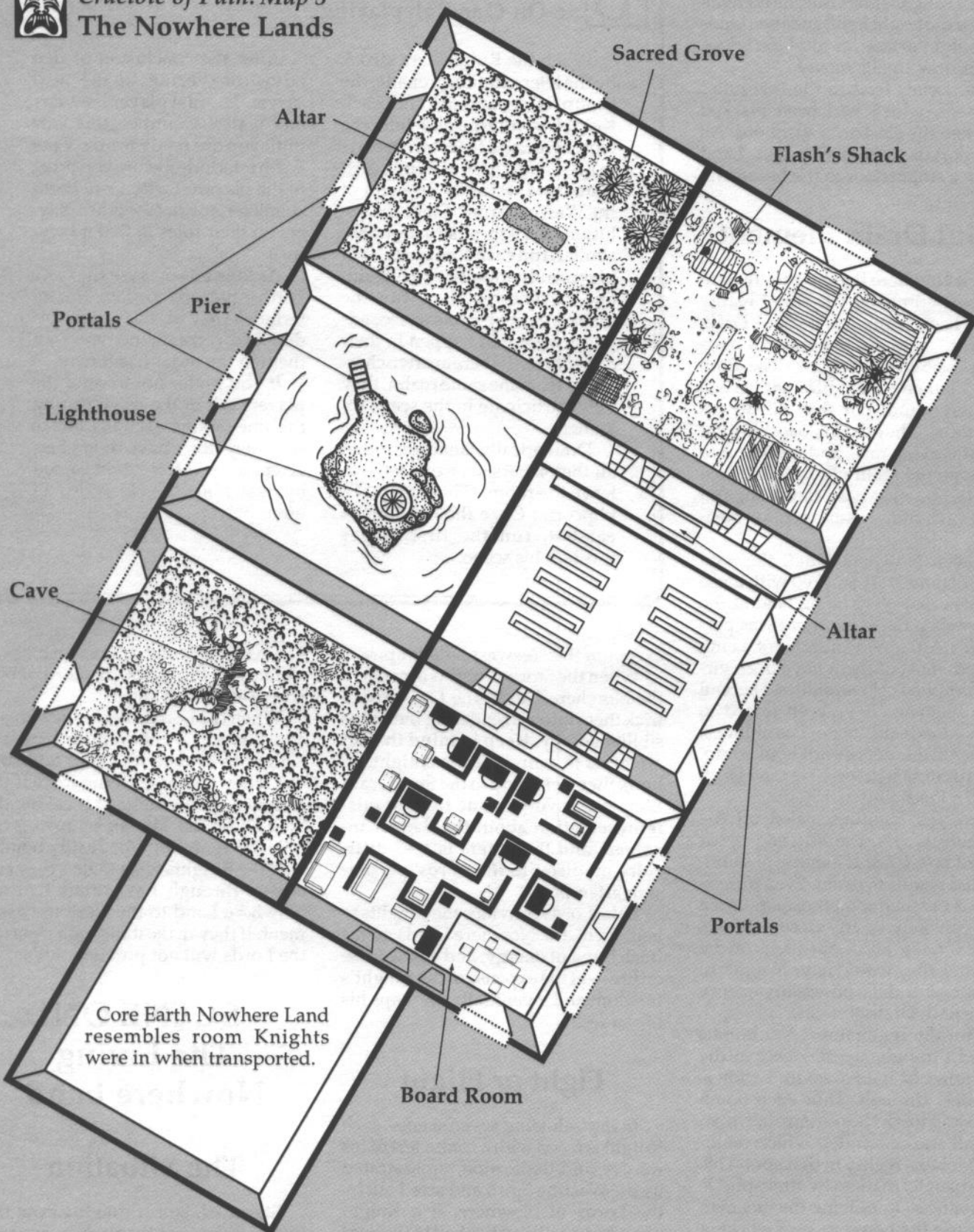
**Standard.** Storm Knights from the Living Land find themselves in a pri-







# Crucible of Pain: Map 3 The Nowhere Lands



meval jungle. The foliage is denser and more lush than any they have ever seen. The mist is thick, and it's hard to tell just how far the jungle extends. This mist is sufficiently similar to that of the Living Land that the same rules regarding sight distance can apply (see page 65 of *The Living Land* sourcebook).

Due to the mist, it's virtually impossible for the Knight to see the portal from the ground, requiring a *Perception* or *find* total of 35. His chance will come once he's atop the Ugresk.

## The Action

If the Knight makes a *Perception* or *evidence analysis* total of 20, he gets the vague impression that though his surroundings resemble the Living Land, there is something subtly different about this area.

The Knight is free to explore the area. Walking forward will bring him to an altar; walking to the right or left will see him just slog through jungle until the ugresk appears. If the Knight turns and looks behind him, he will see the shimmering energy barrier that borders this area.

Before he can reach the altar or the barrier, a *Perception* total of 8 will allow him to hear a rush of wings off to his right. The sound grows louder and louder, until an ugresk flies into view, slowing as it approaches him.

If the Knight attacks the ugresk, it flies away. The Knight will have to continue to explore on his own, and will eventually come upon the altar. Cut to "Jakananda."

If he does not attack it, the ugresk lands and approaches him with its head bowed. It places its head at the Knight's feet, and waits until the Knight takes an action of some sort.

If the Knight takes an action which is not overtly hostile, it will rub its head against him in an affectionate manner. It will allow the Knight to come as close as he wishes, and even to mount it. If the Knight does not mount it, the ugresk will lead him on foot to the altar. Cut to "Jakananda."

Once the Knight is atop the ugresk, it will take off into the "sky." (*Dexterity* or *beast riding* total of 8 to stay atop the creature). If the Knight should fall, cut to "Falling Into the Goddess."



E. Geier

From the air, a *Perception* or *find* total of 13 will allow the Knight to see one of the portals open, revealing a burst of light. The ugresk is fiercely loyal to the commands of its mistress, and will resist any orders to fly toward the portal. A *beast riding* total of 25 is required to get it to fly anywhere besides straight to the altar.

### Ugresk

See page 98 of *The Living Land* sourcebook.

**Possibilities:** none

**Natural Tools:** teeth, damage value STR+2/28; claws, damage value STR+1/27; wings, speed value 12

## Jakananda

When the Knight reaches the altar, he sees a beautiful Jakatt priestess with a smile on her lips and her arms outstretched in greeting. A violent wind is blowing through the grove in which the altar sits. A *Perception* or *evidence*





*analysis* total of 10 reveals to the Knight that a scarab amulet is attached to the side of the altar. If he asks the priestess about it, she will claim that it is a representation of one of Lanala's creatures, and is there by the will of the goddess.

The altar contains the perpetual reality bomb. If the Knight removes the scarab amulet, violent weather will rock the Nowhere Land a silvery rain will begin to fall, as Nile axioms take hold once again. The ugresk and the carnel (if present) will be seen to explode in flames as they transform for a second time, reverting to Nile creatures.

If the Knight attacks Jakananda, she will signal for a carnel, which will emerge from the trees and charge the Knight. It will attempt to subdue, but not kill, the Storm Knight.

If the Knight takes no hostile action, the priestess will beckon him forward and attempt to *charm* him. Read aloud or paraphrase:

**Hersmile is like unto that of Lanala herself, as she says, "I am Jakananda, priestess of Lanala. I welcome you. I see you have accepted my gift. Do you like him? He is yours, brave one(s).**

**"Come, let us go unto Lanala and commune with her."**

If the Knight agrees, he feels himself begin to sink into the soft ground. A *willpower* total of 10 is required to keep from thrashing about. There are roots nearby which the Knight can grab, and a *Strength* total of 9 allows the Knight to pull himself free of the earth's embrace.

If the Knight fails to save himself, cut to "Falling Into the Goddess."

If the Knight refuses to commune with Lanala, or succeeds in freeing himself from the soft earth, cut to "The Wrath of Jakananda."

### Jakananda

#### DEXTERITY 12

Beast riding 14, dodge 15, maneuver 14, missile weapons 13, stealth 14, unarmed combat 14

#### STRENGTH 10

#### TOUGHNESS 10

#### PERCEPTION 11

Find 13, language 13, tracking 12,

trick 14

#### MIND 10

Survival 14, test 12

#### CHARISMA 12

Charm 14, persuasion 15, taunt 14

#### SPIRIT 12

Faith (Keta Kalles) 15, focus 15, intimidation 15, reality 14

**Possibilities:** 6 per Storm Knight

**Miracles:** *animal rage, earth's ear, intense fear, see through mist*

**Equipment:** hroctk spear, damage value STR +3/18

**Description:** Jakananda is an actual Jakatt priestess captured by Nile agents specifically for the Nowhere Lands experiment. She is convinced that the reality bombs, though dead things, could help to spread the will of Lanala throughout the world.

### Carnol

See page 82 of *The Living Land* sourcebook.

**Possibilities:** none

**Natural Tools:** hide, armor value TOU+2/32; teeth, damage value STR+6/32; tail, damage value STR+2/28

## The Wrath of Jakananda

If the Knight declines to commune with Lanala, or frees himself from the apparent embrace of the goddess, Jakananda grows angry and says:

**"Then Lanala will take you! If you deny your goddess, she becomes a demoness!"**

Jakananda calls for a carnel, which attacks the Knight. Again, it strikes only to subdue, not kill. If the Knight is defeated, he feels himself sinking into the soft earth. Cut to "Falling Into the Goddess."

## Falling Into the Goddess

The Knight feels himself slowly falling, but experiences no terror. Warm green enfolds and comforts him. He will take no damage from this, even if he has fallen from the ugresk to the

soft earth.

Read aloud or paraphrase:

**You hear a soft, gentle voice say "Welcome back, my child. You have been long gone, and long missed."**

**You feel waves of bliss flow over you, as you sink into a great, primal calm. The voice says, "I am a loving goddess, and I forgive your fall into the dead lands. I forgive your desire to destroy my people and my land."**

If the Knight objects, saying he only intended to fight Baruk Kaah, and not the goddess, she appreciates the sentiment, saying:

**"You have been too long gone, and we long for your return. Come back and live as one of us again."**

This is actually an effort at *persuasion* by Jakananda, the Lord of this Nowhere Land. She will try for a *yes* or *vow* result.

If the Knight agrees, he is brought back up to the surface, emerging in a thick grove of tree to the rear of the altar. A *Perception* total of 8 reveals that there are five other people here, hanging like puppets from the trees, ivy wound around their wrists.

Jakananda shows him how to entwine his hands in the ivy of the largest tree (a *Strength* total of 10 is required to free one's self from the ivy). As she does so, a *Perception* or *find* total of 15 allows the Knight to see the Wasting Spirit approach. The Wasting Spirit will attack with his *paralyzing touch*, and then use *life drain* to make a single attack the Knight's *Spirit*. If he has already used the *life drain* power in this act, he will simply leave the Knight paralyzed, intending to drain him later. (For details on the Wasting Spirit, see Act Three, Scene One or the *Gamemaster Character Record Sheet*.) If the Wasting Spirit's initial attack is successful, the Knight will be unable to move while the Soul Drain steals his Possibilities, at a rate of one per hour.

If the Knight rejects the offer, the goddess presence becomes angry, and her voice begins to sound more like Jakananda than Lanala. Read:

**"How dare you not give me my due? I reject you! I cast you out! You**





G.Goleash





are no longer welcome among our people! You will live your days as a renegade, never again to feel my loving embrace! I give you one last chance to reconsider!"

If the Storm Knight continues to refuse, he is forcefully ejected from the green bliss, back to the surface. This time, Jakananda will order both the carnol and the ugresk to slay the Knight.

If the Knight runs, he will eventually reach the barrier. If he follows the barrier in either direction for four rounds, he will reach a portal. Leaping through the portal will return the Knight to the basement.

If the Knight wishes, he can attempt to free the other prisoners from the Soul Drain. A *first aid* total of 8 will get them back on their feet, and the Knight can then lead them out through the portal.

## SCENE TWO: The Newest Nile Empire

### The Situation

**Standard.** Storm Knights from the Nile Empire find themselves in an Egyptian village apparently shattered by heavy bombardment. The fields are cratered, the buildings are collapsed, and the streets are filled with bomb fragments and rubble. Thick smoke lies heavy on the village. The streets are filled with corpses, and a few buzzards circle in the skies.

If the Knight searches his immediate area, he finds no one left alive. Every man, woman and child has been burned, bombed, or shot. Everywhere there is desolation, and silence.

### The Action

On a *Perception* or *evidence analysis* total of 20, the Knight realizes that though this is unquestionably the Nile Empire, the setting seems vaguely unreal.

The Knight is free to explore the

area. On a *Perception* or *find* total of 9, he sees a flash of red and gold ahead, and realizes that it is the figure of a man hunched over a fire. A total of 11 or above allows the Knight to see a strange light in the distance, blinking on and off (it is a portal, though the Knight has no way of knowing that at this point).

No matter which direction the Knight travels in, he will eventually come upon the man by the fire. Read aloud or paraphrase:

**You see an emaciated old man wearing a tattered brown robe, tending the ashes of a cook fire. Through the holes in the robe, you can see patches of red and gold, as if he wore some sort of costume underneath. His face is obscured by the hood of his robe.**

If the Knight speaks to the man, he will be regarded with silence for a long time before getting a reply. The stranger will not answer any questions about who he is, preferring instead to talk about the passing of the village. His voice is old and creaky, like a rusted gate. He speaks very slowly and mournfully.

He tells the Knight that "they" came and destroyed everything, slaying 400 people in the process. He knows now it's over — Mobius has won. Then he sinks his head into his hands and weeps. If the Knight announces that he fights Mobius, the stranger becomes angry, saying,

**"Your quest is futile, hero! Your efforts are like trying to blow against the wind. You will find only martyrdom through heroism, like the once-great Dr. Flash! But you do not honestly desire true heroism! You know nothing of heroism! Of sacrifice! Of the price you must pay! You are a mockery of the memory of Dr. Flash!"**

### The Saga of Dr. Flash

If the Knight is unfamiliar with the exploits of Dr. Flash, the old man explains that he is speaking of one of the greatest of the Terran Mystery Men.

For years, he battled Mobius, until the day he was captured by the fiend and forced to endure the agonies of the Omegatron. (For the full story, see pages 6-7 of *The Nile Empire* sourcebook.)

At the most dramatic moment, the elderly man whips off the hood of his robe and proclaims, "But I survived! I am Dr. Flash!" He then removes the robe, revealing a gaudy costume hanging limply on his skeletal body.

Dr. Flash explains that he was sent here to die by Mobius after the High Lord had tired of toying with him. If the Knight agrees to help him, Dr. Flash shakes his head, saying,

**"I am too weak to go on. Only by the selfless generosity of some of the locals am I alive at all now. Many people have given of their essences to keep me from dying. Though my time in the Omegatron has left me in constant agony, I am getting stronger!"**

**"And you can free me from my pain! You are rich with Possibilities! Just a little boost from you would make me as young and strong as I once was!"**

This is a *persuasion* attempt, with Dr. Flash trying for a *yes* or *vow* result. If the Storm Knight agrees to help him, cut to "Soul Survivor." If the Knight refuses, cut to "Flash Attack."

#### Dr. Flash

##### DEXTERITY 11

Dodge 16, energy weapons 13, fire combat 13, maneuver 13, melee weapons 14, unarmed combat 13

##### STRENGTH 11

##### TOUGHNESS 10

##### PERCEPTION 9

Find 11, trick 11

##### MIND 9

Test 12, weird science 11, willpower 14

##### CHARISMA 10

Charm 11, persuasion 12

##### SPIRIT 8

Intimidation 12, reality 12

**Possibilities:** 6 per Storm Knight

**Inclination:** Evil

**Powers:** electro-ray, damage value 21, range 3-10/11-25/26-60

**Power Flaw:** roll-again vulnerability to water attacks



**Equipment:** boom belt (teleportation power, value 17)

**Description:** Dr. Flash was, indeed, one of the bravest heroes of Terra. But after his capture by Mobius and consignment to the Omegratron, he became convinced that his fellow Mystery Men had abandoned him. His mind broke and his inclination flipped to evil. Learning this, Mobius had him released, intending to use him against his former allies. He was then sent to Heritage to be part of the reality bomb experiment.

## Soul Survivor

If the Knight agrees, Doctor Flash takes him to a broken-down house nearby. There is a huge Doctor Flash statue in the center of the room, depicting him as a healthy, radiant hero. "This was the only thing I could salvage from my lab when the shocktroopers raided me," he says, pointing to it proudly.

The statue actually contains the perpetual reality bomb, but there is no atmospheric disturbance or Nile talisman present, as its functioning does not create a contradiction in this particular Nowhere Land. A *Perception* total of 12 lets the Knight hear a slight hum coming from the statue (the bomb's vibrations are causing this). If he asks Dr. Flash about it, the pulp hero will claim to hear nothing.

The exterior of the statue has a *Toughness* of 10. The only way to shut down the reality bomb is to smash the statue and the device within. This would cause the axioms to shift from Nile pure to Nile dominant.

Then he leads the Knight to a *weird science* gizmo. Five people (including Anton Angelou, if the Knights encountered him in Act One), are hooked up to the strange contraption through round metal skullcaps. They look drugged.

Dr. Flash will tell the Knight that this is the Soul Machine, and the good people hooked up to it volunteered to give him a bit of their essence to help him survive. He goes on to say that the procedure is painless, and actually quite relaxing.

When the Knight is hooked up to the machine, he feels a surge of energy pass through him. A *Strength* total of



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10 is required to remove the skullcap. At this point, a *Perception* or *find* total of 15 allows the Knight to see the Wasting Spirit approach. The Wasting Spirit will attack with his *paralyzing touch*, and then use *life drain* to make a single attack the Knight's *Spirit*. If he has already used the *life drain* power in this act, he will simply leave the Knight paralyzed, intending to drain him later. (For details on the Wasting Spirit, see Act Three, Scene One or the Gamemaster Character Record Sheet.) If the Wasting Spirit's initial attack is successful, the Knight will be unable to move while the Soul Drain steals his Possibilities, at a rate of one per hour.

The last sound the Knight hears is Dr. Flash cackling with insane glee.

## Flash Attack

If the Knight refuses to help, Dr. Flash rages, saying he has suffered for so long, and he can't understand why the Knight would refuse him salvation. He will brand the Knight a dis-

grace to the Mystery Men and a self-serving coward.

If the Knight tries to leave, Doctor Flash howls, "So you would go back and leave me to rot, eh?" and attacks. He is slow on his feet, and the Knight has initiative in the first round, so he can escape if he so chooses. Dr. Flash will fight at first merely to subdue the Knight, but will use killing force if it appears he is going to be defeated.

If, at any point, the Knight relents and agrees to aid Dr. Flash, cut to "Soul Survivor."

If the Knight has not already spotted the portal, allow him to generate another *Perception* total. If he wishes, he can attempt to free the other prisoners from the Soul Drain machine. They can be roused with *first aid* totals of 8 — if Angelou is among them, he will tell the Knight the story behind the Nowhere Lands. All can then escape through the portal and into the Heritage basement.





## SCENE THREE: The Aysle in the Storm

### The Situation

**Standard.** Storm Knights from Aysle find themselves suddenly plunged into the middle of an ocean during a raging storm. It is dark and bitterly cold, and waves crash violently onto the rocky shoreline nearby. If the Knight can't swim, or is wearing armor which makes him too heavy to swim, he finds a convenient floating log to hold onto. (Courtesy of the Wasting Spirit).

### The Action

On a *Perception* or *find* total of 9, the Knight spots an island nearby and a strange light blinking on and off in the distance. (This is the portal, gleaming in the distance as it opens).

If the Knight does not see the is-

land, a huge beam of light shines on the waters, illuminating the area. He will then be able to see an elven-style lighthouse standing on a small, nearby island. Its light comes from a huge gem on the top floor of the structure.

On a *Perception* or *evidence analysis* total of 20, the Knight gets the vague impression that, though this Nowhere Land resembles Aysle, it is not. Just where it truly is will be unclear.

A *Dexterity* or *swimming* total of 7 will get the Knight to the island. Swimming in any other direction requires a total of 11. If the Knight swims out toward the open sea, he will hit the barrier in three rounds. If he heads toward the portal, a huge Draconis Aquatica rises up before him, blocking his path. The dragon will not attack unless the Knight attacks first, or persists in trying to go toward the glowing portal.

#### Draconis Aquatica

See page 111 of the *Aysle* source-book.

**Possibilities:** none

**Natural Tools:** armor, TOU+10/31; tail, swimming speed value 11,

damage value STR+3/27

**Note:** This transformed Nile creature does not possess the Aquatica's steam breath weapon, nor its knowledge of magic.

If the Knight hauls himself out of the water and onto the rainswept island, he can visit the lighthouse. There is a pier and a boat on the island.

Sarigar the Elf answers the door. He's a tall, quiet, dignified sort, wearing flowing robes. He ushers the Knight inside, gives him a blanket and deposits him before the warm hearth, but does not say a word.

It seems safe, comfortable and warm inside the lighthouse. It's fairly clean except for some large spider webs near the ceiling.

Sarigar sits in silence. The Storm Knights must initiate the conversation, and regardless of the question, Sarigar's first words will be:

**"I am the Lighthouse Keeper and the Keeper of the House of Light. Do not speak to me if you value your illusions. If you seek comfort in the veil of cheerful lies, I am a danger to you. So before you ask me anything, you must answer me one thing. Do you wish to keep your lies? Or do you seek truth?"**

If the Knight prefers falsehood, Sarigar will tell him that he will learn to value the truth by the end of his stay in the lighthouse. Cut to "Sarigar's Tale."

If the Knight answers that he values truth, cut to "Sarigar's Tale."

#### Sarigar

**DEXTERITY 12 (9)**

Dodge 13, maneuver 13, stealth 13, unarmed combat 14

**STRENGTH 10**

**TOUGHNESS 10**

**PERCEPTION 12**

Alteration magic 14, find 13, trick 14

**MIND 14 (11)**

Apportation magic 16, conjuration magic 17, test 15, willpower 15

**CHARISMA 11**

Persuasion 12, taunt 13

**SPIRIT 9**

Corruption 13, faith (Eshtar) 10, intimidation 11, reality 13



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**Possibilities:** 6 per Storm Knight  
**Arcane Knowledges:** metal 2, fire 4, darkness 3, magic 4, living forces 4

**Spells:** bullet, conjured fireball, create fear, mystic shield, persuasion

**Description:** Sarigar was a corrupt follower of Eshtar captured by Nile shocktroopers on a foray into Aysle and sent to Heritage for this experiment.

## Sarigar's Tale

After the Knight has responded, Sarigar nods his head and speaks. Read aloud or paraphrase:

"My lighthouse illuminates the treacherous reefs as ships head for them. Wise captains can adjust their course before they splinter their vessels on the rocks. So too do my words illuminate perils as our fair Aysle hurtles toward them.

"Our fair jewel of a nation has a fatal flaw. Pella Ardinay never truly won Aysle's freedom. Aysle was

given its freedom, and remains free because the Dark forces suffer it to be so, because it is a part of their plan. The more the Light works to strengthen the realm, the more they do the work of their enemies. Now that I have told you this, you will never see your home the same way again.

"We must support not the pretenders to the throne. We must shine the light of truth on all things. Come. I will show you."

Sarigar leads the Knight up the long, winding staircase to the top of the lighthouse. A great gem is shining light out over the seas, and a harsh wind blows through the chamber. Five tired looking Ayslish are bound in a large spider web, which is in turn attached to the gem.

The gem itself (TOU 20) hides the reality bomb. A *Perception* or *find* total of 10 shows the Knight a small scarab amulet attached to the gem, the Nile

talisman which allows it to function. If asked, Sarigar will say the amulet is a holy symbol of Elmiir. A *scholar* (realm lore) total of 11 will reveal this to be a lie.

If the Knight removes the amulet at any point, the gale outside will grow worse, and a silvery shower of light will signify that the Aysle pure zone is reverting to a Nile dominant zone. Any tunnel spiders present will explode into flames as they transform back to Nile creatures, as will the dragon.

Sarigar will gesture to the spider web and tell the Knight that if he agrees to attach himself to it, the light of truth will burn so strongly that no lie could stand before it. This is a *persuasion* attempt, with Sarigar trying for a *yes* or *vow* result. Sarigar will make use of his *persuasion* spell in this effort.

If the Knight accepts, cut to "In the Spider's Web."

If the Knight refuses, cut to "Spider's Kiss."





## In the Spider's Web

If the Knight agrees, Sarigar binds him in the webbing (*Strength* total of 10 to escape). At this point, a *Perception* or *find* total of 15 allows the Knight to see the Wasting Spirit approach. The Wasting Spirit will attack with his *paralyzing touch*, and then use *life drain* to make a single attack the Knight's *Spirit*. If he has already used the *life drain* power in this act, he will simply leave the Knight paralyzed, intending to drain him later. (For details on the Wasting Spirit, see Act Three, Scene One or the Gamemaster Character Record Sheet.) If the Wasting Spirit's initial attack is successful, the Knight will be unable to move while the Soul Drain steals his Possibilities, at a rate of one per hour.

## Spider's Kiss

If the Knight does not agree, Sarigar loses his temper and accuses the Knight of not truly fighting for truth. He will give the Knight one last chance to accede to his demands.

If the Knight relents, cut to "In the Spider's Web."

If the Knight continues to refuse, Sarigar drops his pretense of being honorable. Read aloud or paraphrase:

"That should have worked on you!" the elf rages. "You idealistic fools always fall for such rot! Kill him, my pets!"

Sarigar's cry brings a spider, a variant of the Aysle tunnel spider, into view, and it attacks the Knight. If the Knight defeats the spider, Sarigar himself will attack.

### Tunnel Spider

#### DEXTERITY 13

Long jumping 14, maneuver 14, stealth 15, unarmed combat 15

#### STRENGTH 9

Climbing 12

#### TOUGHNESS 10

#### PERCEPTION 7

Find 12, tracking 11, trick 10

#### MIND 5

Survival 11, test (8)

#### CHARISMA 5

Charm (25), persuasion (25), taunt

(15)

#### SPIRIT 5

Intimidation 10

Possibilities: none

Natural Tools: fangs, damage value STR+1/10

**Description:** Sarigar's spiders are smaller versions of the standard Aysle tunnel spider (one meter in diameter, eight legs a third of a meter long). The webbing attached to the gem is not theirs, but is a clever disguise for the Soul Drain Element. These particular spiders do not have venom.

The Knight can attempt to escape by leaping out of the lighthouse window into the sea. It's a 60 meter drop, and a *Dexterity* or *acrobatics* total of 5 is required to avoid the rocks. If the Knight hits the rocks, increase the falling damage total by +5.

The stairway will be blocked by the spider, so the Knight must defeat it to reach the steps and then evade Sarigar on the way down. Once at ground level, he can swim or steal the boat. Steering the boat toward the portal requires a *water vehicles* total of 9. Doing it in such a way that the dragon is not alerted requires a *stealth* total of 11. If the dragon notices the Knight fleeing, it will harry the boat, but break off before the barrier is reached.

If the Knight defeats Sarigar and the spider, he can free the other prisoners (*first aid* total of 8 to rouse them). He can then lead them to the boat and toward the portal. If Sarigar has been defeated, the dragon will not attempt to block their passage.

## SCENE FOUR: Thursday the Cardinal Drew Blood

### The Situation

**Standard.** Storm Knights from the Cyberpapacy find themselves in wide, round, high-tech cyber-chapel with a vaulted ceiling. The walls are blue plastic with metal electronic inserts. There are rows and rows of pews flashing

data readouts. The familiar smell of incense and ozone in the air triggers dark memories of the Inquisition. A great humming noise fills the gloomy place, which is only lit by colored light patterns from a ring of stained glass windows.

The chapel is empty, but it is too much to hope that it will stay that way for long.

## The Action

On a *Perception* or *evidence analysis* total of 20, the Knight realizes that though the Nowhere Land looks like the Cyberpapacy, it is somehow not Malraux's realm.

The Knight is free to explore the area. On a *Perception* or *find* total of 9 he sees that three of the stained glass windows flash brightly twice a minute. These are the portals that mark the exit from this Nowhere Land.

The Knight has a few minutes to look around before Cardinal Leech arrives. If the Knight tries to flee, he sees there are no doors. If he approaches one of the portals, Leech appears immediately.

Cardinal Leech floats down from the vaulted ceiling on a great, hovering platform. He's a huge, stern, rotund man in the robes of a cardinal. If the Knight is foolish enough to attack, Leech defends himself, but does not strike back. He makes his opening statements, and asks the Knight to join him. If the Knight keeps fighting, Leech will then strike back.

Leech looks at the Knight and says,

"I shall be blunt. You have impressed us with your cunning and skill. You have proven that you would be a valuable ally to us. Now, before you take a lot of time in angry, idealistic speeches, realize that I am offering you power beyond your petty notions of power. Become our spy, forego allegiance to the anti-papists, and we will give you more power than you have ever dreamed of. And isn't that what you are truly after?"

This is a persuasion attempt, with Leech trying for a *yes* or a *vow* result. If the Knight agrees to ally himself with Leech, cut to "The Chop Shop." If he



refuses, cut to "Heretic!"

### Cardinal Leech

#### DEXTERITY 11

Dodge 13, fire combat 13, melee weapons 13, stealth 13, unarmed combat 14

#### STRENGTH 9

#### TOUGHNESS 11

#### PERCEPTION 11

Cyberdeck operation 18, evidence analysis 15, find 13, language 13, trick 14

#### MIND 13

Test 14, willpower 14

#### CHARISMA 13

Charm 15, persuasion 16

#### SPIRIT 18

Faith (Cyberpope) 23, focus 21, intimidation 20, reality 21

**Possibilities:** 6 per Storm Knight

**Miracles:** *unbeliever's doom*, *vex*

**Equipment:** IRCOM Custom Vee

Cyberdeck (response +2, stealth +3, processor power 4, storage 5); Cyberware: NeuraCal, EpiphaNeur, interdermal plate (head and body, +7/armor value 18), FFO CamEye, CSI LEDs, FFO NightView, Avro PR II.V, damage value 19, ammo 20, range 3-10/11-60; slicers, damage value STR+2/11

**Cyber Value:** 17

**Description:** Leech was yet another of Mobius' prisoners sent to Heritage for the Nowhere Lands experiment. He believes that he will eventually be able to parlay his power in the minicomm into control of a chunk of the Nile Empire.

## The Chop Shop

Once the Knight has given his consent, the Cardinal invites him to step onto the hovering platform, and the two rise up into the vaulted ceiling. There, the Knight sees a cyberware enhancement shop.

In the center of the room is a huge GodNet terminal, covered with an elaborate gold filigree. A cold, harsh wind blows through this chamber. A *Perception* or *find* total of 11 reveals what looks like a Nile scarab amulet attached to the side of the terminal. If asked, the Cardinal will state that the amulet is a symbol of Mobius stolen by cyberpriests and given him as a



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gift. Its placement on the terminal symbolizes Mobius' eventual defeat at the hands of the Cyberpope.

In truth, the GodNet terminal is a disguise for the reality bomb that maintains this Nowhere Land. Removing the scarab would cause the winds to increase in the room, and a silvery shower of light begin to fall. The axioms will change from Cyberpapal pure to Nile dominant and Leech's assistant, the cybernun, will explode in flames as she transforms for a second time.

Several listless people can be seen lying on on steel operating tables, tended by a cybernun. They are wired to pulsing machinery (which Leech explains away as a device to keep patients docile while cyber gear is added). In truth, this is the Soul Drain device.

The Cardinal points to a vast array of cyber enhancements and asks the Knight to choose what he wishes to possess. When he has made his choice, the Cardinal will have him lie on a steel table, and the cybernun will connect metallic filaments to him (if the







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Knight already has neural jacks, she will connect the wires to these). A *Strength* total of 10 is needed to remove the wires.

At this point, a *Perception* or *find* total of 15 allows the Knight to see the Wasting Spirit approach. The Wasting Spirit will attack with his *paralyzing touch*, and then use *life drain* to make a single attack the Knight's *Spirit*. If he has already used the *life drain* power in this act, he will simply leave the Knight paralyzed, intending to drain him later. (For details on the Wasting Spirit, see Act Three, Scene One or the Gamemaster Character Record Sheet.) If the Wasting Spirit's initial attack is successful, the Knight will be unable to move while the Soul Drain steals his Possibilities, at a rate of one per hour.

### Cybernun

See page 83 of *The Cyberpapacy* sourcebook.

**Possibilities:** none

**Additional Equipment:** surgical laser, damage value 13

## Heretic!

If the Knight refuses to join with the Cardinal, Leech brands him a heretic and gives him one last chance to cleanse his soul and become one with the Cyberchurch. In doing so, he reaches into a case and pulls out a number of Datchips and a Trigon prosthetic arm. He makes a second *persuasion* attempt.

If the Knight agrees to follow Leech's lead, cut to "The Chop Shop."

If the Knight remains adamant in his refusal, Leech will attack. He will attempt to physically drag the Knight onto the platform and into the chop shop. There the cybernun will attack with a laser scalpel.

The Knight can escape through any one of the three stained glass windows in the chapel, which will lead him to the Heritage basement. If he defeats Leech and the cybernun, and so desires, he can free the other prisoners (*first aid* total of 8 to revive them) and take them with him.

## SCENE FIVE: Night of the War Wolf

### The Situation

**Standard.** Storm Knights from Orrorsh find themselves on a craggy mountainside late at night. Marrow-chilling winds blow from the north, and strange groans echo through the bluffs.

This is where the Wasting Spirit holds greatest sway, having defeated the War Wolf in the struggle to be the true Lord of this Nowhere Land. The War Wolf is merely following the orders of the Wasting Spirit.

### The Action

If the Storm Knight sets out exploring, he sees the reddish glow of a fire coming from a cave higher up the mountain. A *Perception* or *evidence analysis* total of 20 will tell the Knight that, though this place has the feel of Orrorsh, there is an indefinable difference.

A *Perception* or *find* total of 12 reveals three portals, blinking on and off in the darkness at the foot of the mountain. If the Knight heads for the portals, the War Wolf will move down the mountain, cut him off, and make his offer. If the Knight heads for the cave, he will encounter the War Wolf there. Have the Knight generate a *Perseverance* total against a difficulty number of 10.

Read aloud or paraphrase:

**You are confronted by a shaggy, foul-smelling creature that resembles a cross between a bear and a wolf. It is like no creature you have seen before in all your travels. It stands up right, its matted hair caked with blood, and it beckons you forward with a viciously sharp talon.**

The War Wolf has two messages to deliver, one to non-human Orrorshans (i.e., werewolves and such) and one to humans.

To non-humans, the War Wolf says:



"Come now, dark childe. Aren't you tired of being a wolf among the sheep? How can you stand the smell of their soft, pink little bodies? Do not your claws yearn for the warmth of their flesh? Do your jaws not drool to tast the coppery slickness of their sacred fluids? Is there so little of the Beast left within you?"

To humans, the War Wolf says:

"You know you have a dark side. You cannot exorcise it with petty attacks on Orrorsh or on other realms. It grows within you. Your true soul is betrayal. You cannot live without hurting those close to you. You destroy everything you touch. But why suffer in the company of gnats? Let me show you the path to true power."

Regardless of the Knight's answer, the War Wolf continues with his proposition. Cut to "The Offer."

### War Wolf

#### DEXTERITY 13

Dodge 15, maneuver 14, stealth 14, unarmed combat 17

#### STRENGTH 13

#### TOUGHNESS 16

#### PERCEPTION 11

Tracking 14, trick 13

#### MIND 11

Test 13, willpower 12

#### CHARISMA 12

Persuasion 14, taunt 13

#### SPIRIT 10

Faith (Orrorsh) 12, intimidation 12, reality 14, shapeshifting 13

Possibilities: 6 per Storm Knight

Natural Tools: claws, damage value

STR+4/17; teeth, damage value STR+6/19

Power Rating: 2

Corruption Value: 12

Fear Rating: 1

Powers: resistance to normal weapons

Severe Weakness: silver

True Death: any

## The Offer

Read aloud or paraphrase:

"I will give you a great gift. I will tell you an important secret. As the great Kurst said, the purpose of life is

to kill one's enemies. I shall give you a gift, wild childe — I shall tell you the meaning of this saying.

"It is about more than mere victory and conquest. It means you are to prune the world to fit your devising. Remove that which does not meet with your acceptance, and the world will no longer be an obstacle to your plans. Even the lowliest of humans tries to reshape the world by spewing forth progeny.

"It is up to us to keep some control over who lives and who dies. Morals

were invented to keep the weak from reshaping the world, which makes it easier for those of us who are strong. But would you turn your back on your heritage by adopting moral behavior? Look how it weakens you, and limits your freedom!

"Stay with me! Let me teach you to be a true beast!"

This is a *persuasion* attempt, with the War Wolf trying for a *yes* or *vow* result.

If the Knight refuses the offer, cut to



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"The Beast Unleashed." If he accepts the offer, cut to "The Boneyard."

## The Beast Unleashed

The War Wolf will make one more attempt to *persuade* the Knight, pointing out that every cosm is shaped by butchery, and that bloodshed has accounted for a great deal more progress than the musings of human thinkers. The War Wolf will again offer to unleash the Knight's dark side.

If the Knight relents, cut to "The Boneyard." If the Knight continues to refuse, the War Wolf attacks, out for blood.

If the Knight defeats the War Wolf, he may free the prisoners from the bones and lead them to the portals (*first aid* total of 8 to get them up and moving).

If the Knight attempts to escape to the portals rather than fight the War Wolf, the creature will pursue the Knight down the mountain and attempt to stop him from escaping. It will take five rounds for the Knight to make it down the path to the portals. Once through, he will find himself in the Heritage basement.

## The Boneyard

The War Wolf leads the Knight deep into his cave. In a rear chamber is a room filled with bones. A huge ribcage extends from the floor to the roof, like a perverse vaulted ceiling. Listless people are entwined in the bones, looking pale and emaciated.

At the center of the room is huge throne made of bone, around which a miniature cyclone whirls. A *Perception* or *find* total of 10 reveals a scarab amulet hanging on the throne. If asked about it, the War Wolf will dismiss the question and accuse the Knight of being too cowardly to embrace true power.

The throne is, in truth, the reality bomb. If the Knight removes the amulet, the winds will grow fiercer in the cave, and then a silvery rain of light will fall as the Orrorshan axioms vanish and Nile dominant axioms return.

At this point, the War Wolf will howl in rage and attack.

If the Knight sits on the throne, the bones that make up its arms will begin to writhe and wrap themselves around the Knight's wrists (*Strength* total of 10 required to break free). At this point, a *Perception* or *find* total of 15 allows the Knight to see the Wasting Spirit approach. The Wasting Spirit will attack with his *paralyzing touch*, and then use *life drain* to make a single attack the Knight's *Spirit*. If he has already used the *life drain* power in this act, he will simply leave the Knight paralyzed, intending to drain him later. (For details on the Wasting Spirit, see Act Three, Scene One or the Gamemaster Character Record Sheet.) If the Wasting Spirit's initial attack is successful, the Knight will be unable to move while the Soul Drain steals his Possibilities, at a rate of one per hour.

## Perseverance Award

If the Knight defies the War Wolf and escapes, award him four *Perseverance* points.

## SCENE SIX: Nippon, Mon Amour

### The Situation

**Standard.** Storm Knights from Nippon Tech find themselves in a bright, spacious, circular office building in Nippon. The Knight is seated in a chair on an interior balcony which overlooks a large chamber full of office cubicles, laid out like a maze. Busy workers walk through the cubicles, much like lab rats. Some are former members of the board of directors, others are awaiting their chance at promotion.

Windows line the circular balcony, providing spectacular views of Tokyo. In truth, the windows are high-definition TV screens (TOU3) — breaking one will cause the image of the city to vanish and reveal energy barrier.

## The Action

On a *Perception* or *evidence analysis* total of 20, the Knight senses that though this place seems much like Nippon, it is somehow different.

On a *Perception* or *find* total of 8, the Knight sees that three of the windows are different from the others. Their glass is tinted, and no light comes through from the outside. Once every 30 seconds the glass parts, like a pair of jaws, and a strange white light appears behind it. The jaws then close. (These are the portals leading back to the Heritage basement.)

Once the Knight has had a minute to explore the place, Mr. Takiwara arrives (if the Knight is fooling with the windows that block the portals, Takiwara shows up before he can finish). Takiwara is a tall, balding Japanese businessman with a modest air.

He approaches the Knight, addresses him by name, and tells him it is time for his appointment. If asked about the portals, he dismisses them as an advertising ploy. If asked about the nature of the appointment, he will say that it is with him, and he will get right to the heart of the matter.

Read aloud or paraphrase:

The executive gives you a cold, appraising look. "It is time we discussed your career path. It seems you have chosen a most rebellious avenue designed to bring dishonor to your name. Do not attempt to deny it. We know the truth of the matter.

"But we do not begrudge you your youthful excesses. We respect the fierce struggle you have waged against us these past months. But you do not know all the facts, and it is time you were enlightened.

"We are building a better life for all people. For the world. We do not subjugate, as the others do. We do not oppress. We introduce no radical changes in lifestyle. We take nothing away. Our citizens are happier now than ever, because we give them more of what they want!

"And what do we ask in return? The possibility energy of the people — something they cannot see or touch, something most are not even aware they possess. When it is gone, they do





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not mourn its absence—they revel in the peace and security we have brought to their lives.”

This is a *persuasion* attempt, with Takiwara trying for a *yes* or *vow* result. Takiwara then offers the Knight a place on the board of directors of the firm. If the Knight agrees, cut to “Kanawa Welcomes You.” If he refuses, cut to “Cry ‘Ninja!’”

#### Gomo Takiwara

##### DEXTERITY 9

Dodge 11, fire combat 10, lock picking 10, maneuver 10, stealth 11

##### STRENGTH 9

##### TOUGHNESS 9

##### PERCEPTION 11

Evidence analysis 12, find 13, language 13, trick 15

##### MIND 11

Business 15, test 13

##### CHARISMA 12

Persuasion 14, taunt 15

##### SPIRIT 8

Intimidation 10, reality 12

**Possibilities:** 6 per Storm Knight  
**Equipment:** ZIIP77z, damage value 16, ammo 12, range 3-10/25/40

**Description:** Takiwara is a Nippon businessman who was part of a trade delegation visiting the Japanese embassy in Thebes. He was captured, but is convinced that the entire reality bomb experiment is a test of his loyalty masterminded by Kanawa.

## Kanawa Welcomes You

If the Storm Knight agrees to join the board, Takiwara takes him below to the maze level, leading him into the only office with a ceiling. There, corporate heads sit around a black, lacquered wood table, their right hands resting on gold plates set into the table surface. They stare blankly ahead, and will not respond to questions.

Takiwara offers the Knight a seat at the table. Should the Knight sit down

and place his hand on the plate, he is taken to the maze below, and into the only room with a ceiling. Corporate leaders sit around a black, lacquered wood table, their right hands on gold plates set in the table surface. They stare straight ahead. A chill breeze is blowing through the room, as if the air conditioning were turned up too high. The Knight is offered a seat at the table.

A *Perception* or *find* total of 9 will reveal a scarab amulet set into the center of the table. Takiwara will explain this away as a sign the Nile Empire is the next target of the Kanawa Corporation. In truth, the amulet is a Nile talisman, and the table the reality bomb. If the Knight removes the talisman, a silvery rain begins to fall, and the room is transformed back into a basement testing chamber.

If the Knight joins them and places his hand on the gold plate, a *Perception* or *find* total of 15 allows the Knight to see the Wasting Spirit approach. A *willpower* total of 13 will allow the





Knight to remove his hand from the Soul Drain Element. The Wasting Spirit will attack with his *paralyzing touch*, and then use *life drain* to make a single attack the Knight's *Spirit*. If he has already used the *life drain* power in this act, he will simply leave the Knight paralyzed, intending to drain him later. (For details on the Wasting Spirit, see Act Three, Scene One or the Gamemaster Character Record Sheet.) If the Wasting Spirit's initial attack is successful, the Knight will be unable to move while the Soul Drain steals his Possibilities, at a rate of one per hour.

If the Knight resists taking a seat, Takiwara grows angry. Cut to "Cry 'Ninja!'"

## Cry "Ninja!"

If the Storm Knight resists Takiwara, three ninja emerge from an outer office and attack. During the fight, Takiwara will tell the Knight that the ninja will desist if he will agree to take his rightful place on the board. If the Knight defeats the ninja, Takiwara himself will attack.

If the Knight relents at any time, cut to "Kanawa Welcomes You."

### Corporate Ninja (3)

See page 59 of the *Nippon Tech* sourcebook.

**Possibilities:** 2

**Equipment:** nunchaka, damage value STR+5/19; katana, damage value STR+7/21

**Note:** All three ninja have mastered the first three maneuvers of *ninjutsu*.

The only way to escape is to leap through one of the portal windows on the balcony. Even though it looks like the windows open onto empty air 30 floors up, they actually lead into the Heritage basement, like all the other portals.

If the Knight wishes to free the other prisoners and take them with him, he can. If the bomb has not been disabled, it will take a *Strength* total of 11 to pull their hands free of the plates, and a *first aid* total of 8 to get them up and moving.

# SCENE SEVEN: Core Earth Ain't What It Used To Be

## The Situation

**Standard.** Storm Knights from Core Earth find themselves in what appears to be the room they stood in when the teleportation grenade went off. The black smoke slowly dissipates, and the Knight sees his friends (actually Orrorshan doppelgangers), apparently unaffected by the grenade. (If Angelou threw the grenade, he is noticeably absent.)

## The Action

On a *Perception* or *find* total of 8, the Knight sees a strange black oval ap-

pear in the air at the end of the hallway. It opens like huge black jaws, letting a bright light shine through. It closes seconds later, revealing the hallway behind. If the Knight points it out to his "comrades," they will claim to have seen nothing.

A *Perception* or *find* total of 20 will tell the Knight that though this place seems like the same room he was in before, it feels subtly different. There are small things out of place, almost as if this were somewhere else entirely.

A *Perception* or *evidence analysis* total of 15 will reveal that a specific Knight is not who he seems to be. If the Core Earth Knight identifies an impostor, the others will immediately attack and kill that doppelganger.

Before the Knight can investigate the portal, or find the barrier, Dr. Smithers arrives. He is an elderly man who looks like a standard Nile scientist. He shakes his head and concedes that the best efforts of the Heritage

## Briefing the Players

The participation of the other players is essential for this scene to work. Before you bring the Core Earth player in, brief the other players on their special roles.

In this scene, they will be playing corrupt duplicates of their characters, doppelgangers created by the power of the Wasting Spirit. These creatures have identical attributes to their counterparts, but are governed by Orrorshan axioms—that means they can disconnect in this Nowhere Land.

This particular mini-cosm simulates the setting the Knights were in when the teleportation grenade went off. The other denizens of this Nowhere Land will be careful not to use gadgets with a Tech level higher than that of the Living Land, so as not to tip the Core Earth Knight off that he is in his own reality.

The other players should

keep in mind that their mission is to convince the Core Earth Knight that they are his friends, and that they agree with the arguments made by Dr. Smithers in this scene. They should encourage the Knight to go along with Smithers and volunteer to disconnect and be transformed to another reality.

If the Core Earth Knight mentions the portal, the Orrorshan doppelgangers should claim not to see it. Once they have accepted Smithers' surrender, the doppelgangers should exit (they can pass through the barrier), and stay away until and unless Smithers calls for them.

Keep in mind that if attacking the Core Earth Knight, the doppelgangers are not trying to kill him, merely subdue him. Their purpose is to make the Knight feel inferior to them, so that he will agree to be transformed.



security staff have failed to stop the Knights, so he has no choice but to surrender the facility. If asked about Maya or Berofski, he gives the Knights directions to the office where both of them can be found.

Then he seems to suddenly take notice of the Core Earth Knight, and says:

**"Oh — just one minor matter. We only surrender to those who come from real cosms. We do not surrender to Core Earth types. They no longer have a place on this planet."**

The other Knights (doppelgangers all) will react as if this is a revelation, and heartily agree. Deriding the Core Earth Knight because he has no pulp powers, magic, or cybergear, they will vote to kick him out of the group. Then, saying they are off to rescue Maya, they pass through the barrier as if it were not there. If the Knight tries to follow, the invisible barrier will not let him pass.

Smithers stays behind to console the Knight, saying:

**"Evolution has left you behind! The world has moved on, and left you standing alone. The future belongs to the new order, and you are a pathetic anachronism. Your friends all have a place here, but you do not. Give up this old, outmoded form! Accept conversion to a new, superior life form!"**

This is a *persuasion* attempt by Smithers, and he is trying for a *yes* or *vow* result. If the Knight agrees to be transformed, cut to "The Only Constant." If he refuses, cut to "By My Friends Betrayed."

### Dr. Smithers

#### DEXTERITY 9

Dodge 10, maneuver 10, stealth 11, unarmed combat 10

#### STRENGTH 8

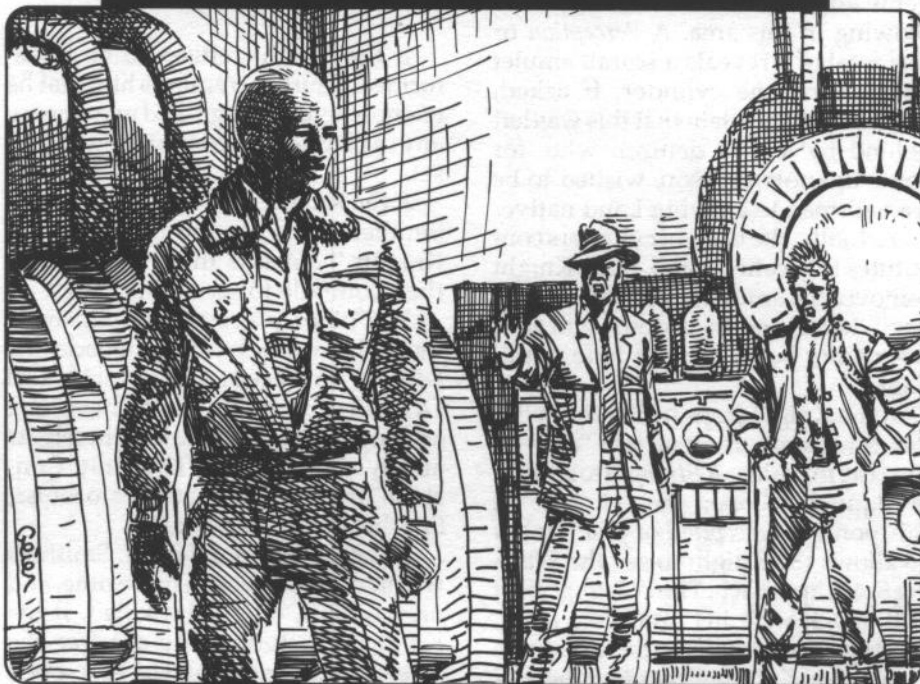
#### TOUGHNESS 8

#### PERCEPTION 11

Evidence analysis 13, find 12, trick 14

#### MIND 12

Science (psychology) 15, test 14



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### CHARISMA 10

Charm 12, persuasion 12, taunt 11

### SPIRIT 10

Intimidation 11, reality 13

Possibilities: 6 per Storm Knight

**Description:** A Core Earth research scientist who volunteered for the Nowhere Lands experiment, fascinated by the reality bomb concept and believing it wise to win the favor of Mobius, all things considered.

### Doppelgangers

Orrorshan creatures, doppelgangers have the same attribute values as the person they're patterned after, +1 adds in each of the following: *dodge, fire combat, maneuver, melee weapons, stealth, unarmed combat, find, tracking, trick, test, willpower, charm, persuasion, taunt, intimidation and reality*, and +5 adds in *shapeshifting*.

Possibilities: 1

Power Rating: 1

Powers: *blur form*

Corruption Value: 15

Fear Rating: 1/2

Weakness: coming face to face with person being simulated — *stymie* weakness

True Death: any

## The Only Constant

If the Knight agrees to have his reality altered, Smithers takes him into a lab, and shows him a cylindrical glass chamber. A rainbow of scintillating colored lights dances within it; red, green, blue, purple, yellow and black.

There are three other cylinders like it, with Nowhere Land denizens inside. They are apparently beginning to transform (actually, it's make-up, something an *evidence analysis* total of 16 will enable the Knight to figure out). Smithers points out one subject who is transforming into an elf, another who chose to become a werewolf, and a woman who wished to become a Nile priestess.





Smithers leads the Knight to an empty cylinder and beckons him to get inside. A harsh wind seems to be blowing in this area. A *Perception* or *find* total of 9 reveals a scarab amulet hanging on the cylinder. If asked, Smithers will explain that this was left behind by a Nile denizen who, for some unknown reason, wished to be transformed to a Living Land native.

Actually, the bank of cylinders constitutes the reality bomb. If the Knight removes the amulet, a silvery rain will begin to fall and the axioms will shift from Core Earth pure to Nile dominant.

If the Knight steps inside the cylinder, Smithers turns a switch "activating" the machine. A *Strength* total of 10 is required to open the cylinder. At this point, a *Perception* or *find* total of 15 allows the Knight to see the Wasting Spirit approach. The Wasting Spirit will attack with his *paralyzing touch*, and then use *life drain* to make a single attack the Knight's *Spirit*. If he has already used the *life drain* power in this act, he will simply leave the Knight paralyzed, intending to drain him later. (For details on the Wasting Spirit, see Act Three, Scene One or the Gamemaster Character Record Sheet.) If the Wasting Spirit's initial attack is successful, the Knight will be unable to move while the Soul Drain steals his Possibilities, at a rate of one per hour.

If the Knight refuses to get into the cylinder, cut to "By My Friends Betrayed."

## By My Friends Betrayed

If the Knight refuses to be transformed, Smithers reminds him that he has nowhere else to go, and may choose any reality he wishes as his new axiom set.

If the Knight rejects the offer again, Smithers calls for the other "Storm Knights." He asks them to persuade their comrade to accept his help.

The other players now will have their characters try to persuade the Knight to accept conversion (all Orrorshan doppelgangers have one add in *persuasion*). If the Knight relents at any time, cut to "The Only Constant." If the Knight continues to refuse, Smithers orders an attack.

If the Knight is defeated, Smithers will make the offer one more time, and on a refusal, order him killed. If the Knight is victorious, he can free the prisoners (*Strength* total of 10 to open the cylinders and a *first aid* total of 8 to get them moving). The Knight must leap through the portal to escape, finding himself back in the Heritage basement. Any surviving doppelgangers will not follow him.

## Flags

The following flags apply to all the scenes in Act Two.

If an *Alertness* card is played, a Knight sees the glowing portals right away, without having to generate a skill total to do it.

If a *Connection* card is played, the Knight recognizes one of the prisoners hooked up to a Soul Drain Element.

## Variables

If a Storm Knight defeats a Lord of Nowhere but does not disable the reality bomb, he can force the vanquished to explain the Nowhere Lands experiment to him and guide him to a portal.

## Awards

Award each Knight three Possibilities for escaping the Nowhere Lands. If the Knight resisted the offer but was defeated or did not escape, award one Possibility. If the Knight accepted a Nowhere Lord's offer and was attached to a Soul Drain Element, award him no Possibilities.

## Cut To ...

Once each Knight has been through his Nowhere Land experience (and, hopefully, escaped back to the Heritage basement) cut to "Act Three: Out of the Crucible."



## Act Three

# Out of the Crucible

### The Major Beat

The Knights challenge the power of the Wasting Spirit, and "rescue" Maya from her predicament, making their escape from Heritage just as reinforcements arrive.

### SCENE ONE: Just Wasting Away

#### The Situation

**Dramatic.** The Storm Knights emerge from the Nowhere Lands, discovering that all of the portals lead back to one door in the basement. Read aloud or paraphrase:

**The basement is dark and musty. You can hear movement coming from the floor above you — more shocktroopers, no doubt.**

**Suddenly, the room is illuminated by a bright flash of light, followed by another and another. The door behind you is opening on its own!**

The door opens each time one of the sets of portals opens, roughly every five seconds. It is only their fear of the outside that has kept the denizens of the Nowhere Lands from escaping into Heritage.

The portal openings give the room a bizarre strobe effect, which makes it difficult to see (+1 to the difficulty of all *Perception* checks which require the use of vision). If the Knights do not have any artificial sources of light, they will have to rely on the strobe flashes for light.

### The Action

Have the Knights generate *Perception* or *find* totals. On a 9, they spot a clipboard nailed to the opposite wall. The notes attached explain the theory of the Nowhere Lands experiment, as well as the fact that the door in the basement leads to these mini-cosms. The notes go on to say that one must be thinking of the Nowhere Land he wishes to enter when he walks through the portal to be transported there.

If there are any Knights missing, the party may assume, based on their own experiences, that the Nowhere Lands have claimed victims. If they wish, they can re-enter the mini-cosms to rescue their comrades, simply by going through the basement door. If they do so, the Lord of the Nowhere Land they invade will attack, along with any of his minions who survived Act Two.

If there are no Knights missing, or if the party decides not to go back in, they can explore the basement. On a *Perception* or *find* total of 12, they spot a small chamber in the rear of the basement. This was originally designed as the monitoring center for the Nowhere Lands experiment, but was abandoned when the project got out of control. It is now the lair of the Wasting Spirit.

If the Knights enter the cluttered and abandoned observation room, or attempt to exit the basement via the stairs, cut to "The True Spirit of Things."

### The True Spirit of Things

The Wasting Spirit is enraged at the Knights for escaping the Nowhere Lands. He has a particular hatred for any of them who managed to shut





down the reality bombs and thus destroy mini-cosms which he had dominated. He is determined to stop the Knights from exiting the basement and revealing to the Heritage personnel how the experiment can be ended. Ideally, he would like to force the Knights back into the Nowhere Lands, but failing that, he will settle for rending them with his claws.

When the Wasting Spirit first appears before them, have the Knights generate a *Perseverance* total against a difficulty number of 10. The Wasting Spirit will stand before them, looking supremely confident in his power, and say in a voice like glass breaking:

**"You cannot be allowed to leave, little ones. You have seen too much now, and you have attempted to deprive me of sustenance. But tonight, the Wasting Spirit shall feed and feed well."**

The Wasting Spirit will attack, going first for Knights who destroyed Nowhere Lands.

### The Wasting Spirit

#### DEXTERITY 11

Dodge 14, maneuver 13, stealth 15, unarmed combat 14

#### STRENGTH 16

#### TOUGHNESS 13

#### PERCEPTION 14

Find 16, language 15, trick 17

#### MIND 11

Test 14, willpower 16

#### CHARISMA 15

Persuasion 17, taunt 19

#### SPIRIT 12

Faith (Orrorsh) 15, intimidation 18, reality 16

**Possibilities:** three per Storm Knight

**Natural Tools:** claws, damage value

STR+4/20

**Corruption:** 17

**Power Rating:** 8

**Powers:** *life drain*, power value 26; *paralyzing touch*, power value 27; *blur form*, power value 19; *darkness*, power value 16

**Fear Rating:** 1

**Perseverance DN:** 10

**True Death:** any

**Description:** The Wasting Spirit is not a spirit at all, but a humanoid horror who uses his blur form and

darkness powers to convince others that he is ethereal. The only parts of him commonly visible are his blood-red eyes and his gleaming claws.

Defeating the Wasting Spirit means the Knights are free to escape the basement and free Maya. If the basement door is still barred, a *Strength* total of 12 is required to open it.

## Cut To ...

Once the Wasting Spirit has been disposed of, cut to "Scene Two: To the Rescue?"

## Variables

If the Knights are somehow able to persuade the Wasting Spirit into thinking they wish to return to Heritage to procure more subjects for the Nowhere Lands, he will let them go. But he may well attack them again as they attempt to escape Heritage when he discovers he's been deceived.

## Flags

If a *Nemesis* card is played and the Wasting Spirit has been defeated but not slain, he will escape from Heritage at some point during the ensuing confusion. After he has restored his energies, he will pursue the Knights, intent on their destruction, in a later adventure.

## SCENE TWO: To the Rescue?

### The Situation

**Standard.** The Knights find Maya in complete control of her situation, and together, she and the party make their escape from Heritage with the Zero Ward prisoners.

### The Action

When the Knights emerge from the basement, they will find things rela-

tively quiet. They can easily make their way to Berofski's office, and when they enter, they will find Maya standing confidently, completely in control. Berofski is cowering in the well of his desk, and the gospog are twitching in the corner.

Maya will ask that the Knights not kill the gospog, as they belong to her now. She will explain the salient points of her story, including her triumph over Berofski, but you need not go into great detail, as the players will find it all out when they read the end of the story. You can pattern Maya's dialogue to the Knights after that in the text.

If the Knights ask how she managed to summon them in the first place, she demonstrates, inadvertently causing the target Knight great pain (mental damage value 12).

## Berofski Attacks

Toward the end of Maya's story, Professor Berofski snaps. He whips out his gun, and starts shooting at the Knights. If the Knights try to use deadly force in subduing him, Maya stops them, saying he must remain alive to pay for his crimes. She wants him to spend the rest of his life caring for the learned helplessness prisoners and restoring their courage. She rejects all other suggestions for dealing with him.

### Professor Berofski

#### DEXTERITY 8

Dodge 9, fire combat 9, maneuver 9, unarmed combat 9

#### STRENGTH 8

#### TOUGHNESS 8

#### PERCEPTION 11

Evidence analysis 14, find 15, scholar (psychology) 16, trick 12

#### MIND 14

Test 15, weird science 17

#### CHARISMA 10

Persuasion 12, taunt 11

#### SPIRIT 11

Reality 14

**Possibilities:** 5

**Inclination:** Evil (but slowly moving towards Good)

**Equipment:** .22 Revolver, damage value 12, ammo 6, range 3-10/15/25

**Description:** Typical mad scientist, at this point thoroughly cowed by Maya's power. His attack is an act of desperation, but at heart, he's terrified



of physical pain.

## Freeing the Prisoners

If the Knights try to rescue the learned helplessness prisoners before they rescue Maya, they will find the captives a frustrating bunch. The prisoners tremble at their approach, and will not leave their cells. They moan and gibber if the Knights try to carry them out. In short, the Knights will need Maya's help to get them out.

Maya forces Berofski to see the world through the prisoners' eyes. The experience shatters Berofski, and in the end he promises to dedicate the rest of his life to restoring the prisoners' psyches. (Spells or miracles to detect lies reveal he is truthful).

Next Maya sits with the prisoners, trying to earn their trust. She fails, and storms out in a fury. She announces she's abandoning her plan to save them, and would like to go. She complains that they would rather die than leave, and she is prepared to let them.

The Knights will have to convince Maya that she can give the prisoners the courage to walk out of Heritage. A persuasion total of 10 will be necessary to accomplish this.

If the Knights are successful, Maya will go back into the cells and when she has had her say, the prisoners will follow her out.

## The Great Escape

The Knights can get out of the Heritage building unchallenged, or can encounter a few shocktroopers, if you prefer. Once outside, a *Perception* total of 8 reveals two roadsters, one troop truck and one halftrack troop transport parked on the grounds of the institute.

The prisoners will all fit in the troop transport, and the Knights can take however many vehicles they would like (*land vehicles* totals of 8 required to operate the card, 9 for the truck and transport).

## Event

When the Knights are just about ready to leave the base, shocktrooper



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reinforcements summoned earlier by Berofski arrive.

Begin this event when the Knights have loaded the learned helplessness prisoners into their escape vehicle (or after the Knights have given up on persuading them to leave). The reinforcement squad is composed of 30 shocktroopers, all equipped with Nile Empire talismans. Their talismans enforce local reality so their guns and jeeps can continue to work.

Use the shocktrooper stats provided in Scene Three of Act One. The Knights must escape with Maya and as many prisoners as possible. It might be possible to get Berofski to assure the shocktroopers all is well, and the prisoner transfer has been ordered by Mobius; simply outfight and outrun the shocktroopers; or lure them into the minefield, where their talismans will cause the mines to begin detonating.

## Flags

If a *Romance* card is played by a male Storm Knight, Maya develops a crush on him. As she is only a teen-

ager, this attention may make the Knight extremely uncomfortable.

## Aftermath

Once the Storm Knights get clear of the institute, they can take the prisoners to the Free Sudan refugee camp, where camp leader N'Buto welcomes them with open arms. Unlike the story, Maya does not join the group. Instead, she stays in the camp to help the prisoners.

The players may now read the remainder of the story.

## Adventure Awards

Award the Knights 10 Possibilities for completing this adventure successfully. If they are able to rescue the prisoners, either by getting Maya to do it or doing it themselves, award them an extra two Possibilities.





# Crucible of Pain

## Part II

Maya waited.

Nothing happened. Far away she heard the cry of a wild bird. She slowly raised her head. The gospog were standing still, silently watching her.

"Come on, you bastards!" she shouted to the creatures. "Come and kill me!"

The creatures did not move.

"Oh god, I can't even die ..." she moaned. "Why me? Why me?"

Through her stinging tears and rage, she felt the answer come.

Because I'm a hero, she thought. Because I'm a Storm Knight. That's why. And I didn't kill those people. They killed themselves when they decided not to climb the fence. When they decided the hell they knew was better than the one they didn't. They made their own choices!

The realization was like light, washing away the dismal darkness in her heart.

I've been punishing myself over their choices! I wanted to go crazy after that! I decided to become insane, or suicidal or ... helpless. Helpless.

Helpless like he wanted me to be. But I'm not helpless. I have the strength to save myself!

Maya pulled herself out of the murky water. She turned to face her pursuers. The gospog took a menacing step toward her, trying to spur her to flight. She held her ground.

She quieted her mind, and reached out. She studied the rotting matter inside the creatures. All the decaying flesh was bound around a fine lattice of plant filament.

Like nerves, she thought. Or zombie DNA. Cool!

She gathered up a bunch of the filaments in her mind's eye, and imagined them twisting and tearing. The gospog began a spastic dance, twitching and flailing in the mud.

Okay, Maya thought. Problem one taken care of. Problem two is shutting down the Research Center and stopping the experiments.

She turned and headed back to Heritage.

Professor Berofski sat in his cluttered office, tinkering with his bulky dictation machine. He leaned toward it, keeping his body as close to it as possible. As long as he

stayed near the machine, it would record. If he moved away, the primitive tech level of the room would affect it, and it would stop working.

He raised the horn-shaped microphone to his mouth, and fought the urge to pace around the room.

"Damn ancient technology!" he began. "It's bad enough I can't get a decent Sony here, but until that damn bomb wears off, I can barely move without this damn machine conking out. And, as if things weren't bad enough, my staff has lost the ability to behave like rational, thinking people. It's impossible to get them to cooperate on even the simplest tasks while we're operating under this ridiculous set of Living Land axioms. I don't trust them to defend this place well. Even the other scientists are acting like Neanderthals! The idiots! The morons! The — ahem."

He started over, in a tightly controlled voice. "Did not enjoy this morning's learned helplessness sessions as much as I thought I might. Even though the prisoners had felt very guilty for trying to escape, and writhed most agreeably, I could not concentrate on my work."

He leaned back, and put his feet up on his desk. The dictation machine's rapidly spinning tape reel slowed. He cursed, and pulled the machine closer to him. The reel sped up again.

"The gospog are still out, continuing my experiment with the Dearborne Storm Knight. They won't bring her back until they have completed the experiment and broken her. Though I strive to maintain a very professional scientific detachment at all times, I can't wait till her little psyche is crushed like a goose egg!

"Hmm ... it occurs to me that this gospog experiment should completely revolutionize the concept of ... field research. Heh heh heh!"

A loud crash echoed down the hall, shaking the professor's desk, and rattling his chair.

"Damnation!" he shouted. "You idiots! Can't you see I'm recording here!"

"Ahem," he continued, composing himself. "Now then, where was I? Ah, yes. Though I strive to maintain a rigorous scientific detachment, I can't wait till that Dearborne girl is brought back from —"

Suddenly the office door burst open, and a noxious stench blasted into the room. A gospog shambled in, holding the limp and bloody body of Maya Dearborne. Another



gospog lurched in behind the first, hurling a shocktrooper back down the hallway.

"Yah!" the professor shouted, startled. "Stop! Halt! What are you doing here? You belong outside! Bad gospog! Give girl to shocktrooper! Now, you foul thing! Bad!"

The second gospog slammed the door, closing them inside the professor's office.

"You open that up!" he bellowed indignantly. "What are you doing here? Is the experiment over?"

"No," replied a strong female voice. "It's just beginning." Maya sat up in the gospog's arms, looking like a mysterious enchantress.

Berofski gagged, choking on his own panic and disbelief.

"Obey me!" he shouted at the creatures, his voice filled with desperation. "I am your lord and master!"

"Sorry," Maya said, sliding down out of the creature's arms. "You've just been deposed."

Berofski yanked open his desk drawer and plunged his hand into it. Before he could pull the revolver clear of the desktop, a gospog grabbed his hand and squeezed. He dropped the gun, gagging on the smell. He had never been this close to a gospog before, and the feel of rotting meat and vegetation around his hand made his stomach heave.

"Please ... no!" he croaked in a feeble voice. "Urp!"

Maya nodded, and the creature released Berofski. The gospog twitched and shook, their nerve filaments still damaged from Maya's first attack.

Berofski was also trembling. He cowered in the back of his office, completely unaccustomed to seeing a young girl so powerful and confident. In his feverish mind, Maya looked like some bedraggled gypsy witch-woman. Every time he looked at her, her eyes pierced him just as they had the day she saw him through the one-way glass wall of the torture room. She terrified him. He felt certain she knew some witch-woman magic that would cut him to the core. The silence in the room intensified his terror.

Summoning all his courage, he sputtered, "But you ... you're broken! In mind and spirit!"

She said nothing.

He sank to the floor, his legs unable to hold him.

At last, Maya spoke.

"Why?" she asked. "Why did you do it?"

"I'll never do it again!" he blurted out, afraid of what Maya might do, and hoping she would believe him.

"Why hurt people like that?" she asked quietly.

"If they were hurt, it was never what I intended, specifically," he replied curtly. "It was purely peripheral to the experiment."

"Peripheral?" Maya asked, incredulous. "Do you know what you put them through?"

Berofski said nothing. He was unsure of the correct answer.

"You don't, do you?" she asked. "You have no idea what they endured."

"Of course I do," he answered, offended. "I have every response clinically documented."

"No!" she shouted. "I mean you don't understand! You can't empathize with them at all!"

"Well," he said, arrogantly. "No one can ever truly understand the pain of another."

Maya did not answer. It was incomprehensible to her that he could be so disconnected from the pain of the prisoners.

Maya continued, "During the times we talked, it seemed like what you treasured was being free. And you seemed genuinely interested in studying people's minds and habits."

"Yes, that's true," he said.

"But now I see you weren't interested in freedom, were you?" she said. "Freedom means freedom for all. What you really wanted was permission to do as you pleased; to hurt anyone you wanted and feel powerful. It's not the same thing."

Berofski opened his mouth and closed it again. He felt like Maya had cracked him open.

"You have a gift," she continued. "You understand people. You could have done people a lot of good. Why hurt them like that?"

"I ..." he began. "Their pain is necessary to my research. But it doesn't really matter. I mean, they're not the important ones. They're just —"

He stopped abruptly. It was as if he had taken the lid off a nest of vipers that were hiding in his stomach. He felt a rush of vile thoughts spilling out into his mind. Their lush, seductive power frightened him more than Maya frightened him. How could such foul thoughts really be a part of him?

He turned away from the flood of thoughts, determined not to look at them. He hated Maya for stirring them up in the first place.

"You can't get away with this!" he said angrily, leaping to his feet. "I sent for reinforcements after the bomb went off. This place will be crawling with fresh shocktroopers any minute now!"

Maya shook her head sadly. "For a man who likes to understand the workings of minds, you're completely out of touch with your own," she said.

There were crashing noises from the front of the building, followed by muffled gunshots.

"They're here!" the professor said excitedly. "Your gospog won't stand two minutes against them!"

Maya said nothing.

Footsteps pounded down the hallway toward the office. "In here!" the professor shouted desperately. The door flew open and three exotic men burst in, weapons drawn. The one on the left was a strikingly beautiful man in exquisitely detailed plate armor. His long blonde hair fell in rings on his shoulders, and he brandished a golden spear with a flowing banner. On the left was a thin man with an exotic punk haircut and a glittering array of wires and circuits protruding from a skullcap on the left side of his head. He had a dangerously seductive smile.

When Maya took a good look at the man in the center, she felt a deep flush of heat. He was easily the most handsome man she had ever seen. He was tall, tanned, and dressed in black leathers and a black leather fedora. He was almost impossibly good-looking, like a movie star.

She summoned all her will to calm her excitement, and said, "What took you so long?"

The man in armor said "Forgive us, maiden. We came





with all possible haste."

The punk said "Yeah. You wouldn't believe what we just bin through. Besides, we'd 'a got here sooner, but Doc Wilde kept freakin' out on us."

The man in the center was just staring at Maya. His penetrating gaze made her giddy, but she composed herself.

"I'm Maya," she said. "The gospog are mine, so please don't attack them."

"Oh!" the man in the center said. His voice was unbelievably warm and reassuring. "Excuse me, but I haven't introduced my group. I'm Doctor Wilde, of Terra." He pointed to the man in armor. "This is Tremayne. He's from the land of Aysle."

"The pleasure is mine," Tremayne said, a smile shining on his supremely beautiful face.

"This is SkyJack," Wilde continued. "From the Cyberpapacy in France."

"Great pair a' legs you got," SkyJack said, by way of greeting. He was looking at Maya's purple, black and yellow tights, now in tatters around her slender legs.

Doc Wilde gritted his teeth and struck SkyJack's skullcap with the back of his hand. "I apologize on SkyJack's behalf," he said tersely.

"Aw, don't git all remorseful on my account," SkyJack said, laughing. He then waved a beeping gadget over Maya's body.

"How'd you do that, babe?" he asked. "How 'ja call us here?"

"Well," Maya began. "I just ...um ..." She knew she could never explain what she did, so she closed her eyes and sent out the signal again.

Doctor Wilde screamed and clutched his head. Maya stopped, alarmed.

Wilde recovered. "Next time ..." he said, "Not quite so loud! Please!"

SkyJack laughed uproariously. "He was freakin' out all the way over here!" he said gleefully. "Hey Legs, can ya do that psychic thing again? Or about fifty more times? I gotta take a whole lot more readings of it."

"Quiet, thou miserable child of the Cyberpapacy," Tremayne said, scolding SkyJack.

Maya felt suddenly very protective of Doctor Wilde. She wanted to soothe his pain.

"I didn't mean to hurt you," she said earnestly. "I just really, really wanted you to hear me. Well, not you guys personally, but I knew someone out there would know how to deal with this craziness. I wanted some heroes to get me back into Heritage. So I called out. And heroes are supposed to arrive in the in the nick of time, right? To save people?"

"Don't bet yer granny's pension on it," SkyJack said. "Do we what we want when we want."

"He is, of course, an idiot," said Tremayne, summoning all his patience and shaking his head disdainfully at SkyJack. "We could no more ignore your summons than cease breathing."

"Great," Maya said. "Well, I couldn't wait, so I came back on my own."

"Cool beans!" SkyJack shouted, dashing over to the

spastic gospog. "Zombie Shuffle!" He twitched wildly, imitating the nerve-damaged gospog. "Hey, Legs! Did you do this?"

Doctor Wilde whirled, and pointed at the young punk. "SkyJack, you will call her by name!"

"Thank you," Maya said sweetly, scarcely letting out a trace of the amazement and awe she felt over Doc Wilde's simple, gallant gesture. The respect she felt from the Terran was stronger than any she had ever felt before. It was a moment before she could summon enough breath to answer.

"Yes," she said. "I took control of the gospog."

"Thou art quite a formidable presence," Tremayne said with awe. "Thou art of Core Earth?"

"Um, I'm from the earth that used to be here, if that's what you mean," she replied. "Yeah, Core Earth."

Doc Wilde scratched his head, tipping his fedora. "We've been planning to assemble a large group of Storm Knights to raid this science center, but I hadn't imagined a single Storm Knight could wreak this kind of devastation! We were amazed to see the place trashed and defenseless. How did you —"

The professor, who had been cowering behind his desk, finally could take no more.

"Aaaaargh!" he shouted and dove for his gun. Before he could point it, a golden spear deflected his aim and a crackling blue stun charge rocked his body.

"Easy, easy," Maya cautioned, as Tremayne and SkyJack grabbed Berofski. "I don't want him hurt. He hasn't begun to pay for what he's done."

The professor was shaking and screaming. "Damn this cosm!" he screeched. "I should have known the cavalry would rescue you at the last minute! Damn these axioms!"

"You still don't get it, do you?" Maya asked. "No one rescued me. I saved myself. Once I chose to be free of my own guilt and fear, it was easy to stop those creatures."

"Huh!" she said, laughing. "When I overcame my monsters, I overcame yours."

"But my work!" Berofski pleaded, his adrenaline rush slowing down. "I made you powerless!"

"You can't make me anything. I almost destroyed myself over leaving the prisoners behind, but that was my choice. Irony, huh? The closest you came to winning was something you didn't even know about."

"But I had it all figured out ..." he said helplessly, groping toward the *Introductory Psychology* textbook on his desk. "It all made sense ... You were supposed to break!"

Maya thought about that. "You know, I learned a lot of things from you. A lot of things. But helplessness wasn't one of them."

She laughed. "It's funny," Maya said with a smile, "but I really grew because of you. I hated you more than I ever hated anybody, But because you tried to drag me down, I can now stand on my own two feet. And you know what else? I don't even hate you anymore."

Berofski went limp. SkyJack and Tremayne lowered him into a chair. The professor curled up into a ball, and pulled his knees up to his chin. He looked small and frail.

Doc Wilde hesitantly asked, "Uh, who is this guy?"

"Yeah," said SkyJack. "Who's the feeb?"





G. Goleash





Maya quickly described the learned helplessness experiments, her captivity, and her escape. Her story angered Tremayne, and made SkyJack laugh.

"What a load a' void-oid!" SkyJack snorted derisively. "Only a truly pathetic Storm Knight would break under a brain-dead experiment like that."

"I would not be so quick to judge," Tremayne cautioned. "Given time to refine his experiments, this Berofski may well succeed. Even if he does not, his lair is an abomination, and must be shut down."

Doctor Wilde agreed, ending the discussion. "Well, let's put him out of his misery," he said grimly.

"No," Maya said firmly. "We don't have to kill him."

SkyJack smiled mischievously, and said "I agree with Legs. I mean, Maya. What a cold-blooded old sod you are, Wilde-childe. Just leave it to SkyJack! I got the perfect solution to the problem of Professor Butcher-ofski."

He drew out a long, sharp needle attached to a yellow box by a tangled wire.

"A Purgatory Lobotomy!" he announced proudly. "He'll always know he once had a great mind, but he'll never be able to use it! That'll be pure, living hell for a brainiac like him!"

"No," said Maya. "I want him to know exactly what he's done. I want him to really understand his experiments."

"Oh, god!" he said, realization sinking in. "No! You're going to ... you're going to put me in that room! Shock me! Make me helpless! Oh god. Oh, god!"

"No," said Maya. "That would do nothing but continue the cruelty." She turned to Doctor Wilde. "Bring him with me. We're going to Zero Ward."

The prisoners started screaming as soon as they arrived. "They must really hate this man," Doctor Wilde said, glaring at Berofski.

"I don't think he's the one they're afraid of," Maya said darkly. The prisoners ignored Berofski, and shrank from her approach.

Maya put one hand on the back of Berofski's neck, and pointed to a prisoner. "See that man?" she asked. The professor nodded slowly and then screamed. His whole body wrenched violently, and he sank to his knees. Maya let him go. The Storm Knights watched with horror and fascination. Even SkyJack was at a loss for words.

"Maya?" Doctor Wilde began.

"He just walked a mile in another man's shoes," Maya said slowly. "I showed him the world through the prisoner's eyes."

The professor was twitching on the ground, mumbling. "Never ... never ... never again!" he said.

Tremayne nodded. "Most ... effective," he said.

When the professor could talk coherently, he said "Maya, I'll never do that ... to anyone again!"

Maya looked sadly at the man, and said, "Professor, we're just getting started."

He drew back in terror as Maya channelled the collective experiences of the group of prisoners into Berofski's body. Every cell of his body felt the shocks, the imprisonment, and the monumental despair.

First he screamed, then he broke into a flood of tears, and soon he lay quietly on the floor, completely drained.

Maya looked at him gravely. "Professor, I want you to promise to devote your talents and skills to helping people."

Berofski looked up at her, eyes sad and lost, but searching for salvation. His lower lip trembled, and he said quietly, "I promise."

Tremayne stepped up to Berofski, and reached into the front pocket of the professor's lab coat. He drew out a fountain pen and removed the cap. Holding the point to Berofski's throat, he said, "Swear an oath!"

The terrified man said, "I ... I swear to never hurt anyone. I won't ... I won't do any more cruel experiments. I'll ... help people." He breathed a heavy sigh.

Tremayne released Berofski, and held up the pen. "The point did not bleed," he announced. "He speaks the truth."

"Professor, listen to me," Maya said firmly. "You will work with the prisoners to overcome the devastation you caused them. You will eat, sleep and breathe with them. Their pain will be your pain. Their despair, your despair. Their accomplishments will be your accomplishments. When you have undone the damage you have done, when every one of them is confident and courageous again, you will be free."

The professor thought for a long time. "Is ... that possible?" he asked in a whisper.

Maya picked up the battered psychology textbook and flipped through it. Then she slapped it shut and placed it in the old man's hands.

"Page 288. Learned industriousness. Look it up."

Maya stepped away from the group, and leaned against a wall, drained from the ordeal. Doc Wilde approached her, and laid his hand on her shoulder. His touch felt warm and reassuring.

"That was a brave and powerful thing you did back there," Wilde began. "And amazing. I am ... in awe of you."

Maya smiled, but did not blush at the compliment. She knew it was deserved and true. "Thank you," she said. "Really, it was easy." She looked toward the frightened prisoners in the ward. "Now for the impossible part," she said darkly.

Maya drew in a deep breath, opened the cell door, and went into Zero Ward. The prisoners started jabbering and moaning, more afraid of Maya than Berofski.

She sat with them, muttered and talked with them, and soon they began to listen to her. She explained the situation to them, and told them that Berofski would lead them to a new home. She brought the Professor in, and the two worked with the prisoners. They moaned and complained.

SkyJack fidgeted, sighed loudly, and tapped his head, making blue static electric discharges from his headplate. Finally he turned to Doctor Wilde.

"Well," the young man began. "That thing she did with the professor was great fun, though long and tedious. But since this part is incredibly boring, really stupid, and unbelievably useless, I'll just go loot the place. Somebody's gotta do something useful."

Doctor Wilde regarded his friend in stony silence. Finally he said, "Since you feel that way, you obviously need to see this more than any of us. You'll stay here."

SkyJack turned away like a petulant child, careened toward the door, and bashed his head into the wall, shaking



loose a cloud of plaster. Everyone turned to look at him.

"Power surge! Power surge!" SkyJack shouted. "System malfunction! Doc Wilde's brain in core meltdown!"

"Settle down and pay attention," Wilde said, not amused by the young man's antics.

"To what? To Miss Messiah of Core Earth try for sainthood?" he sputtered. "I'll call the Cyberpope right now!"

Doc Wilde and Tremayne exchanged knowing glances and turned back to watch Maya.

"Wilde," SkyJack said earnestly, foregoing sarcasm and resorting to reason. "These people are useless! This won't work, and even if it did, who cares? They're just a bunch of Ords!"

"SkyJack," Tremayne said, interrupting. "For whom are you fighting this war?"

SkyJack said nothing. He sat on the ground and fumed.

Maya stormed out of the ward, slamming the cell door and leaving Berofski alone. The professor watched her leave, looking helpless.

"Goddamn Ords!" Maya cursed. "They can go or stay! I don't care anymore!"

SkyJack shrugged, saying 'I told you so' with his body language.

"What went wrong?" Tremayne asked.

"Them!" she said with frustration. "It's the same stupid thing all over again! They'd rather stay and be tortured and die rather than try to live a life again!"

"They've just forgotten how," Doctor Wilde said patiently.

"They won't give me a chance to show them! If they don't trust me after all I've done for them ..."

SkyJack looked up from where he was squatting on the ground and said, "Aw, you're still hacked off at them for not following you out before."

"Shut up, you immature, wire-head dork!" Maya yelled. "You don't know a thing about it, so just shut up!"

"No," said Tremayne gravely. "The lad is right. When you returned to this ward, did you really believe you would succeed? You said this task would be impossible."

Maya said nothing. She looked down.

Doctor Wilde touched her shoulder. "Maya," he said softly. "Isn't it time to stop punishing them for not following you?"

"He's right, Maya," Tremayne added. "If you cannot forgive them, you cannot help them."

Tears welled up in Maya's eyes. "I hate them so much for staying behind!" she said in a whisper. She cried softly.

"You could forgive Berofski," Wilde said. "Is it so much harder with them?"

"I never expected anything from Berofski," she replied. "It hurts so much worse when people you really care about let you down."

The three men nodded silently, each momentarily lost in memory.

At length, Wilde said, "If you resent them, you can't succeed with them. We can leave now."

"No," said Maya. "No! I forgive them. I forgive them."

She spun on her heel and marched back to the cells. "Hey,

guys!" she shouted, completely confident they would follow. "Let's go! No more excuses! We're outta here!"

Obediently, the prisoners got up and filed out of the cells. Nervously they hobbled past the Storm Knights. Berofski gaped in astonishment as Maya coaxed out the last stragglers.

"That truck," Maya said, pointing to an abandoned troop carrier. "Hop in! A Storm Knight will drive you to safety."

The prisoners slowly climbed into the half-track. "Help each other," Maya said. "We're in this together, and we gotta look out for each other."

Doctor Wilde watched the prisoners help each other into the troop carrier, a look of amazement on his face. Maya stood beside him.

"It's extraordinary," Wilde began. "I don't know what to say."

Maya smiled. "This hero stuff is more demanding than I thought. You do this a lot?"

"All the time," he replied, wondering if he would ever live up to the standards she set.

"Incoming!" SkyJack shouted. "Fresh shocktroopers marching up the main drag!"

Wilde began barking orders. "Tremayne, go with Maya and Berofski in the APC! Maya, you drive! SkyJack, raid the labs. I'll keep them at bay with my jeep. We'll rendezvous behind Zero Ward in five minutes! Only five, SkyJack!"

Maya panicked. "Drive that big tank thing?"

"Tremayne is from a reality where people can't drive!" Wilde shouted. "You have to do it!"

"I can't!" she shouted.

"Funny," he replied. "That's how all those prisoners think!" He sped off in the jeep.

Maya scrambled into the driver's seat of the troop carrier. Tremayne vaulted onto the roof. The professor got into the passenger seat, saying, "It's all my fault! I sent for those reinforcements!"

"Never mind that!" Maya shouted. "How do I drive this thing?"

Berofski quickly explained the controls. Maya slammed the great vehicle into reverse and roared away.

She heard gunfire from the front of the compound. For a moment she worried about Doctor Wilde. Suddenly she saw men in Egyptian headdresses leaping toward the troop carrier.

Tremayne's golden spear twirled, and sliced through the nearest attackers. She drove away from the main pack, and toward the back of the building, turning in tight loops to shake off the spear-throwing shocktroopers. Most of the spears bounced harmlessly off the armored side of the APC, but a few went in the open back hatch. The spears quickly flew out again, as an emboldened former prisoner hurled them back at the guards.

Moments later Doctor Wilde drove up, and ran interference for them in his jeep, his side-mounted machine gun scattering the Pharaoh's troops.

"Where's SkyJack," Wilde shouted. "It's time to go!"

"There's another contingent coming," Tremayne warned.

"Damn him," Wilde said. "We can't keep hanging around!"





"Doc!" Maya shouted out her window. "He's off to the left! Behind that garrison building!"

She spurred her APC in that direction, toward the onrushing shock-troopers. The troops scattered like panicked chickens before the onrushing half-track. Maya was grateful that their organizational skills were diminished, because they could easily stop her if they worked together.

"There he is!" Maya shouted, pointing up to a second-floor window. SkyJack was shooting a wrist gun at the troops below, who were trying to scale the wall after him.

The guards broke and ran as Maya approached, and SkyJack leaped onto the truck, clutching a large bag. He clambered into the cab, and squeezed in between Maya and the Professor. He dumped out his bag in Berofski's lap.

"Look!" he said. "Gizmo components, schematics, wiring diagrams! The Israelis will pay big bucks for this stuff!"

"You're welcome," Maya said, struggling with the cumbersome steering wheel to maneuver the clumsy half-track between two narrow buildings.

"Oh yeah, thanks for the pickup," he replied without interest. "And look at this junk! I don't even know what this is! So it must be good!"

They pulled outside the research center compound, leaving the shock-troopers in the dust. They didn't stop till they reached the Free Sudan refugee camp, where they received a heroes' welcome.

The refugees brought out their best food and started an impromptu celebration. The camp leader, an elderly woman named N'Buto, welcomed the former prisoners with open arms, and pledged to help them become productive citizens again. "They only problem is free food they got in torture chambers!" she announced emphatically. "All they need is hard work to earn their food, and you be amazed what good workers they become!"

Berofski rubbed his chin and pondered this. "Hmmm ... that would expand their locus of control, and provide immediate gratification —"

N'Buto nudged Maya's arm. "Tell him if he want to live here, he speak English!"

Maya was enchanted with the camp. The other Storm Knights were grateful for the chance to rest.

During the festivities, Doctor Wilde pulled SkyJack aside, and said, "When I say five minutes I mean five minutes. Maya should not have had to rescue you."

"You're off yer nut! I don't see why I hadda watch Miss Maya Gandhi help the dumb animals. I had so little time, I couldn't even get all the good stuff. Important equipment, too!"

Doctor Wilde placed his hand on the young man's shoulder. "That stuff wins battles. What she did wins wars. We can all learn from her." He turned away, and joined the others.

"Well," he said to the assembled Storm Knights. "Tomorrow we set out to find the Mystery Men, and help push the Pharaoh's overgovernor from Khartoum. Maya, you are welcome to come with us."

Tremayne added, "We would be honored to have you officially join our merry band."

"About time we had a little tail in the group," SkyJack added, a mischievous twinkle in his eyes. "You'll love being a part of the Wilde Knights!"

Doctor Wilde grimaced. "I wish you'd stop calling us that," he said.

Maya did not smile. "Thank you," she said sadly, "but my answer is no." The men looked at her with surprise. No one spoke.

"Tell you what though," she continued. "I'll let you guys join up with my group," she said with a smile.

Doctor Wilde looked puzzled.

"Joke!" Maya said, impulsively hugging Wilde. "It was a joke! I'd love to join you guys! Thank you!"

The men laughed, and visibly relaxed. They parted well into the night. Maya was so excited she thought she'd have trouble sleeping, but she was asleep the moment her head hit the pillow.

That night she dreamed of her opal again. The fire within the gem burned with a new vitality and strength.

Maya was finally at peace.



# Gamemaster Character Records

Use these pages to record the damage to and status of the gamemaster characters in the key encounters. Use the "status" line to record wounds, stymied, unskilled, and setback results. Each character's *Toughness* is repeated on the "Stun Damage" line for easy reference.



## Act One

### Shocktrooper Guards (8)

See page 23 of *The Nile Empire* sourcebook.

**Possibilities:** None

**Inclination:** Evil

**Equipment:** club, damage value STR+3/18; dagger, damage value STR+3/17; throwing spear, damage value STR+4/18, range 3-5/25/40

<b>Shocktrooper #1</b>	
Stun Damage (9)	K
Status	O
<b>Shocktrooper #2</b>	
Stun Damage (9)	K
Status	O
<b>Shocktrooper #3</b>	
Stun Damage (9)	K
Status	O
<b>Shocktrooper #4</b>	
Stun Damage (9)	K
Status	O
<b>Shocktrooper #5</b>	
Stun Damage (9)	K
Status	O
<b>Shocktrooper #6</b>	
Stun Damage (9)	K
Status	O
<b>Shocktrooper #7</b>	
Stun Damage (9)	K
Status	O
<b>Shocktrooper #8</b>	
Stun Damage (9)	K
Status	O

### Achmar the Mad

#### DEXTERITY 9

Dodge 12, melee weapons 10, running 10, stealth 10, unarmed combat 10

#### STRENGTH 10

#### TOUGHNESS 9

#### PERCEPTION 8

Find 9, trick 9

#### MIND 7

Test 9

#### CHARISMA 10

Taunt 11

#### SPIRIT 9

Intimidation 10, reality 10

**Possibilities:** 1

**Inclination:** Evil

**Equipment:** hunting knife, damage value STR+3/19

#### Achmar the Mad

Stun Damage (9)

Status

K

O

### Nile Bureaucrats (2)

#### DEXTERITY 8

Dodge 10, running 9, stealth 10

#### STRENGTH 7

#### TOUGHNESS 7

#### PERCEPTION 10

Evidence analysis 12, find 12, language 11, trick 11

#### MIND 10

#### CHARISMA 8

Charm 11, persuasion 12, taunt 10

#### SPIRIT 9

Intimidation 10

**Possibilities:** None

**Inclination:** Evil

#### Nile Bureaucrat #1

Stun Damage (7)

Status

K

O

#### Nile Bureaucrat #2

Stun Damage (7)

Status

K

O

### Captain Khali Hafji

#### DEXTERITY 10

Beast riding 11, dodge 12, fire combat 12, maneuver 11, melee weapons 11, unarmed combat 12

#### STRENGTH 10

#### TOUGHNESS 11

#### PERCEPTION 10

Evidence analysis 12, find 12, land vehicles 11, tracking 11, trick 13

#### MIND 9

Test 12

#### CHARISMA 10

Charm 14, persuasion 13, willpower 11

#### SPIRIT 9

Intimidation 14, reality 14

**Possibilities:** 2

**Inclination:** Evil

**Equipment:** KO8, damage value 15, ammo 8, range 3-10/25/60; grenades (2), damage value 19, range 1-6/15/40, blast radius 0-3/8/15; radio

#### Captain Khali Hafji

Stun Damage (11)

Status

K

O

### Anton Angelou

#### DEXTERITY 10

Dodge 14, maneuver 12, running 12, stealth 15

#### STRENGTH 8

#### TOUGHNESS 9

#### PERCEPTION 11

Evidence analysis 14, find 13, land vehicles 12, trick 13

#### MIND 12

Test 13, weird science 15

#### CHARISMA 9

Charm 11, persuasion 10

#### SPIRIT 9

Reality 13

**Possibilities:** 7

**Inclination:** Evil

**Equipment:** miniaturized teleportation grenade (concealed in ring), adventure cost 5, effect value 25, burst radius 0-4/10/25. This is another piece of modified "weird science" equipment — a grenade which causes anything trapped within its burst radius to be teleported to a place of the thrower's choosing (providing it is within range, and not within a solid object). Like the reality bomb prototypes, this one-of-a-kind device sacrifices range for effect — it will transport anyone whose *Toughness* its effect value can beat, but no more than 100 meters away. Its creation was an accident, which may never be duplicated.





People teleported automatically take two shock points.



## Act Two

**Anton Angelou**  
Stun Damage (9) **K**  
Status **O**

### Angelou's Shocktroopers (5)

#### DEXTERITY 10

Beast riding 12, fire combat 13, heavy weapons 13, unarmed combat 13

#### STRENGTH 10

Climbing 11

#### TOUGHNESS 10

#### PERCEPTION 9

Find 11, first aid 11, tracking 11, trick 11

#### MIND 8

Survival 10, test 10, willpower 13

#### CHARISMA 9

Taunt 11

#### SPIRIT 8

Faith (Egyptian) 11, intimidation 11, reality 11

**Possibilities:** 2

**Inclination:** Evil

**Equipment:** KK81, damage value 19, ammo 24, range 3-40/400/1k; bayonety, damage value STR+4/17

#### Angelou's Shocktrooper #1

Stun Damage (10) **K**  
Status **O**

#### Angelou's Shocktrooper #2

Stun Damage (10) **K**  
Status **O**

#### Angelou's Shocktrooper #3

Stun Damage (10) **K**  
Status **O**

#### Angelou's Shocktrooper #4

Stun Damage (10) **K**  
Status **O**

#### Angelou's Shocktrooper #5

Stun Damage (10) **K**  
Status **O**

### Ugresk

See page 98 of *The Living Land* sourcebook.

**Possibilities:** none

**Natural Tools:** teeth, damage value STR+2/28; claws, damage value STR+1/27; wings, speed value 12

#### Ugresk

Stun Damage (28) **K**  
Status **O**

### Jakananda

#### DEXTERITY 12

Beast riding 14, dodge 15, maneuver 14, missile weapons 13, stealth 14, unarmed combat 14

#### STRENGTH 10

#### TOUGHNESS 10

#### PERCEPTION 11

Find 13, language 13, tracking 12, trick 14

#### MIND 10

Survival 14, test 12

#### CHARISMA 12

Charm 14, persuasion 15, taunt 14

#### SPIRIT 12

Faith (Keta Kalles) 15, focus 15, intimidation 15, reality 14

**Possibilities:** 6 per Storm Knight

**Miracles:** *animal rage, earth's ear, intense fear, see through mist*

**Equipment:** hroct spear, damage value STR +3/18

#### Jakananda

Stun Damage (10) **K**  
Status **O**

### Carnol

See page 82 of *The Living Land* sourcebook.

**Possibilities:** none

**Natural Tools:** hide, armor value TOU+2/32; teeth, damage value STR+6/32; tail, damage value STR+2/28

#### Carnol

Stun Damage (30) **K**  
Status **O**

### Dr. Flash

#### DEXTERITY 11

Dodge 16, energy weapons 13, fire combat 13, maneuver 13, melee

weapons 14, unarmed combat 13

#### STRENGTH 11

#### TOUGHNESS 10

#### PERCEPTION 9

Find 11, trick 11

#### MIND 9

Test 12, weird science 11, willpower 14

#### CHARISMA 10

Charm 11, persuasion 12

#### SPIRIT 8

Intimidation 12, reality 12

**Possibilities:** 6 per Storm Knight

**Inclination:** Evil

**Powers:** electro-ray, damage value 21, range 3-10/11-25/26-60

**Power Flaw:** roll-again vulnerability to water attacks

**Equipment:** boom belt (teleportation power, value 17)

#### Dr. Flash

Stun Damage (10) **K**  
Status **O**

### Draconis Aquatica

See page 111 of the *Aysle* sourcebook.

**Possibilities:** none

**Natural Tools:** armor, TOU+10/31; tail, swimming speed value 11, damage value STR+3/27

**Note:** This transformed Nile creature does not possess the Aquatica's steam breath weapon, nor its knowledge of magic.

#### Draconis Aquatica

Stun Damage (21) **K**  
Status **O**

### Sarigar

#### DEXTERITY 12 (9)

Dodge 13, maneuver 13, stealth 13, unarmed combat 14

#### STRENGTH 10

#### TOUGHNESS 10

#### PERCEPTION 12

Alteration magic 14, find 13, trick 14

#### MIND 14 (11)

Apportation magic 16, conjuration magic 17, test 15, willpower 15

#### CHARISMA 11

Persuasion 12, taunt 13

#### SPIRIT 9

Corruption 13, faith (Eshtar) 10, intimidation 11, reality 13

**Possibilities:** 6 per Storm Knight

**Arcane Knowledge:** *metal 2, fire 4, darkness 3, magic 4, living forces 4*



**Spells:** *bullet, conjured fireball, create fear, mystic shield, persuasion*

<b>Sarigar</b>	
Stun Damage (10)	K
Status	O

### Tunnel Spider

#### DEXTERITY 13

Long jumping 14, maneuver 14, stealth 15, unarmed combat 15

#### STRENGTH 9

Climbing 12

#### TOUGHNESS 10

#### PERCEPTION 7

Find 12, tracking 11, trick 10

#### MIND 5

Survival 11, test (8)

#### CHARISMA 5

Charm (25), persuasion (25), taunt (15)

#### SPIRIT 5

Intimidation 10

**Possibilities:** none

**Natural Tools:** fangs, damage value STR+1/10

<b>Tunnel Spider</b>	
Stun Damage (10)	K
Status	O

### Cardinal Leech

#### DEXTERITY 11

Dodge 13, fire combat 13, melee weapons 13, stealth 13, unarmed combat 14

#### STRENGTH 9

#### TOUGHNESS 11

#### PERCEPTION 11

Cyberdeck operation 18, evidence analysis 15, find 13, language 13, trick 14

#### MIND 13

Test 14, willpower 14

#### CHARISMA 13

Charm 15, persuasion 16

#### SPIRIT 18

Faith (Cyberpope) 23, focus 21, intimidation 20, reality 21

**Possibilities:** 6 per Storm Knight

**Miracles:** *unbeliever's doom, vex*

**Equipment:** IRCOM Custom Vee Cyberdeck (response +2, stealth +3, processor power 4, storage 5); Cyberware: NeuraCal, EpiphaNeur, interdermal plate (head and body, +7/armor value 18), FFO CamEye, CSI

LEDs, FFO NightView, Avro PR II.V, damage value 19, ammo 20, range 3-10/11-60; slicers, damage value STR+2/11

**Cyber Value:** 17

<b>Cardinal Leech</b>	
Stun Damage (11)	K
Status	O

### Cybernun

See page 83 of *The Cyberpacy* sourcebook.

**Possibilities:** none

**Additional Equipment:** surgical laser, damage value 13

<b>Cybernun</b>	
Stun Damage (9/14)	K
Status	O

### War Wolf

#### DEXTERITY 13

Dodge 15, maneuver 14, stealth 14, unarmed combat 17

#### STRENGTH 13

#### TOUGHNESS 16

#### PERCEPTION 11

Tracking 14, trick 13

#### MIND 11

Test 13, willpower 12

#### CHARISMA 12

Persuasion 14, taunt 13

#### SPIRIT 10

Faith (Orrorsh) 12, intimidation 12, reality 14, shapeshifting 13

**Possibilities:** 6 per Storm Knight

**Natural Tools:** claws, damage value STR+4/17; teeth, damage value STR+6/19

**Power Rating:** 2

**Corruption Value:** 12

**Fear Rating:** 1

**Powers:** *resistance to normal weapons*

**Severe Weakness:** silver

**True Death:** any

<b>The War Wolf</b>	
Stun Damage (16)	K
Status	O

### Gomo Takiwara

#### DEXTERITY 9

Dodge 11, fire combat 10, lock picking 10, maneuver 10, stealth 11

#### STRENGTH 9

#### TOUGHNESS 9

### PERCEPTION 11

Evidence analysis 12, find 13, language 13, trick 15

#### MIND 11

Business 15, test 13

#### CHARISMA 12

Persuasion 14, taunt 15

#### SPIRIT 8

Intimidation 10, reality 12

**Possibilities:** 6 per Storm Knight

**Equipment:** ZIIP77z, damage value 16, ammo 12, range 3-10/25/40

<b>Gomo Takiwara</b>	
Stun Damage (9)	K
Status	O

### Corporate Ninja (3)

See page 59 of the *Nippon Tech* sourcebook.

**Possibilities:** 2

**Equipment:** nunchaka, damage value STR+5/19; katana, damage value STR+7/21

**Note:** All three ninja have mastered the first three maneuvers of *ninjutsu*.

<b>Corporate Ninja #1</b>	
Stun Damage (9)	K
Status	O

<b>Corporate Ninja #2</b>	
Stun Damage (9)	K
Status	O

<b>Corporate Ninja #3</b>	
Stun Damage (9)	K
Status	O

### Dr. Smithers

#### DEXTERITY 9

Dodge 10, maneuver 10, stealth 11, unarmed combat 10

#### STRENGTH 8

#### TOUGHNESS 8

#### PERCEPTION 11

Evidence analysis 13, find 12, trick 14

#### MIND 12

Science (psychology) 15, test 14

#### CHARISMA 10

Charm 12, persuasion 12, taunt 11

#### SPIRIT 10

Intimidation 11, reality 13

**Possibilities:** 6 per Storm Knight

<b>Dr. Smithers</b>	
Stun Damage (8)	K
Status	O







## Act Three

### The Wasting Spirit

#### DEXTERITY 11

Dodge 14, maneuver 13, stealth 15, unarmed combat 14

#### STRENGTH 16

#### TOUGHNESS 13

#### PERCEPTION 14

Find 16, language 15, trick 17

#### MIND 11

Test 14, willpower 16

#### CHARISMA 15

Persuasion 17, taunt 19

#### SPIRIT 12

Faith (Orrorsh) 15, intimidation 18, reality 16

**Possibilities:** three per Storm Knight

**Natural Tools:** claws, damage value

STR+4/20

**Corruption:** 17

**Power Rating:** 8

**Powers:** *life drain*, power value 26; *paralyzing touch*, power value 27; *blur form*, power value 19; *darkness*, power value 16

**Fear Rating:** 1

**Perseverance DN:** 10

**True Death:** any

#### The Wasting Spirit

Stun Damage (13)

Status

K

O

### Professor Berofski

#### DEXTERITY 8

Dodge 9, fire combat 9, maneuver 9, unarmed combat 9

#### STRENGTH 8

#### TOUGHNESS 8

### PERCEPTION 11

Evidence analysis 14, find 15, scholar (psychology) 16, trick 12

### MIND 14

Test 15, weird science 17

### CHARISMA 10

Persuasion 12, taunt 11

### SPIRIT 11

Reality 14

**Possibilities:** 5

**Inclination:** Evil

**Equipment:** .22 Revolver, damage value 12, ammo 6, range 3-10/15/25

#### Professor Berofski

Stun Damage (8)

Status

K

O



# CRUCIBLE OF PAIN

By Dan Greenberg



A beautiful young woman at the mercy of a madman ... a creature from Orrorsh that preys on fear ... a Nile experiment gone horribly wrong, which threatens all with a fate far worse than death.

These are the ingredients mixed in the crucible of pain that is the Heritage Institute. There a woman struggles for her sanity against a maniacal "weird scientist" who plans to drive her to the edge ... and beyond. But Storm Knights who come to her aid are plunged into the nightmare that is the "Nowhere Lands" — mini-versions of the six realms, each ruled by a being as evil as the High Lords themselves. And behind it all, there lurks the Wasting Spirit ...

*Crucible of Pain* introduces a new concept in roleplaying. Players and gamemaster read the first part of the short story, then run the adventure, and then come back for the exciting conclusion of the story. Powerful fiction and a terror-filled adventure combine for the gaming experience of a lifetime!

An Adventure/Short Story for



Roleplaying the Possibility Wars™



Fantasy/Games

This supplement is designed as a companion to *Torg: Roleplaying the Possibility Wars*. You need the boxed game to play. It introduces players and gamemasters alike to the universe of Torg, where realities overlap and anything is possible.

For up to six players and a gamemaster.

**For ages 12 and up.**



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