

THE Ancible

Your portal to Sci-Fi and Fantasy Wargaming

**Animal Vegetable
or what?**



We put the spotlight on **Hedley Coppock**

INSIDE

Intro to
Exillis

Conan Adventure
Part 1

Martian
Empires

Malifaux

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View from the Command Deck

It only seems like a few short weeks since I wrote my first editorial. Now that I come to think of it, it was just a few short weeks ago. Much has happened in the world of The Ancible. We have shipped our product all over the world and I personally am very proud to have done that for issue 1. Still they say the real test is Issue 2 and keeping up the quality and enthusiasm.

We have had many kind comments and lots of feedback, some more positive than others, but we have taken it all on board, discussed it and implemented the bits that fit in with what we are trying to do.

As part of my general amazement at the reception we have had I decided that I needed to do something to say thanks so I decided that the first person who actually paid money for the magazine would get a special thank you. To that end Mr Anthony Alexander had his single issue purchase upgraded so he will now receive the next five issues free, courtesy of The Ancible. When we spoke to Anthony he had this to say:

"I feel honoured to have been the first person to sign up for a copy of The Ancible and, having thoroughly enjoyed the first issue, am looking forward to number two (I'm hoping for a Malifaux review - love those models) particularly now I know I'm a jammy sod and will be getting it free!"

I would just like to say that the Malifaux review was already in plan before Anthony asked for it but it is good to see that we are in tune with at least one of our readers!

One of the big things for me is that we start to expand the coverage of The Ancible and I am particularly excited by the Conan adventure. When we were approached I had thought that it would be a good thing to do and expected it to be a single issue sort of thing. Just goes to show what I know. It is looking like it will be split over three issues with loads of maps and stats and all the other goodness that the RPG guys (and gals) love. So without further ado I present you Issue 2 of The Ancible. As always we are keen to hear what you think.

Our aim is to introduce **YOU** to the games you don't yet know

Kenny R

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The team welcomes ideas for articles and in the first instance you should contact Ian Barstow (ianb@the-ancible.com) for some handy hints on submission. Please note that while every care is taken with your submitted material we cannot be held responsible for any loss or damage that may occur.

Artwork Submissions

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Reviews

Manufacturers and publishers are invited to send in samples of their products for our team to review in the magazine.

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PULL UP A SANDBAG WITH UNCLE BOMBER

A Surprising Ming

There I was, setting up my figures for another glorious battle when suddenly I had a nagging feeling that something was missing. I couldn't put my finger on it at first; you know that feeling you get when you have entered a room? Even though you know you had a good reason for going in you simply cannot remember what that reason was. You are sure it was very important, but when you try to remember what it was, it vanishes like smoke in the wind.

Well, I was having one of those moments, I was sat at the table looking at the terrain, admiring the quality of the finish on my opponent's figures, and wondering where I should place my next figure. The little voice in the back of my mind was telling me that something was wrong, and it only got louder as the set up progressed. It wasn't until we had both had set up our figures that the reason behind my unease started to become clear.

Our deployment was almost a perfect mirror of each other, my basic troops were standing opposite his rank and file, my harder hitting troops were facing his shock troops, and my character was in the centre facing off against his uber-character-of-doom. It suddenly occurred to me that I was bored, I could see the whole battle unfolding before me: the outcome would be decided by the role of the dice and a little luck, not by my superior generalship and masterful deployment. Where was the fog of war? Where was the random chance? Where was that feeling of despair as the early morning mist lifted and you saw your best troops facing the combined might of your enemy's artillery? Or even better where

was that sense of elation when your fast attack troops found themselves facing off against your opponent's support troops?

Yes I am talking about what seems to be the lost art of the hidden deployment; I know that I haven't seen it used for years, but why is this? I believe that it is a conspiracy, a conspiracy created by those people who like to create the mingiest lists possible. You know who I mean – those people who create such unbalanced lists that normal, balanced lists don't stand a chance, I believe that they all got together over a few packets of pork scratching and a pint of warm beer to decide our fate. These painted devils just couldn't live with the chance that some normal person with a balanced army list would defeat them, because their ineptitude while setting up showed that their only ability was in creating mingy army lists, and that their grasp of military tactics was woefully inadequate.

I say bring back the hidden deployment set up and let's see it used in every tournament across our great land. Let us rise up against the tyranny of the mingy army lists everywhere! Come on, who else wants to see the face of the person with all those terminators or giant robots as the screen is lifted to find his uber mingy troops are facing nothing but air, while his general is facing your entire balanced force. Oh yes, think how good that would feel to see the look of unreasoning fear as Captain Mingy realises that the one tactic he has ever developed is of bog-all use to him. Let's bring back the element of surprise, the fog of war to our great hobby.

I HAVE A DREAM!

If you have any comments you would like to make or if you have a subject that you feel Uncle Bomber should tackle then please send your emails to unclebomber@the-ancible.com

Your Letters

If I'm honest I had no intention of getting involved with this magazine. I was quite happy minding my own business, avoiding the very people I thought would be reading a magazine like this – you know the ones, those show-offs with disposable income. Anyway, Kenny knocked on my door and made me an offer I couldn't refuse so, avoiding a visit from the concrete shoe fitters, I gave it a bash.

After the first issue I was confident Kenny would see through me and send me packing anyway, so I figured why not give it a go? But no! It seems that people liked me and had sent in e-mails for me to [the ones I saw all seemed to contain personal abuse – Ed] read and reply to. What was the world coming to? I figured I would tell Kenny that this wasn't for me, and that I would be heading off home. It was at this point that he told me Ted Chang was out hunting Rhino in the grounds of Ancible Towers with his service Webley, and he couldn't guarantee Ted wouldn't use me for target practice, so I guess I would have to answer these e-mails. Here goes:

Mark from Nottingham asked: why is it I have trouble finding a girlfriend? He enclosed a photo, which was nice of him.

Well Mark, I have two words for you. Soap; okay, that's one word but please, use it twice.

David from Newport asked a very interesting question: Is there was anything about gaming that annoys the hell out of you? Yes David, yes there is.

I'm playing a game, let's call it Machine War [he means Warmachine – Ed], and I get into close combat, now it's pretty straight forward – my guy has certain skills that help him, we both role our dice, we have a result and life goes on. It's the same for the shooting – we measure, roll some more dice, maybe we hit and maybe we don't, but it's all nice and easy to follow.

The problem I have, no, the thing that makes me almost stop playing this game is the lack of balance between the combat phase and the shooting phase. A rifle or a pistol, even one that uses black powder, has a range. A musket, for example, has an effective range of around 100 yards, yet in Machine War [Warmachine – Ed] there are some figures who have a close combat range of two inches, yes two inches, what's that about! I'm not talking about a big machine with a spear, I'm talking about a figure representing a living, breathing thing, and it would seem a being with unfeasibly long arms, a being who has a reach of around 20 to 30 feet when you take into account the range of powder weapons.

Don't misunderstand me, figures in base to base contact fight each other, that's okay, a friendly figure who is in base to base contact with his own guy can provide a support bonus, I can live with that, but come on! A figure that can conceivably reach across a road to rip a face off, what's that about? Then, to cap it all off, he can move on to another combat with no penalty, because he isn't in base to base contact he isn't considered in combat, so you don't get a free hit as he moves off.

There I feel better now, maybe this e-mail business can be a good thing after all. Come on, who else has a question, let's see what other problems I can help the gaming community with.

Uncle Bomber
Ancible Towers

Uncle Bomber. Come on editor, why are you giving this bloke space in the magazine? He's got opinions that passed through my nether regions about a decade ago. I'm half-tempted to reveal his identity just to make sure he goes down in posterity as the boring old git he is. Noting his guff in issue 1 he forgot to mention one annoying type of gamer: the doddery, grumpy old fool who breaks anything he touches, can't get within five feet of a table for overhang reasons, and insists on bringing Werther's Originals to a gaming night. It's hard to believe this contributor (and I use the term loosely) was also in the services, but based

on what I've seen so far if I'd met him in the Falklands he'd have suffered a bit of friendly fire, that's for sure. Actually I blame the editor. And the owner. Without the bizarre toleration of messrs Barstow and Robb we'd be spared this rubbish and have room for some decent articles in its place. I did mention this to them during the gaming of this month's battle report, but it seemed to fall on deaf ears. As for the people who have actually emailed him, I can only presume they were having a laugh – a bit like torturing a dumb animal. Lucky for Uncle Bomber that I'm out of the country again. At least you know where you are with oil wells. Anybody who makes a mistake turns into flame grilled chicken. Actually, maybe I should invite UB out with me for a sight-seeing trip...

There, I feel better now. If you hate Uncle Bomber as much as I do then I suggest you bombard the letters page accordingly and we can start a campaign to boot him into touch. Do it. Do it now.

Ted Chang
Bahrain

FIRESTORM GAMES

Well, the perception of expectations is usually a negative one, most people see having expectations as not clever as you may get your hopes up for something that will never be. The exact opposite happened for me today as I walked into my new friendly local gaming store FLGS.

Firestorm games are a Cardiff based independent stockist of games ranging from the vast collections of the evil empire to the more niche Hordes and even the more quiet (yet popular) Malifaux. I entered the store and I found myself extremely surprised, not that I expected a bad shop but that it met my high expectations entirely. First of all I was elated, the shop was bright, merry and everyone (I mean, everyone) was smiling or laughing. I promptly took my first deep breath and walked inside. I meandered through to the back, past a small office with staff laughing and joking when it hit me not one person had done the familiar sales pitch of GW. I was only asked by a member of staff "you alright there mate" who promptly pointed me in the manager's (Rob's) direction. Upon entering the games room I was quite taken aback, I did (I admit) half expect a rundown (and for some reason blue) dank warehouse. I instead found a prim and clean room, with 45 tables neatly lined out as if there was a large organized tourney there...on opening night. Rob, the owner of the shop greeted me with open arms...well not really. He did though give me an extremely warm handshake and instantly offer me a cup of tea from a machine they had, we chatted about the shops prospects but then delved into the hardcore "so what are you into" conversation.

I headed back into the shop and looked around, stacked next to the Litko stuff and the GW paints was also some Galeforce Nine bits and some extremely attractive miniatures modestly displayed in a clean glass case. The first thing to catch your eye upon entering from either the game room or the front door is of course the two demo tables. They had both a 40k chaos (I think) and a hordes table set up (as it seems hordes is going to be shops forte it seemed only appropriate).

The employees were all extremely helpful and offered what help they could even with only having been open for one day. I then played a game of Hordes, at first my mind exploded in a dark swirling mass of words such as "What the hell is going on?" and "whoa hold up there you lost me" as it can be very confusing.....but I quickly came around and I enjoyed the game very much, with extremely attractive miniatures and a reasonably nice laid out board I was easily convinced to pick up a starter set and I am now £30 poorer for it.

I hate to kiss ass but this shop rocks socks. And I can safely say they have a new customer in me.

Arthur Hannan
Penarth

<http://oddcast1.blogspot.com/>

Review

by Chris Duncan

MARTIAN EMPIRES

By Oozlum Games

OVERVIEW

The first thing that strikes you when you pick up the Martian Empires rule book is the great use of a simple white base with striking red wording and border, surrounding a vibrant picture of a battle using the Black Hat miniatures which compliment this rule set. The fact that the image contains some red vegetation and Mars-like desert ground adds to the attraction completely focusing on the image and wording. A sign of things to come within the book you ask? Well, there is only one way to find out, and that is to open it and plunge in.

Before we drop into the depths of the book the back cover also needs a sound description. Yet again the use of the simple plain white allows you to study the content in a way other rule books fail to deliver on with their cluttered back images. At the top we see another stunning image of the 18mm models, this time depicting the Cephalods, squid-like brains deploying a host of what can only be described as ominously exotic weapons. There is a small table of contents to tantalise the would-be buyer, and a very short passage conveying the history that the book covers. So with slaving taste buds for Victorian conquests and other worldly battles it's time to envelope ourselves in the content of the book itself.

Inside 48 full colour pages await with quality paper to the touch and a soft sheen of print. The pictures are vibrant and relative. The first page is exactly what you would expect; the basic details of any book including the copyright and version, which is 1.0 in this case. The creator, Mike Lewis is also listed here. Again the choice of font and minimalist approach allows the eye to quickly absorb the detail so the reader

can move on. The contents page is extremely well set out, and very comprehensive, with various important rules on the same page listed separately, allowing the gamer in the middle of a game to quickly open the book and select the page, and also know roughly where on the page the content they need will be. The information is set out in three columns, and is very concise. Starting with an introduction section and a history of the era the book deals with explanations of what a wargame is. The list and therefore the book itself then moves into familiar wargaming territory where such things as dice, stands and game length are dealt with. Once the reader has strolled through the rules content, towards the back of the book is the very important section containing the army lists, both for the epic battles that took place on Earth and also the counter offensive on the sands of Mars. Lastly there are five scenarios to get the battle fever racing.

CONTENTS

The introduction is a very pleasantly written by Mike Lewis explaining where his influences originated. This small foreword also has a clever explanation of what is Victorian Science Fiction (VSF). Here Mike also pays homage to those that helped him and encouraged him to create Martian Empires, notably Ian Marsh and his set of Napoleonic rules, Hazzah! Finally at the bottom of the page is a list of playtesters and other contributors, a must for any publication to thank the generous assistance from willing victims I mean volunteers.

What follows on the next few pages is an account of all the events that conspire to create the situation the players find themselves in. I will not elaborate upon this as it is best read for yourselves without any previous idea of content as it is a very interesting read all on its own. What I will say is all the time while reading this rule book my mind was constantly playing clips from War of the Worlds. I'm sure I could also hear a large metallic unscrewing of something huge and otherworldly coming from somewhere. Read this during the day, folks, with plenty of light and don't believe all you hear on the radio.

What is a wargame? A very good point, a lot of people have different ideas on what makes a wargame. Over the next two pages Mike gives a great 'best of British' go at explaining it. And by golly he does a good job of it! Even going into optimum board size and what you can use to represent scenery. The last column on the two-page spread is simply titled 'Toy Soldiers'; controversial to some maybe, a few would even argue they are not toys. But I am with Mike on this one; tell anyone that you wargame, and they say 'you mean toy soldiers'. Again in a very short but concise passage it is explained what they are, and in what format they are available. By the end of the two pages even the greenest of gamers will know the pointy end from the blunt end of a wargame. That said this may be a little simple for experienced gamers but it can always be skipped over, and this nod to the inexperienced is to be applauded.

The next section is described as 'Basic Concepts' and we are really starting to get to the rules of the game. Over the next four pages various game basics are set out. These are the first pages where you will see blue tinted tables, which are used to clarify the rules or show examples of whatever is explained upon that page. Again, as before, there is an excellent choice of colours, with the continuing white background and clear font, the pictures and blue tinted tables making a pleasant accompaniment. All your normal explanations can be found here for measurements used and dice required. Those of you that don't have a vast collection of variously sided dice will be pleased to know that this entire system relies upon two 6-sided dice, where a double one is

always a very good thing, while rather unusually a double six AND a five and six are not good results.

When it comes to dice rolling, this book sets down some very strict guidelines which some might find over the top, but anyone who has wargamed for a long time will see the wisdom of setting out from the start just what is acceptable. One of the most useful tables in the whole book is also listed here... stand sizes and how many figures to place on each stand.

Terrain is also covered in this section and handled well; the same strict but well written and justified conventions style applying again. Whether you are a Martian player or the extended hand of the British Empire you will find out what you can and cannot have for terrain and how big it should be, whilst also explaining how to deploy the scenery. Also in this section is the game length table to determine how many turns it will take, victory conditions and some colour pictures showing examples of the basic four troop types – Regulars, Irregulars, Vehicles and Characters.

Sequence of play is the next section and the list is limited to one page, with 5 steps for each player:

Orders and movement

Fire combat

Close combat

Character actions

Rally and repair

Each of these steps is then broken down over the following pages in the logical order that appears on this page, starting with Orders and Movement, which is explained over the next five pages. Where relevant tables are required they are supplied in the same no-nonsense manner becoming familiar throughout the book. On the first page of this section such a table is printed explaining the movement of each troop type in line, open and march column order.

The moves are broken down into three conditions:

Compulsory

Initiative

Ordered

Each is well explained and makes sense, something game rules sometimes seem to lack. Compulsory and Initiative moves are very straightforward, although ordered moves need a little more explaining, but nothing drastic. There is also an interesting section dealing with vehicles you have tried to order and rolled an 11 or 12... let's just say there is a vehicle failure table and leave the rest to your vivid imagination.

there is a large blue box explaining all the terms used in this section. On the second page is a paragraph relating to firing at chargers and this is the one unusual part of firing in that it occurs in the opponent's turn when they have declared a charge, as one would expect.

The following page covers firing at vehicles and also has the vehicle damage table embedded into it. This table covers walkers, tracked vehicles and fliers. The same page also covers



Characters can also attempt multiple orders on the same unit (with consequences). This could mean quite a considerable set of instructions being placed on a unit. It could also see your units not doing much of anything; a flip side to a rule is always refreshingly welcome to balance out games with fog of war and all that.

The theme of a crisp clear set of rules continues throughout the Orders and Movement section and into the next part which is everyone's favourite – Fire Combat, or the ability to send man or Martian-made projectiles hurtling across the gulfs of space and the tabletop.

What we have here is your basic 'if they can see and are in range, they let rip with everything they have' style. Obviously there are a series of factors which equate to modifiers to the dice roll and these are listed under the procedure section for fire combat. Weapon ranges have been placed in one of the handy blue tables and

force backs which can affect chargers and other formations. All of the above are covered on page 19 inside one of the blue boxes which in this case takes the whole page, with each of the four examples in the box explaining one of the situations described, from firing and damage vehicle rolls to firing at chargers and force backs.

As is customary in most wargaming rules the next section is Close Combat. Again examples and explanations are provided in blue boxes; also the format that will be familiar from firing combat is reproduced in this section, such as the Intent paragraph, detailing just what close combat is and the procedure section where the bare bones of the rules are explained. There is another chance of a force back with close combat and units routing which is also detailed. Winners have options at the end of a combat and they are listed on page 21. Characters in

combat is the next subject to be tackled and let me tell you it is a brutal end for characters caught in a unit during combat; great respect and care needs to be taken with your characters or they will be lost to the winds. Another full page blue box follows with examples of combat, showing squaring up and multiple combat options with very clear and informative photos to support the descriptions.

The next section provides a full explanation on Character actions. This is quite detailed, again starting with the Intent paragraph and moving onto exactly what the character's choice of actions are. Character casualties and saving throws are also explained here. You will also find a very hand blue box with advice from the designer on using characters – a must-read for any player who wishes their commander to advance to another engagement.

Continuing with the traditional layout style the book next moves into the Morale area of the game; for Martian Empires this is called Rally and Repair. During the battle the brave men of the fighting machines will attempt to make

repairs while musket rounds and beams of ultra-heated air pass close by. The very familiar layout of each section should be a comfort (or a pain if this style doesn't appeal to you) to see and rallying/repairing is like an old pair of slippers; in two pages you get an understanding of just what you can do to whip your forces back into an aggressive frenzy and stop them pouring off the table like Martian sands. By the end of this section you will be able to try and save your battle plan. If your tactics are doing well you will have no need of this area, as your superior skills and forces sweep the enemy from the field of battle with aplomb. If you are anything like me, this never happens. Details of how to carry out repairs follows with the obligatory blue examples box ending the section.

There then follows a section on other rules not previously. The main part of this is Terrain, and another vital table is included at the bottom of page 26 – Terrain Effects table. Here you will find out just how hard it is to move your cavalry across a stream (half move) or infantry through woods (half move again) for example. Each type of terrain is explained in more depth from open ground right up to rivers and Martian canals. A couple of blue-boxed examples helps you to understand what is dead ground and changes of terrain and how they affect your forces. Hidden units and reinforcements are detailed in this part of the rulebook, giving guidance on just what can dig in ready for an ambush and also how reinforcing units can enter the battlefield fresh and ready for bloodshed.

A surprise on page 29 is Vehicle designs; here the author has explained just what makes a vehicle design in Martian Empires. The four factors that require consideration are listed and each is explained a little further, although one observation I have noted is that nowhere does it list a points cost for each factor's range. For instance if a steam tank can take 4 hits, what is the point value to be added to the vehicles cost while designing, compared to a tank that can take 8 hits? They both won't cost the same, and there is no guidance to stop players from producing monster machines that are unbeatable. Considering the very sensible and strict construction of the rest of this book and the rules within, the vehicle design rules do seem to be lacking in structure and restrictions.



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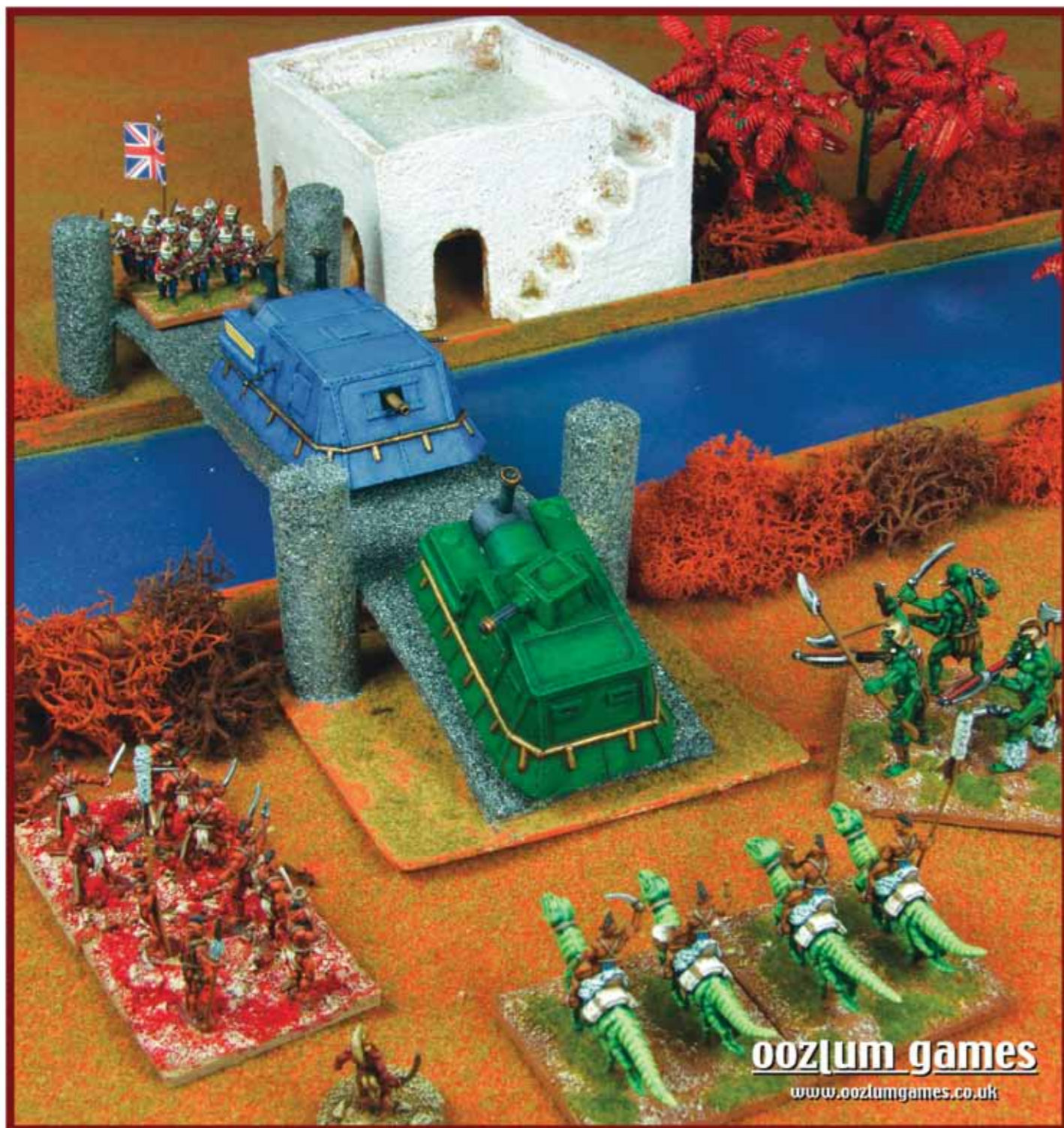


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A table of points values to calculate a design is much needed and hopefully may appear as a download in due course.

Page 30 continues with the brief explanations of vehicle designs and then turns to Martian smoke projectors and the rules that govern them. This breaks down into the use of the projectors, the effect of the smoke produced and introduces some variable wind direction rules. This is reiterated in a blue-boxed example on the same page that indicates how wind directions should be worked out randomly.

This concludes the rules within the book, which I think are a very good set – clear, concise and well thought out. Next come the obligatory army lists. The first thing we have on page 31 is an explanation of the section and some basics for deciding size of forces. There is also the de rigueur blue table detailing the explanations of terms within the army tables over the next few pages.

The first force to be listed is, quite rightly, the Home Forces of Her Britannic Majesty. Covering units such as guard infantry and cavalry to

artillery, this force will be familiar to anyone who has seen 19th century forces in films such as Zulu and the popular Sharpe series. There is a blue box with some handy examples of British forces in 1,000, 1,500 and 2,000 point armies.

Next to be listed is the British Expedition Force which forged across the void to claim Mars for Her Majesty. Many of the units in the previous list are duplicated here, but by this time the British had also produced steam tanks and their own version of a walker, not to mention some Martian allies. This means the units available to the British player swells from seven choices to a not inconsiderable 13 choices. In both lists special rules are included as notes at the base of each page, numbered and cross-referred on the unit table.

The Imperial Martians are the next force, again having a total of 13 units to choose from. All the same layout is observed and a second page defines the Imperial Martian special units from the three cities Helia, Gorlan and Lota. An Imperial Army can contain the specials of one city only. On page 35 there is an example of an

Imperial force for 1,500 points and an additional list of units totalling 500 points that can be added for a total of 2,000 points.

Now for something completely different. On the surface of Mars the Human invaders found a tribal group of Martian giants and the next force list details how a player can field these huge creatures. There are only six units to choose, all of them tough and all causing fear in other units. A 2,000 point example army is included on the page.

Having had the British Home forces (and we will all remember the devastating forces that descended from the heavens to turn the beautiful English countryside in to a quagmire of bloated bodies and red weeds) the next list is the Martian Invasion Force. The Cephalod race attempt at conquering earth is well documented and here you will be able to pick the oh-so-familiar Martian tripods as well as ground troops of Cephalods and the dreaded handling machines. Once again a list comprising of 2,000 points has been included as an example.



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The last two forces to be listed are the Prussian and French expedition forces. Each one details different units unique to their origin, but they also have allies on the Red Planet to draw from. There is an example army list of 2,000 points for the Prussians, but alas no example list of the French forces for some reason, although the British and Prussian examples suggest how a French force might be comprised.

Following the army lists come five scenarios, tracking the history of the battles from the Martian invasion of Earth, through the victory of the world against that aggressor, and on into the retaliation invasion of the Red Planet. Each one is set out with detailed notes on what forces were deployed on each battlefield and a map is provided as a guide to the battle site. On page 40 the first scenario is explained and the others follow in chronological order, so this one is the meteors from Mars spawning the walking machines of the Cephalods and the desperate counter of the inadequate British home forces.

Scenario 2 is the British fight back; with a single captured Tripod they try to destroy the invading force. However the captured Tripod is of vital importance.

Scenario 3 depicts the first contact on Mars between the British Expedition Force and the Imperial Martian armies. This is a classic battle of a patrol force meeting a larger force, and having to break through it.

Scenario 4 is the tale of the relief of Lord Palmerston. This is a sizeable battle with the British trying to hold on tenaciously to a foothold in a foreign (well, alien) land. Not the first time Her Majesty's forces have been up against overwhelming odds.

Scenario 5 is the Battle of the Spires, which is another re-enactment of a pivotal battle during the Mars campaign. This is the first large scale battle between the forces of General Gordon and the Imperial forces of Helian. Can you achieve the same victorious result as the exalted general?

So, after a whirlwind tour of the rule book we are finally on the last pages, two of which are a quick reference guide covering a lot of the most useful tables of information recorded throughout the book. Finally, if all that just isn't enough for you and you feel you need to express your delight in this book by having an actual game, then the very last page in the book

is an advert for Black Hat Miniatures where you can get your fix of 18mm models for this enjoyable game.

Conclusion

I'm sure by now from reading this you will get the impression that I like the layout of this book, and you would be spot on. Where other companies are spicing up their publications with colourful watermarked pages or eye-catching borders Oozlum Games have picked a more practical approach, keeping the clutter to an absolute minimum and ensuring that the information is well laid out and concise. At first the rules, like any rule book, look somewhat daunting but, as you read through, the way it is laid out breaks it down into manageable, bite-sized pieces. The crisp, clear pictures and the use of a pale blue box for the important examples and tables compliment the white background of each page beautifully.

The rules themselves seem to be very dynamic and offer a lot of choice and longevity which will have you unpacking your Martians and pith helmets for a long time to come. My only negative point is the vehicle rules – and this is a very minor point as all the vehicles are already worked out. It would only be for any diehard scratch builders out there, who would want some points values on vehicle construction choices. That said many wargamers who enjoy the VSF 'period' delight in creating bizarre and wonderful contraptions, as befits the age, and such an omission is poor.

All in all for me a very impressive publication and a really vibrant interesting setting. I defy anyone not to be moved playing these battles with Richard Burton banging on in the background about 'one appearing above Big Ben' and the haunting 'Ulla' echoing around the room.



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CONAN

THRESHOLD OF DARKNESS

By Eric K. Rodriguez and Vincent N. Darlage

Screen shots by kind permission of Paradox Entertainment

Part 1

INTRODUCTION

The mysteries and secrets of the Black Kingdoms have remained hidden for untold ages. Shadowed jungles, bleak savannas and fetid jungles have dominated life in the south for as long as man has lived. No kingdom or land has retained its dark history and reputation as prominently as Darfar. The Darfari are notorious for their cannibalism and sacrifice of human life to the dark gods of the south. Many men have travelled to the dark kingdom, never to return. It is a land of extreme harshness and suffering; forgiveness does not exist.

Recently, a Darfari Sorcerer has been using his magic to corrupt and torment men from the north. He believes that by sending his magic through the dreams and nightmares of individuals he will compel them to travel to Darfar where he will immolate them in sacrifice to his dark spirits.

IN THIS ADVENTURE

A dark sorcerer has been using his powers to dominate and corrupt the dreams of innocents. His ultimate goal is the sacrifice of certain individuals to the dark power he worships. Those individuals who follow the dream portents he forces upon them will eventually find themselves travelling to the Black Kingdoms; ultimately Darfar.

The characters may travel through several different cities and lands on their journey to discover the cause of their nightmares and twisted dreams. Each step of the way they are hunted for crimes that they have not committed. Eventually they will reach the source of their troubles and confront the Ngil Master who has violated their dreams for the last several weeks.

PREPARATION

A copy of Conan the Roleplaying Game, a notepad, pencils and a full set of dice (at least one of each of the following; d20, d12, d10, d8, d6 and d4) will be needed to play Threshold of Darkness. Players and Games Masters may also find a copy of Conan: Scrolls of Skelos, Conan: The Road of Kings and a few miniatures of use. If you lack any of these, you may have to substitute feats, spells and monsters as needed.

Threshold of Darkness combines situations and encounters that will require a mix of skills to survive and overcome. Players will find that a party of adventurers from a wide variety of character classes of particular use. Any character class will easily fit into this adventure.

Games Masters should read and become familiar with the entire adventure before attempting to run it to fully understand how each encounter fits with those which surround it. Be familiar with the characters presented in the Appendix. A sound knowledge of who they are, how they relate to each other, and their motivations is essential to run this scenario smoothly.

As with any Conan game, action should always be present, either in the form of combat, disaster or the threat of such. If at any time this scenario slows down, then introduce a violent complication.

PART I ANTHROPHAGY IN DARFAR

CHAPTER I THE DREAM OF THE THRESHOLD

The characters can begin in any location desired by the Games Master. Zamboula, however, is a good starting point if the Games Master has

no better option. The Non-Player Characters will presume a starting point in Zamboula; if the Games Master desires a different starting point, substitute appropriate Non-Player Characters. The bedrooms are upstairs or in a separate area from the common room.

One character (chosen by the Games Master) has a nightmare. Alternatively, all the characters could have an identical dream. The description of the dream may vary, and individual Games Masters are encouraged to insert scenes or images they know will be disturbing for the character, but the overall sequence of the dream is as follows:

A grey mist clouds your vision as you stumble along a cobbled alleyway in an unknown city. The mist parts and you find that you are no longer in a city and the cobble stone path ends in a dim jungle scene. A crooked soldier is attempting to extort money from a chariot rotting in some lost world of verdant jungle. Suddenly the soldier turns toward you and attacks. The soldier is charming, but violent, claiming you have ruined his business, driven him into poverty and forced him to extort money from strange chariots lying in swamps to make a living. As he fights, he whispers, "Ehrlich hod," over and over again. Suddenly the fight turns into a chase. You are being pursued by seven dimly-seen humanoid shapes loping behind you. You feel that you are in mortal danger as you run through a vaguely familiar residential district that is strangely overgrown with jungle flora and fauna. The chase ends in an armed fight with the dim pursuers, who try to claw you down and club you in some hidden location filled with shadowed skulls. The fight continues until you see a doorway into some outer darkness. Once you reach the darkened threshold, you know you can escape, but just as you get there, a horribly ugly crone appears from the darkness, cackling and gibbering as she reaches for you. Just before she touches you, you awaken.

After leaving their rooms, the Player Characters discover that everyone who slept or stayed in the common room overnight is dead – and partially devoured. Blood is everywhere and most of the bodies are headless. The owner is not there, he has run off long before the Player Characters awoke. The owner intends to bring the authorities. He will claim the Player Character who dreamed did this. He will claim he saw it from his room. While the Player Characters are investigating the deaths (or looting the bodies, or just standing there – stunned), the authorities arrive to arrest the Player Characters.

In Zamboula, the authorities are Pelishtim soldiers who serve the Turanians as the city watch. If the Games Master is originating the adventure elsewhere, substitute some appropriate guards. The goal of this encounter is to encourage the Player Characters to flee (possibly the city, if not the general area). Send enough soldiers (or waves of soldiers) to accomplish this – but the goal is not to kill the characters, or at least not the dreaming character. Once outside of the tavern, the guards will be mounted.

The character who dreamed hears voices and laughter during the whole of this encounter. He cannot tell if he is hearing it only in his head or if it is coming from behind certain doors, windows or objects. Anyone who did not have the dream will not hear the laughter.

Also, during this combat, Isilahi, the Darfari slave of the Captain of the Guard, shouts and points at the character who had the dream. He repeats over and over, 'Ilong z'ayoge! Ilong z'ayoge!' (He senses the character is accursed by a witch and believes the character has the 'curse that kills'). He will be utterly terrified of this character and will do anything to avoid being around him. Characters who speak Darfari will of course understand him. Characters who know a Southern Black Kingdom language may be able to figure out the approximate meaning. Characters familiar with the Black Kingdoms and/or its people may be able to make a Sense Motive skill check to determine that his fear is not of the character, but of the supernatural.

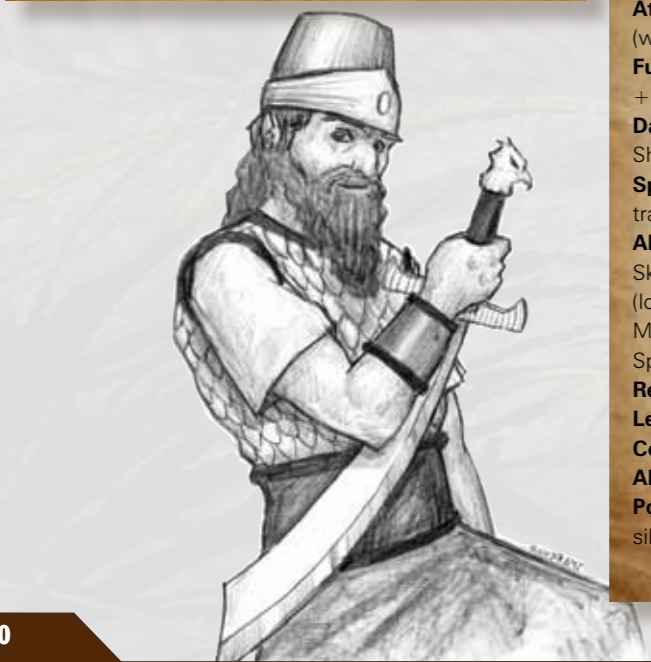


PELISHTI ASSHURI THE CITY WATCH

The watchmen did not accost him but swung on down the street, while the crowd opened a lane for them. They were Pelishtim, squat, hook-nosed, with blue-black beards sweeping their mailed breasts -- mercenaries hired for work the ruling Turanians considered beneath themselves, and no less hated by the mongrel population for that reason.

Robert E. Howard, Man-Eaters of Zamboula

Medium Humanoid (Pelishtim Soldier 2);
Hit Dice: 2d10+2 (13 hp);
Initiative: +2 (+2 Dex);
Speed: 30 ft.;
Dodge Defence: 13 (+1 level, +2 Dex);
Parry Defence: 17 (+1 level, +2 Str, +4 shield);
DR: 6 (scale corselet and cylindrical helmet);
Base Attack Bonus/Grapple: +2/+4;
Attack: Scimitar +4 melee; or Light Lance +4 melee; or Shemite bow +5 ranged (within 30'; -1 otherwise);
Damage: Scimitar 1d8+2 /18-20 x2 /AP 4; Light Lance 1d10+2 /x3 /AP 4; or Shemite bow (+2) 1d10+2 /x3 / AP 6;
Special Qualities: Pelishtim traits;
Space/Reach: 5 ft. (1)/5 ft. (1);
Saves: Fort +2, Ref +1, Will -1; Abilities: Str 15, Dex 14, Con 12, Int 13, Wis 10, Cha 8;
Skills: Handle Animal +4, Intimidate +1, Knowledge (arcana) +5, Knowledge (local) +3, Ride +7, Spot +5;
Feats: Mounted Combat, Point Blank Shot, Mounted Archery, Weapon Focus (Shemite bow);
Reputation: 1 (Cruel);
Leadership: -;
Code of Honour: Mercenary;
Allegiances: Captain Zelig, Turan, Zamboula;
Possessions: Scale corselet, cylindrical helmet and large shield, scimitar with an iron pommel shaped as a hawk, Shemite bow (+2), quiver of 40 arrows



Medium Humanoid (Pelishtim Soldier 4);
Hit Dice: 4d10+4 (26 hp);
Initiative: +3 (+2 Dex, +1 Reflex); Speed: 30 ft.;
Dodge Defence: 14 (+2 level, +2 Dex);
Parry Defence: 19 (+3 level, +2 Str, +4 shield); DR: 6 (scale corselet and cylindrical helmet); Base Attack Bonus/Grapple: +4/+6;
Attack: Scimitar +6 melee; or Light Lance +6 melee; or Shemite bow +7 ranged (within 30'; +6 otherwise);
Damage: Scimitar 1d8+2 /18-20 x2 /AP 4; Light Lance 1d10+2 /x3 /AP 4; or Shemite bow (+2) 1d10+2 /x3 / AP 6;
Special Attacks: Formation Combat (heavy cavalry);
Special Qualities: Pelishtim traits;
Space/Reach: 5 ft. (1)/5 ft. (1);
Saves: Fort +3, Ref +2, Will +0; Abilities: Str 15, Dex 15, Con 12, Int 13, Wis 10, Cha 8;
Skills: Handle Animal +4, Intimidate +3, Knowledge (arcana) +5, Knowledge (local) +3, Ride +9, Spot +7; Feats: Mounted Combat, Point Blank Shot, Mounted Archery, Ride-by Attack, Spirited Charge, Weapon Focus (Shemite bow);
Reputation: 3 (Cruel);
Leadership: -;
Code of Honour: Mercenary;
Allegiances: Captain Zelig, Turan, Zamboula;
Possessions: Scale corselet, cylindrical helmet and large shield, scimitar with a bronze pommel shaped as a hawk, Shemite bow (+2), quiver of 40 arrows

CAPTAIN ZELIG

Medium Humanoid (Pelishtim Soldier 6);
Hit Dice: 6d10+6 (39 hp);
Initiative: +5 (+3 Dex, +2 Reflex);
Speed: 30 ft.;
Dodge Defence: 16 (+3 level, +3 Dex);
Parry Defence: 21 (+4 level, +3 Str, +4 shield);
DR: 6 (scale corselet and cylindrical helmet); Base Attack Bonus/Grapple: +6/+9;
Attack: Scimitar +9 melee; or Light Lance +9 melee; or Shemite bow +10 ranged (within 30'; +8 otherwise);
Full Attack: Scimitar +9/+4 melee; or Light Lance +9/+4 melee; or Shemite bow +10/+5 ranged (within 30'; +8/+3 otherwise);
Damage: Scimitar 1d8+3 /18-20 x2 /AP 5; Light Lance 1d10+3 /x3 /AP 5; or Shemite bow (+3) 1d10+3 /x3 /AP 7;
Special Attacks: Formation Combat (heavy cavalry); **Special Qualities:** Pelishtim traits; Space/Reach: 5 ft. (1)/5 ft. (1); Saves: Fort +4, Ref +4, Will +1;
Abilities: Str 16, Dex 16, Con 13, Int 14, Wis 11, Cha 9;
Skills: Handle Animal +4, Intimidate +3, Knowledge (arcana) +6, Knowledge (local) +4, Ride +10, Spot +7; **Feats:** Improved Sunder, Mounted Archery, Mounted Combat, Point Blank Shot, Power Attack, Precise Shot, Ride-by Attack, Spirited Charge, Weapon Focus (Shemite bow);
Reputation: 15 (Cruel);
Leadership: -;
Code of Honour: Mercenary;
Allegiances: Jungir Khan, Turan, Zamboula;
Possessions: Scale corselet, cylindrical helmet and large shield, scimitar with a silver pommel shaped as a hawk, Shemite bow (+2), quiver of 40 arrows

The soldiers of Shem are considered to be men devoid of compassion or mercy. These cold-blooded killers are inhumanly cruel, fighting with the ferocity and lust of wild beasts. They do not leave fallen foes behind, but kill the wounded and the downed with pitiless intensity. Although some of the Shemitish mercenaries are skilled with swords and spears, their archers are the most in demand. Extremely keen of eye, the Shemites are feared for their deadly archery skills. They are practically born with bows in hand and horses beneath them. Dressed in scale corselets and cylindrical helmets, the sons of Shem are always ready for war.

Their swords have pommels shaped as hawks and the material it is made of displays the prowess of the mercenary. An asshuri with an iron hawk has killed at least ten men in battle. A bronze hawk indicates twenty slayings in war. A silver hawk shows fifty confirmed kills.

ISILAHİ CAPTAIN ZELİĞ'S SLAVE

Medium Humanoid (Darfari Barbarian 1/Thief 3);
Hit Dice: 1d10+3d8 (19 hp); Initiative: +6 (+1 Dex, +5 Reflex save);
Speed: 30 ft.; Dodge Defence: 13 (+1 level, +1 Dex, +1 Dodge);
Parry Defence: 15 (+1 level, +4 Str); DR: -; **Base Attack Bonus/Grapple:** +3/+7;
Attack: Club +8 melee;
Full Attack: Club +8 melee;
Damage: Club 1d8+4;
Special Attacks: Bite attack, sneak attack +2d6/+2d8, sneak attack style (club);
Special Qualities: Darfari traits, illiterate, track, fearless, versatility (-2 penalty), trap disarming, trap sense +1; Space/Reach: 5 ft. (1)/5 ft. (1);
Saves: Fort +3, Ref +6, Will +1 (-1 vs. Terror);
Abilities: Str 18, Dex 13, Con 10, Int 12, Wis 10, Cha 6;
Skills: Appraise +4, Bluff +5, Hide +8, Intimidate +5, Jump +7, Knowledge (local) +4, Move Silently +8, Perform (drums) +4, Profession (slave) +4, Survival +4, Tumble +4;
Feats: Eyes of the Cat b, Fighting Madness, Improved Unarmed Strike, Sneak Subdual;
Reputation: 2 (Cruel);
Leadership: -;
Code of Honour: None; Allegiances: Captain Zelig;
Possessions: Loin-cloth, sandals, club

ZAMBOULAN OWNER BARKEEP

Medium Humanoid (Zamboulan Commoner 4);
Hit Dice: 4d4-4 (6 hp);
Initiative: +2 (+1 Dex, +1 Reflex);
Speed: 30 ft.;
Dodge Defence: 13 (+2 level, +1 Dex);
Parry Defence: 11 (+2 level, -1 Str); DR: -;
Base Attack Bonus/Grapple: +2/+1;
Attack: Club +1 melee;
Damage: Club 1d8-1 /x2 /AP 0;
Special Qualities: Zamboulan traits, illiteracy; Space/Reach: 5 ft. (1)/5 ft. (1);
Saves: Fort +0, Ref +2, Will +1;
Abilities: Str 9, Dex 12, Con 8, Int 13, Wis 10, Cha 12;
Skills: Appraise +5, Bluff +5, Diplomacy +6, Gather Information +9, Knowledge (local) +4, Profession (bartending) +10, Sleight-of-Hand +4, Sense Motive +2, Spot +6;
Feats: Negotiator, Skill Focus (profession (bartending));
Reputation: 5 (Talented);
Leadership: -;
Code of Honour: None;
Allegiances: Jungir Khan, Turan, Zamboula;
Possessions: Sash, loose-fitting trousers, turban, blue silk shirt, club

The Zamboulan barkeep is absolutely convinced the character in question attacked and devoured his patrons.

CHAPTER 2 PROBLEMS FOLLOW

Wherever the characters go from here, either along some trade route or just someplace on the outskirts of Zamboula (or whatever city they started at), they should locate a caravanseraï (roadside trading inn) with an emblem of a soldier lifting a sack from a broken wagon or chariot emblazoned on the sign. A few coins are depicted as falling out of the sack. This is the Looting Soldier Caravansary.





This Caravansary has stood for over 100 years. Originally built by Stygians; it eventually fell into several different hands before its current owners claimed it. Built around an oasis, this walled compound lies only 2 miles from the nearest trade route. Its adobe walls lie alongside a bleak and barren landscape and are haphazardly splashed with white and brown paints. Several palm and date trees can be seen from the outside, towering over the 12 foot walls. Several stalls and living areas occupy the caravansary. The braying of camels and mules can be heard from outside the walls. The loud singing and raucous laughter of many men can also be heard. As the characters enter they will find several women dancing in the middle of the oasis.

This is where the characters meet Katrusha, the Zamboulan dancer, and her troupe. They dance nude. During the dance, she tries to attract the attention of the character-who-dreamed. She wants to talk to that character later.

At an appropriate time, Katrusha attempts to meet with the Player Character who had the dream. If this meeting happens, she tells them that her slave, a Darfari woman, says the character is cursed and that she can help. If the Player Characters want to meet this slave, Katrusha will bring her to the characters. Otherwise, go on to the next dream sequence. If the Player Characters are reasonably nice to the dancers, Katrusha will also offer to pay for rooms for the Player Characters.



The slave will introduce herself as Tunu, a Nganga or witch-doctor of sorts. She will tell the Player Characters that the one who has had the dream is cursed. She offers to protect them from the curse if he will give her some of his hair for a fetish charm. (Note: If accepted, the Games Master can roll for the warding, but no matter what is rolled, assume it is a failure). Tunu also tells them that they will have to slay the witch to permanently end the curse. She does not know who the witch is or where the witch is located, but suggests that the Player Characters seek out Mdahoma, a Ngil Master. She does not know exactly where Mdahoma lives these days, but believes he lives somewhere to the east of Stygia, in the grasslands south of the desert. She suggests that they travel to the trading town Utchasep on the Stygian border and look for her son, Kibwe, a slave to a Stygian noble. He would know Mdahoma's current whereabouts.

KATRUSHA THE ZAMBOULAN DANCER

Medium Humanoid
(Zamboulan Commoner 3/Temptress 3);
Hit Dice: 3d4+3d6+12 (30 hp);
Initiative: +7 (+3 Dex, +4 Reflex);
Speed: 30 ft.;
Dodge Defence: 15 (+2 level, +3 Dex);
Parry Defence: 13 (+2 level, +1 Str); DR: —;
Base Attack Bonus/Grapple: +3/+4;
Attack: Stiletto +6 melee finesse;
Damage: Stiletto 1d4+1 /x4 /AP 2;
Special Attack: Sneak attack +1d6;
Special Qualities: Zamboulan traits, illiteracy, comeliness, savoir-faire, seductive art +1, dance of desire 1/day;
Space/Reach: 5 ft. (1)/5 ft. (1);
Saves: Fort +4, Ref +7, Will +3;
Abilities: Str 13, Dex 16, Con 14, Int 11, Wis 9, Cha 16;
Skills*: Appraise +4, Balance +12, Bluff +7, Climb +4, Diplomacy +7, Escape Artist +5, Gather Information +4, Intimidate +7, Jump +14, Perform (dance) +17, Sense Motive +0, Spot +3, Sleight-of-Hand +4, Tumble +13 (* includes synergy and seductive art bonuses);
Feats: Acrobatic, Agile, Endurance, Skill Focus (perform (dance)); Reputation: 9 (Talented);
Leadership: —;
Code of Honour: None;
Allegiances: Her backup dancers, the Looting Soldier Caravansary;
Possessions: Cloak (she wraps herself in this when not performing), stiletto, bracelets, anklets, toe ring, gold earrings

Katrusha typically earns 3d6 silver pieces per day and has several noble patrons. She is noted for her ability to dance for hours non-stop. She also has a female Darfari slave, an elderly woman with some skill with Darfari fetishes and charms.

ZAMBOULAN BACKUP DANCERS

Medium Humanoid
(Zamboulan Commoner 3);
Hit Dice: 3d4+3 (11 hp);
Initiative: +3 (+2 Dex, +1 Reflex); Speed: 30 ft.;
Dodge Defence: 13 (+1 level, +2 Dex);
Parry Defence: 12 (+1 level, +1 Str); DR: –;
Base Attack Bonus/Grapple: +1/+2;
Attack: Stiletto +3 melee finesse;
Damage: Stiletto 1d4+1 /x4 /AP 2;
Special Qualities: Zamboulan traits, illiteracy; Space/
Reach: 5 ft. (1)/5 ft. (1);
Saves: Fort +2, Ref +3, Will +0;
Abilities: Str 12, Dex 14, Con 13, Int 10, Wis 8, Cha 15;
Skills: Appraise +4, Balance +4, Bluff +6, Climb +2, Jump +9, Perform (dance) +10, Spot +3, Tumble +7;
Feats: Acrobatic, Skill Focus (perform (dance));
Reputation: 5 (Talented);
Leadership: –;
Code of Honour: None;
Allegiances: Katrusha;
Possessions: Cloak (she wraps herself in this when not performing), stiletto, bracelets, anklets

ANOTHER DREAM

When the character that had the dream before falls asleep next, another dream occurs, going a bit further.

In your dreams you see several, naked Zamboulan dancers attacking a rotten treasure chest in a thatched-roof hut littered with human bones. The nude dancers are crying about their failure to defeat the chest. They all shout, “Ehrlich Hod will save you!” Suddenly the dancers kill themselves with jagged blades as a humanoid shape looms up from the shadows. The scenery changes and you see the shape talking to dusky, hawk-nosed figures who declare that all who oppose them shall die. You then find yourself chased by seven dimly-seen humanoid shapes that lope behind you. You feel that you are in

TUNU DARFARISLAVE WOMAN NGANGA

Medium Humanoid
(Darfari Commoner 3/Scholar 2);
Hit Dice: 3d4+2d6 (15 hp);
Initiative: +2 (+1 Dex, +1 Reflex); Speed: 30 ft.;
Dodge Defence: 13 (+1 level, +1 Dex, +1 dodge);
Parry Defence: 11 (+1 level, +0 Str); DR: –;
Base Attack Bonus/Grapple: +2/+2;
Attack: Fetish-stick +4 melee finesse;
Damage: Fetish-stick 1d2 /x2 /AP 0 (will break if used to cause damage);
Special Attack: Bite attack;
Special Qualities: Darfari traits, illiteracy, sorcery style x2, scholar, acolyte background, base power points, knowledge is power, +1 power point;
Space/Reach: 5 ft. (1)/5 ft. (1);
Saves: Fort +1, Ref +2, Will +6 (+4 vs. Terror);
Abilities: Str 10, Dex 13, Con 10, Int 12, Wis 14, Cha 14;
Skills: Craft (fetish) +9, Craft (herbalism) +3, Knowledge (arcana) +3, Knowledge (nature) +3, Knowledge (religion) +3, Perform (dance) +4, Perform (drums) +5, Perform (ritual) +4, Heal +12, Intimidate +4, Profession (nganga) +8, Sense Motive +4, Spot +4, Survival +6;
Feats: Self-Sufficient, Skill Focus (Heal);
Reputation: 5 (Talented);
Leadership: –;
Code of Honour: None; Allegiances: Katrusha; Magic
Attack: +3 (+1 level, +2 Cha);
Power Points: 7 (4 base, +2 Wis, +1 bonus; 14 maximum);
Sorcery Styles Known: Counterspells, Curses; Spells
Known: Lesser ill-fortune, warding;
Corruption: None; Obsession: None;
Possessions: Loin-cloth, sandals, fetish-stick, big and dangling earrings, headband, various powders and herbs

mortal danger as you run through a vaguely familiar residential district. The chase sequence ends with an armed fight with the dim pursuers, who try to claw you down and club you in some hidden location filled with shadowed skulls. The fight continues until you see a doorway into some outer darkness. Once you reach the darkened threshold, you know you can escape, but just as you get there, a horribly ugly crone appears from the darkness, cackling and gibbering as she reaches for you. Just before she touches you, you awaken.

After leaving their rooms, the Player Characters discover that everyone who slept or stayed in the common room overnight is dead – and partially devoured. This includes the old slave woman, regardless of where she slept. Blood is everywhere and some of the bodies have had their heads and spines extracted from the bodies. Katrusha intends to bring the authorities to avenge her dead dancers and the dead slave. She will claim the Player Character who dreamed did this. She will claim she saw it from her room. She will relay that her late slave insisted the character was cursed and evil. While the Player Characters are investigating the deaths (or looting the bodies, or just standing there – stunned), the authorities arrive to arrest the Player Characters.

The goal of this encounter is to encourage the Player Characters to flee (hopefully toward Utchasep. Send enough soldiers (or waves of soldiers) to accomplish this – but the goal is not to kill the characters, or at least not the dreaming character. Once outside of the tavern, the guards will be mounted.

TURANIAN SOLDIERS

Medium Humanoid
(Turanian Soldier 3);
Hit Dice: 3d10+3 (21 hp);
Initiative: +3 (+2 Dex, +1 Reflex); Speed: 30 ft.;
Dodge Defence: 13 (+1 level, +2 Dex);
Parry Defence: 18 (+2 level, +2 Str, +4 shield);
DR: 6 (sleeveless mail shirt and gold-spined helmet with turban); Base Attack Bonus/Grapple: +3/+5;
Attack: Scimitar +5 melee; or Light Lance +5 melee; or Hyrkanian bow +6 ranged ; Full Attack: Scimitar +5 melee; or Light Lance +5 melee; or Hyrkanian bow +6 ranged ; Damage: Scimitar 1d8+2 /18-20 x2 /AP 4; Light Lance 1d10+2 /x3 /AP 4; or Hyrkanian bow (+2) 1d10+2 /19-20 x2 /AP 5;
Special Attacks: Formation Combat (Light Cavalry);
Special Qualities: Turanian traits; Space/Reach: 5 ft. (1)/5 ft. (1);
Saves: Fort +4, Ref +3, Will +1; Abilities: Str 14, Dex 15, Con 12, Int 13, Wis 10, Cha 8;
Skills: Craft (bowyer) +3, Handle Animal +4, Intimidate +2, Ride +8, Spot +6, Survival +2;
Feats: Mounted Combat, Far Shot, Mounted Archery, Weapon Focus (Hyrkanian bow);
Reputation: 1 (Cruel);
Leadership: –;
Code of Honour: None;
Allegiances: Jungir Khan, Turan, Zamboula;
Possessions: Sash, loose-fitting trousers, gold-spined helmet with turban, white silk shirt over sleeveless mail, tiger-skin cloak, scimitar, Hyrkanian bow (+2), quiver of 40 arrows

LUBAYO AHGA SALAR LEADER OF 100 GUARDSMEN

Medium Humanoid
(Turanian Nomad 2/Soldier 4);
Hit Dice: 6d10+6 (42 hp);
Initiative: +7 (+3 Dex, +4 Reflex); Speed: 30 ft.;
Dodge Defence: 17 (+3 level, +3 Dex, +1 favoured terrain);
Parry Defence: 21 (+4 level, +3 Str, +4 shield);
DR: 6 (sleeveless mail shirt and gold-spined helmet with turban);
Base Attack Bonus/Grapple: +6/+9;
Attack: Yataghan +9 melee; or Light Lance +9 melee; or Hyrkanian bow +10 ranged;
Full Attack: Yataghan +9/+4 melee; or Light Lance +9/+4 melee; or Hyrkanian bow +10/+5 ranged; Damage: Yataghan 1d10+3 /19-20 x3 /AP 7; Light Lance 1d10+3 /x3 /AP 5; or Hyrkanian bow (+3) 1d10+5 /19-20 x2 /AP 6;
Special Attacks: Formation Combat (Light Cavalry);
Special Qualities: Turanian traits, favoured terrain +1, born to the saddle;
Space/Reach: 5 ft. (1)/5 ft. (1);
Saves: Fort +8, Ref +7, Will +1;
Abilities: Str 16, Dex 16, Con 13, Int 14, Wis 11, Cha 9;
Skills: Craft (bowyer) +4, Handle Animal +5, Intimidate +5, Ride +12, Search +4, Spot +9, Survival +4;
Feats: Mounted Combat, Far Shot, Mounted Archery, Point Blank Shot, Precise Shot, Ride-by Attack, Track, Weapon Focus (Hyrkanian bow), Weapon Specialisation (Hyrkanian bow);
Reputation: 5 (Cruel);
Leadership: –;
Code of Honour: None;
Allegiances: Jungir Khan, Turan, Zamboula;
Possessions: Sash, loose-fitting trousers, gold-spined helmet with turban, white silk shirt over sleeveless mail, tiger-skin cloak, yataghan, Hyrkanian bow (+3), quiver of 40 arrows

CHAPTER 3 UTCHASEP

At first the characters might mistake Utchasep as another caravansary surrounded by the southern grasslands of Stygia, however as they get closer they will see that this walled compound has two towers and gates, as well as a fortified tower in the North-western portion of this trading post. As the characters enter the walled trading post they will notice an oasis in the centre of the main compound surrounded by palm trees and thick green bushes.

The fortified tower, upon closer inspection, is actually a temple with the symbol of the Stygian god Hathor embedded over the main double doors. Several Stygian soldiers can be seen moving about the trading post and exiting and

entering the temple. Like most trading posts, Utchasep is host to many different peoples selling or trading their wares. Fruits, vegetables and even slaves can be found all over Utchasep.

Once in Utchasep, the characters will want to find Kibwe. The name of a slave is not well known information at all – almost impossible to find among the Stygians, but possible through other Darfari slaves. Kibwe is only known by that name among some of the Darfari slaves; his name to his Stygian masters is Seneh Bak. He serves the priestess Ma'ay-Kheru as her slave. She lives on an estate outside of Utchasep, but can often be found in the Temple of Hathor. A Gather Information check of DC 25 will find the information fairly easily (remember, a Gather Information check takes 1d4+1 hours). Failing that, the slave will actually make contact with the Player Character on his own (he will make it seem accidental, but will have been sent by his mistress, who was told by her demonic patron to send the slave).

Kibwe knows his mistress dabbles in sorcery and finds anyone interested in sorcerous matters to be a matter of interest for her. Kibwe does indeed know where the Ngil Master lives, although he tries denying it, trying to find out why the characters want the information. Eventually he will tell them where Mdahoma lives (although he lies), and that the Ngil Master is clumsy but menacing, and an utter fanatic (truthful). He also tells them that Mdahoma will only see people one at a time (a lie), and that if his home is approached by a group, he will climb into the spirit world and hide (believes this is the truth). Kibwe is trying to set things up so his Stygian masters can get the dreaming character alone if possible. Further, Kibwe will tell the Player Characters the Ngil Master will only see people at night (a lie), when his power is the strongest (the truth). The lie about the night is to make sure his mistress has time to decide if she wants to do anything and/or mount some sort of kidnapping, assault or other activity.

Regardless of where the Player Characters decide to stay – or even if they decide to stay in Utchasep – Kibwe will go to his mistress and tell her everything. Kibwe is a treacherous sort and is always looking to better his position.

If the dreaming character and/or his companions travel to the location described by Kibwe, a small Stygian military band will be waiting in ambush. The Stygians are led by Ma'ay-Kheru (a beautiful, menacing temptress) who wants the PC for a sacrifice. She pulled several strings to get Sheft-Tepay, the High Priest of the Army of the Temple of Hathor in Utchasep, to give her command of a small unit of soldiers in order to capture the Player Character(s). The Stygian unit includes a physician and a government scribe, whose job is not only to report to the government about the use of its troops but to keep track of all weapons allocated to the soldiers and see they are returned to the stores in Utchasep afterwards.

The ambush site is a ravine not far from the main trade route. The Stygian soldiers are up on the sides while the Player Characters are likely in the ravine.

Send enough troops to seriously challenge, but not defeat the Player Characters utterly – the Player Characters should win. Typically the archers will fire first and, after the enemy has either taken cover or been sufficiently softened, the infantry will run in. Include the commander (who is mounted in a chariot with a chariot driver) and his adjutants. The commander will typically shoot arrows while his driver moves him around the combat area. No one will intentionally engage the character-who-dreamed in lethal combat. Anyone engaging that Player Character will strike for non-lethal damage with their weapons, their goal is to capture that character and kill the rest.

Ma'ay-Kheru will not actually take part in the combat; she will watch from a ridge in the distance. If her troops are defeated, Ma'ay-Kheru will flee in her chariot back to her estate on the outskirts of Utchasep.

After the fight, if they win, the Player Characters will likely want to avenge themselves on the slave Kibwe. He will be at his mistress' estate. However, at this point, they will meet the Ngil Master. This is not where he lives, but he knew to be here (although he will not say how). He will tend to any wounded Player Characters. At this point move to the next chapter.

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MA'AY KHERU'S ESTATE





Map Key:

1. This is the main entry gate. A gate-keeper admits people.

2. The house of the gate-keeper.

3. Temple to Set and the Stygian gods. This darksome temple has a blood-stained altar and at least one image of a shambling, bestial god. Some maintain a stable of serpents for their temple.

4. The noble’s personal garden. The centre piece of this garden is a beautiful pool with a walkway around it. Trees and shrubs complete the garden, each standing in a puddle of water.

5. A flight of shallow steps brings a person to the threshold of the house, which has the owner’s name carved on its stone or wood lintel. Four intricately detailed columns support the roof. Passing through the door takes one to the vestibule where a servant greets the person and takes them to the reception room.

6. These are reception halls. One end has chairs where a servant pours water over the feet of the visitors and dries them with linen towels. The water runs through a channel into a vase for emptying later. The southern section is more enclosed and is used as sitting room in the winter months.

7. The central hall: This is the heart of the home. Several small windows high up let in light. Braziers of burning charcoal are set on cool evenings. Games and other entertainment happen in this room.

8. This is the sitting room for the women with their bedrooms attached.
9. This is the mistress’s bathroom and toilet area.

10. These are the toilets for guests and there is also a waste deposit area.

11. This is the mistress’s bedroom.

12. These are guest bedrooms.

13. This is where the horses are watered. It is an open air stall.

14. These are horse stables with a bucket for hay or grain in each stall. It is enclosed with a roof.

15. This is the sleeping quarters of the servants. It is enclosed with a roof.

16. This is the kitchen of the estate. It is enclosed with a roof.

17. This is where cattle are fed grain and watered. It is an open air stall.

18. This is a cattle yard with an entrance to the street. It is an open air yard.

19. This is the well of the estate. It is an open air stall.

20. This area is the grain storage area, being large enough to both store grain for the estate and as a means of making a profit through trading. Steps lead to a platform so grain can be placed in and out of the bins.

21. Back in the house, this room is used to store linens, clothes and water.

If the characters do not win this fight, then the character who had the dreams will be captured and the remainder of the party will either be dead or left for dead. In this case, the character who had the dream will be rescued by a demon summoned by the Ngil Master (although he will probably be unconscious and never know what saved him). The Ngil Master will tend to any party members left for dead. At this point move to the next chapter.

The goal of this encounter is so the characters can meet the Ngil Master and gain the eldritch staff described in the next chapter.

SENEH BAK KIBWE
SLAVE TO MA’AY KHERU

Medium Humanoid
(Darfari Barbarian 1/Thief 3);
Hit Dice: 1d10+3d8+8 (27 hp);
Initiative: +6 (+1 Dex, +5 Reflex save);
Speed: 30 ft.;
Dodge Defence: 13 (+1 level, +1 Dex, +1 Dodge);
Parry Defence: 15 (+1 level, +4 Str); DR: – ;
Base Attack Bonus/Grapple: +3/+7;
Attack: Club +8 melee; Full Attack: Club +8 melee;
Damage: Club 1d8+4;
Special Attacks: Bite attack, sneak attack +2d6/+2d8, sneak attack style (club);
Special Qualities: Darfari traits, illiterate, track, fearless, versatility (-2 penalty), trap disarming, trap sense +1;
Space/Reach: 5 ft. (1)/5 ft. (1);
Saves: Fort +5, Ref +6, Will +6 (+4 vs. Terror);
Abilities: Str 18, Dex 13, Con 14, Int 12, Wis 16, Cha 6;
Skills: Appraise +4, Bluff +5, Hide +8, Intimidate +5, Jump +7, Knowledge (local) +4, Move Silently +8, Perform (drums) +4, Perform (ritual) +2, Survival +7, Tumble +4;
Feats: Eyes of the Cat b, Fighting Madness, Iron Will, Sneak Subdual;
Reputation: 12 (Trickster);
Leadership: – ;
Code of Honour: None;
Allegiances: Set, Ma’ay-Kheru;
Possessions: Loin-cloth, sandals, club

MA’AY KHERU

Medium Humanoid
(Stygian Temptress 5/Noble 4/Scholar 1);
Hit Dice: 6d6+4d8+20 (51 hp);
Initiative: +7 (+2 Dex, +5 Reflex save);
Speed: 30 ft.;
Dodge Defence: 15 (+3 level, +2 Dex);
Parry Defence: 13 (+3 level, +0 Str); DR: – ;
Base Attack Bonus/Grapple: +6/+6;
Attack: Flint dagger +8 melee finesse; Full
Attack: Flint dagger +8/+3 melee finesse;
Damage: Flint dagger 1d4;
Special Attacks: Sneak attack +1d6;
Special Qualities: Stygian traits, comeliness, savoir-faire, title, rank hath its privileges, wealth, seductive art +1, dance of desire +1, special regional feature +1, poison use, seductive savant, social map (see Conan: Hyboria’s Fallen), binding contract, art of distraction, sorcery style, scholar, lay priest background, base power point, knowledge is power;
Space/Reach: 5 ft. (1)/5 ft. (1); Saves: Fort +4, Ref +7, Will +13 (+11 vs. Corruption);
Abilities: Str 10, Dex 14, Con 15, Int 16, Wis 16, Cha 18;
Skills*: Bluff +16, Craft (alchemy) +5, Diplomacy +20*, Gather Information +20*, Handle Animal +7, Intimidate +20*, Knowledge (arcane) +9, Knowledge (Mystery: Derketo) +15, Knowledge (Mystery: Set) +12, Knowledge (Mystery: Hathor) +12, Knowledge (nobility) +8, Perform (dance) +14*, Perform (ritual) +17*, Profession (priestess) +7, Search +5, Sense Motive +19*, Spot +8 (* includes bonuses for seductive art and for mysteries known (see Conan: Stygia – Serpent of the South));
Feats: Carouser, Debaucher*, Investigator, Negotiator, Ritual Sacrifice, Persuasive, Steely Gaze (* she qualifies for this feat because of her rank in Derketo’s Mysteries); Reputation: 17 (Villain); Leadership: – ;
Code of Honour: None;
Allegiances: Maati-fem-des, Temple of Derketo, Temple of Hathor;
Magic Attack: +7 (+2 level, +4 Cha, +1 special regional feature);
Power Points: 7 (4 base, +3 Wis; 14 maximum);
Sorcery Styles Known: Summoning;
Spells Known: Demonic Pact;
Corruption: 5;
Obsession: None;
Possessions: Wig, sheer pleated linen cloak, blue beaded dress, Stygian noble’s clothing

Ma’ay-Kheru is a dusky-skinned Stygian with beautiful but haunting features. She has emerald green eyes accentuated with kohl. She is a priestess in several temples, so her body is completely shaved of hair. She usually wears gorgeous wigs, however. In Utchasep, Ma’ay-Kheru is in charge of the clothing of Hathor’s statues. She is in charge of the lesser priestesses who clean, feed and maintain the statues in the Hathor temple. In performance of her duties, she wears a sheer white linen kilt, but on social occasions likes to wear a blue, beaded dress.



Ma'ay-Kheru's full title is Adept Tcheseru Priestess of the Temple of Derketo in Luxur, Overseer of the Umet Priestesses of the Temple of Hathor in Utchasep, Tscheseru Acolyte of the Temple of Set in Karnath, Keeper of the Fourth Mystery of Derketo, Keeper of the Third Mystery of Hathor, Keeper of the Second Mystery of Set, Mistress of the Secrets of Third Chamber of the Temple of Derketo in Luxur.

Ma'ay-Kheru is ambitious. She has been playing the political game for a while, moving up in ranks in various temples. She is trying to become a full-time priestess with a high-priestess ranking. Her primary goal right now is to become High-Priestess of the Shrine of Derketo's Harem in the Temple of Derketo in Luxur, and from there to become the Hem Netjer of that temple, but she isn't the sort to put all of her eggs in one basket, so she is manoeuvring for power in several temples.

Although not a member of the House of the Black Circle in any of her temples, she has managed to learn one spell from a captured Atlaian sorcerer – demonic pact. With that spell,

she summoned the mighty demon Maati-femdes, whose eyes are like knives. This demon, in return for sacrifices, is helping her make political and sorcerous choices. This demon has selected the dreaming Player Character to be the next sacrifice because of a feud with the demon afflicting the Player Character. If she has enough time, she will probably summon the demon to protect herself and her estate from vengeful Player Characters.

She keeps her pact with the demon a secret, lest the House of the Black Circle discover she has been practising without their supervision. She does, however, hope the House of the Black Circle will accept her as a novice so she can receive formal sorcerous training. The Temple of Derketo is currently grooming her as a full-time, fully ordained priestess as soon as she is ready (she needs to be a 4th level scholar to take the Priest feat). She hopes to learn Hypnotism from the temple of Derketo and become ordained from there into the House of the Black Circle – if she can keep her pact secret.

2ND UNIT STYGIAN INFANTRY OF THE TEMPLE OF HATHOR IN UTCHASEP

Medium Humanoid
(Stygian (hybrid) commoner 3/soldier 3);
Hit Dice: 3d4+3d10+12 (36 hp);
Initiative: +3 (+1 Dex, +2 Reflex save);
Speed: 25 ft.;
Dodge Defence: 13 (+2 level, +1 Dex);
Parry Defence: 19 (+3 level, +1 Str, +4 shield bonus, +1 parry);
DR: –;
Base Attack Bonus/Grapple: +4/+6;
Attack: Bronze Khopesh +7 melee;
Damage: Bronze Khopesh 2d4+1/18-20 x2/ AP 4; **Special Attacks:** Formation Combat (skirmisher); **Special Qualities:** Stygian (hybrid) qualities, farmer background skills, illiteracy;
Space/Reach: 5 ft. (1)/5 ft. (1);
Saves: Fort +6, Ref +3, Will +2;
Abilities: Str 14, Dex 12, Con 14, Int 11, Wis 10, Cha 9;
Skills: Climb +4, Handle Animal +9, Intimidate +2, Listen +4, Profession (farmer) +11, Search +3, Spot +3, Survival +2, Swim +5, Use Rope +7;
Feats: Alertness, Athletic, Endurance, Parry, Skill Focus (profession (farmer)), Weapon Focus (khopesh); Reputation: 2 (Talented);
Leadership: –;
Code of Honour: None;
Allegiances: Stygian priesthood, Stygian nobility, unit commander;
Possessions: Bronze dagger, bronze khopesh, steel cap, antique large shield

2ND UNIT STYGIAN ARCHERS OF THE TEMPLE OF HATHOR IN UTCHASEP

Medium Humanoid
(Stygian soldier 3);
Hit Dice: 3d10 (16 hp);
Initiative: +2 (+1 Dex, +1 Ref.);
Speed: 30 ft.;
Dodge Defence: 12 (+1 level, +1 Dex);
Parry Defence: 13 (+2 level, +1 Str); DR: 0; Base
Attack Bonus/Grapple: +3/+5;
Attack: Stygian bow +6 ranged or bronze dagger +5 melee;
Full Attack: Stygian bow +4/+4 ranged or bronze dagger +5 melee;
Damage: Stygian bow 1d12+2/19-20 x2 / AP 4; or bronze dagger 1d4+1/19-20 x2/ AP 1;
Special Attacks: Formation Combat (skirmisher);
Special Qualities: Stygian qualities;
Space/Reach: 5 ft. (1)/5 ft. (1);
Saves: Fort +3, Ref +2, Will +0 (-2 vs. Corruption);
Abilities: Str 14, Dex 13, Con 11, Int 10, Wis 8, Cha 7;
Skills: Climb +5, Handle Animal +0, Jump +5, Knowledge (arcane) +4, Knowledge (local) +3, Perform (ritual) +2, Search +3;
Feats: Disciple of Archery*, Point Blank Shot, Rapid Shot, Weapon Focus (Stygian bow);
Reputation: 1 (Brave);
Leadership: –;
Code of Honour: None;
Allegiances: Unit Commander, Set, King of Stygia;
Possessions: Linen kilt, daggers, sheaf of 30 arrows, Stygian bow

METU MESTCHETCH ADEPT MESHAY PRIEST OF SET COMMANDER OF THE 2ND UNIT STYGIAN ARMY OF THE TEMPLE OF HATHOR IN UTCHASEP KEEPER OF THE THIRD MYSTERY OF SET

Medium Humanoid
(Stygian Noble 4/Scholar 3/Soldier 3);
Hit Dice: 4d8+3d6+3d10 (45 hit points);
Initiative: +5 (+2 Dex, +3 Ref);
Speed: 30 ft.;
Dodge defence: 15 (+3 level, +2 Dex);
Parry defence: 21 (+5 level, +2 Str, +4 shield);
DR: 6 (Bronze scale hauberk and helmet);
BAB/Grapple: +8/+10;
Attack: Khopesh +10 melee or Stygian Bow +12 or Alchemical weapon +10 ranged;
Full Attack: Khopesh +10/+5 melee or Stygian Bow +12/+7 ranged or Alchemical weapon +10/+5 ranged;
Damage: Khopesh 2d4+2/18-20 x2/AP 6 or Stygian Bow (+2) 1d12+2/19-20 x2/AP 4 or Alchemical weapon (varies); Space/Reach: 5 ft (1)/5 ft (1);
Special Attacks: Formation combat (light cavalry);
Special Qualities: Stygian traits, bonus feat in lieu of sorcery style x2, base power points, scholar, background (lay priest), knowledge is power +2, title, rank hath its privileges, special regional feature +1, social ability (ally), +1 power point, +4 skill points in lieu of advanced spells;
Saves: Fort +5, Ref +5, Will +11 (+9 vs. corruption); **Abilities:** Str 14, Dex 14, Con 10, Int 17, Wis 16, Cha 14;
Skills: Appraise +5, Bluff +11, Concentration +4, Craft (alchemy) +12, Craft (herbalism) +7, Decipher Script +9, Handle Animal +4, Heal +5, Intimidate +16, Knowledge (arcana) +14, Knowledge (mystery: Set) +13, Knowledge (nobility) +9, Knowledge (tactics) +15, Perform (ritual) +8, Profession (priest-general) +14, Profession (scribe) +5, Ride +6, Search +5, Sense Motive +11, Sleight-of-Hand +13;
Feats: Diligent, Knowledgeable, Mounted Archery, Mounted Combat, Power Attack, Improved Sunder, Skill Focus (intimidate), Skill Focus (craft (alchemy)), Steely Gaze;
Code of Honour: None;
Reputation: 15 (Brave);
Leadership: –;
Allegiances: Father Set, High Priest; Base Power Points: 8 (4 base, +3 Wis, +1 bonus; 14 maximum); **Magical Attack:** +5 (+2 level, +2 Cha, +1 special regional feature);
Possessions: Kilt, priest's mantle, khopesh, alchemical weapons, bronze scale hauberk, bronze crested helmet, leather & wood tear-drop-shaped shield, Stygian bow, 40 arrows, chariot

*feat from Conan:

The Free Companies.

If this volume is not available, substitute Improved Initiative

NETCHET PERSH'T
PHYSICIAN SURGEON KEEPER
OF DJEHUTY'S FIRST MYSTERY

Medium Humanoid
Stygian Scholar 3rd level;
Hit Dice: 3d6-3 (6 hit points);
Initiative: +2 (+1 Dex, +1 Ref);
Speed: 30 ft.;
Dodge defence: 12 (+1 level, +1 Dex);
Parry defence: 11 (+1 level, +0 Str);
BAB/Grapple: +2/+2;
Attack: Alchemical weapon +3 ranged ;
Full Attack: Alchemical weapon +3 ranged;
Damage: Alchemical weapon (varies);
Space/Reach: 5 ft (1)/5 ft (1);
Special Qualities: Stygian traits, sorcery style, base power points, scholar, background (lay priest), knowledge is power, 2 bonus feats (instead of sorcery styles), +4 skill points (instead of advanced spells and bonus spells);
Saves: Fort +0, Ref +2, Will +4 (+2 vs. corruption);
Abilities: Str 10, Dex 12, Con 8, Int 15, Wis 14, Cha 13;
Skills: Bluff +6, Craft (alchemy) +15, Craft (herbalism) +13, Gather Information +5, Handle Animal +3, Knowledge (arcana) +10, Knowledge (nature) +7, Knowledge (mystery: Djehuty) +7, Knowledge (mystery: Set) +4, Heal +15, Perform (ritual) +9, Profession (physician/surgeon) +6, Profession (priest) +4, Profession (scribe) +4, Sense Motive +7, Sleight-of-Hand +5; Feats: Stygian Physician, Surgery, Skill Focus (Heal), Skill Focus (craft (alchemy)), Skill Focus (craft (herbalism));
Code of Honour: None;
Reputation: 8 (Talented);
Leadership: –;
Allegiances: Father Set, High Priest of Djehuty's Temple in Re-Hayp, Ma'ay-Kheru;
Base Power Points: 7 (4 base, +2 Wisdom, +1 bonus) (14 maximum); Magical Attack: +1 (+0 level, +1 Cha);
Corruption: 2;
Possessions: Kilt, priest's mantle, surgeon's kit, alchemical weapon (Games Master's choice)

The physicians of Stygia are typically scholarly priests without sorcerous training, and Netchet-Pershāt is no exception. His dalliances with Ma'ay-Kheru are slowly corrupting his soul.

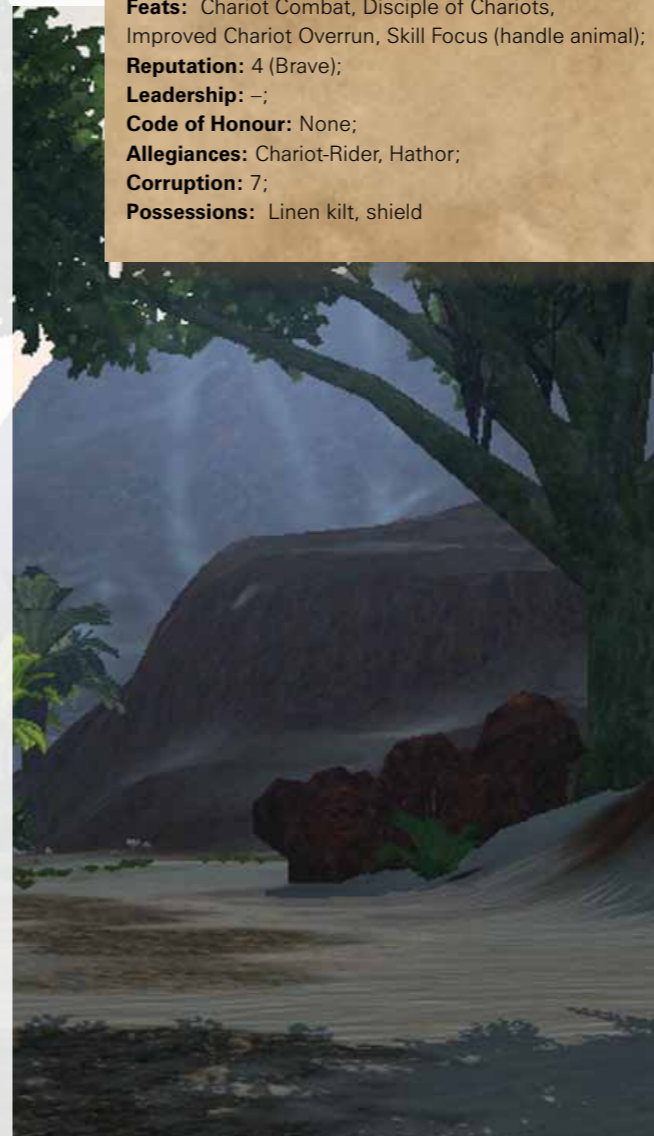
HUIA ASAR SCRIBE KEEPER
OF DJEHUTY'S FIRST
MYSTERY

Medium Humanoid
Stygian Scholar 1st level;
Hit Dice: 1d6-1 (2 hit points);
Initiative: +1 (+1 Dex, +0 Ref); Speed: 30 ft.;
Dodge defence: 11 (+0 level, +1 Dex);
Parry defence: 10 (+0 level, +0 Str);
BAB/Grapple: +0/+0;
Attack: Dagger +1 melee finesse or Stygian Bow +2 ranged ;
Full Attack: Dagger +1 melee finesse or Stygian Bow +2 ranged; Damage: Dagger 1d4/ 19-20 x2 / AP 1 or Stygian Bow 1d12 / 19-20 x2/ AP 2;
Space/Reach: 5 ft (1)/5 ft (1);
Special Qualities: Stygian traits, sorcery style, base power points, scholar, background (lay priest), knowledge is power;
Saves: Fort -1, Ref +1, Will +5 (+2 vs. corruption);
Abilities: Str 10, Dex 12, Con 8, Int 14, Wis 14, Cha 13;
Skills: Appraise +4, Concentration +3, Craft (alchemy) +10, Decipher Script +8, Gather Information +5, Handle Animal +3, Heal +4, Intimidate +3, Knowledge (arcana) +10, Knowledge (engineering and architecture) +8, Knowledge (Mystery: Djehuty) +8, Perform (ritual) +7, Profession (scribe) +9, Sleight-of-Hand +7; Feats: Diligent, Knowledgeable, Skill Focus (profession (scribe));
Code of Honour: None;
Reputation: 7 (Talented);
Leadership: –;
Allegiances: Father Set, High Priest of the temple of Hathor;
Base Power Points: 6 (4 base, +2 Wisdom) (12 maximum);
Magical Attack: +2 (+0 level, +2 Cha);
Possessions: Kilt, stylus, quill, wig

Huia-Asar is a young scribe with the title Third Novice Priest of Texts in the Army of the Temple of Hathor in Utchasep, Keeper of Djehuty's First Mystery. He is looking for a way to stand out and achieve a higher rank. He answers primarily to the Adept Priest of Acolytes in the Army of the Temple of Hathor in Utchasep and the Overseer of the Priests of Texts in the Army of the Temple of Hathor in Utchasep. His function is to report to the temple about the use of its troops and to keep track of all weapons allocated to the soldiers and see they are returned to the stores in Utchasep afterwards. His father is the High Priest of Texts in the House of the Black Circle and Keeper of all Djehuty's and Seshet's Mysteries, so Huia-Asar feels he must distinguish himself soon or his father will look upon him as a failure.

CHARIOT DRIVERS

Medium Humanoid
(Stygian soldier 3);
Hit Dice: 3d10-3 (13 hp);
Initiative: +1 (+0 Dex, +1 Ref.);
Speed: 30 ft.;
Dodge Defence: 11 (+1 level, +0 Dex);
Parry Defence: 16 (+2 level, +1 Str, +3 shield when using it to defend noble archer);
DR: 0;
Base Attack Bonus/Grapple: +3/+5;
Attack: Unarmed Strike +5 melee;
Full Attack: Unarmed Strike +5 melee;
Damage: Unarmed Strike 1d4+2/ x2/ AP 0;
Special Attacks: Formation Combat (heavy cavalry);
Special Qualities: Stygian qualities;
Space/Reach: 5 ft. (1)/5 ft. (1);
Saves: Fort +2, Ref +1, Will +0 (-2 vs. Corruption);
Abilities: Str 12, Dex 11, Con 9, Int 10, Wis 8, Cha 13;
Skills: Handle Animal +10, Knowledge (arcane) +4, Knowledge (local) +2, Perform (ritual) +5, Profession (chariot driver) +5;
Feats: Chariot Combat, Disciple of Chariots, Improved Chariot Overrun, Skill Focus (handle animal);
Reputation: 4 (Brave);
Leadership: –;
Code of Honour: None;
Allegiances: Chariot-Rider, Hathor;
Corruption: 7;
Possessions: Linen kilt, shield



MDAHOMA NGIL MASTER

Medium Humanoid
(Darfari Barbarian 5/Scholar 11);
Hit Dice: 5d10+5d6+6 (51 hp);
Initiative: +10 (+3 Dex, +7 Reflex save);
Speed: 30 ft.;
Dodge Defence: 21 (+7 level, +3 Dex, +1 Dodge);
Parry Defence: 17 (+5 level, +2 Str);
DR: – ;
Base Attack Bonus/Grapple: +13/+15;
Attack: Club +16 melee;
Full Attack: Club +16/+11/+6 melee;
Damage: Club 1d8+2;
Special Attacks: Bite attack;
Special Qualities: Darfari traits, illiterate, fearless, versatility (-2 penalty), bite sword, crimson mist, trap sense +1, uncanny dodge, mobility, sorcery style x4, scholar, background (acolyte), base power points, knowledge is power, +3 power points, advanced spell x9, bonus spell x3, increased maximum power points (triple);
Space/Reach: 5 ft. (1)/5 ft. (1);
Saves: Fort +7, Ref +10, Will +13 (+11 vs. Terror);
Abilities: Str 15, Dex 16, Con 11, Int 15, Wis 17, Cha 20;
Skills: Bluff +8, Concentration +5, Craft (herbalism) +10, Craft (fetish) +8, Craft (mask) +10, Hide +10, Heal +13, Intimidate +16, Knowledge (arcana) +20, Knowledge (nature) +13, Knowledge (Mystery: Ngil) +14, Listen +6, Move Silently +10, Perform (chant) +10, Perform (drums) +10, Perform (Ngil dancing) +19, Perform (ritual) +14, Sense Motive +8, Spot +6, Survival +10; Feats: Endurance, Fighting Madness, Focused Magical Link, Hexer, Iron Will, Leadership, Performer, Ritual Sacrifice, Steely Gaze, Tortured Sacrifice, Track;
Reputation: 26 (Cruel);
Leadership: 21 (10th level cohort; 200 1st, 8 2nd, 3 3rd, 1 4th level followers) ;
Code of Honour: None;
Allegiances: Ngil cult;
Magic Attack: +14 (+6 level, +5 Cha, +1 bonus, +2 totem mask);
Power Points: 7 (4 base, +3 Wis, +3 bonus; –3 obsession; 21 maximum);
Sorcery Styles Known: Counterspells, Curses, Hypnotism, Summoning;
Spells Known: Banish outsider, curse of Yizil, domination, doom of the doll, enslave, entrance, greater ill-fortune, greater warding, hypnotic suggestion, incantation of Amalric's witchman, lesser ill-fortune, mass hypnotic suggestion, master-words and signs, shamanic ecstasy, summon demon, warding;
Corruption: None;
Obsession: Defeating his enemy;
Possessions: Loin-cloth, sandals, cudgel, body paint, fetishes, fetish-stick, Ngil fetish bones (Skill Focus (Perform (ritual))), Negotiator, Summoner), shaman's mask, totem mask

See the next issue of The Ancible for Part 2

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exilis

gameplay · experience · evolved

1309, The world of Ex illis...

...a world completely different from the one we know, altered by the Fael, a strange fog that spread over the lands of Europe in 1246. Each passage of the fog has brought great upheaval: unexpected disappearances, monstrous metamorphoses and the arrival of creatures of legend. Former rulers and mythic heroes have blurred Europe's borders, causing endless political strife inside the different kingdoms of Europe. Now, mythological beings share everyday life with ordinary people. It's quite a common thing to see ogres travelling with pedlars, fairies fighting with pitiless outlaws for every inch of woods and angels charging alongside men-at-arms.

If commoners strive as best as they can to protect themselves from numerous gangs of brigands that regularly pillage remote villages, they receive little help from their lords too occupied with their wars against each other for estates torn apart by all these battles. Opportunistic traders make a mint of money with wealthy nobles seeking for glory and prestige in a world where everything can happen.

Meanwhile peasants defend day after day their meagre harvests against marching armies and hungry creatures. Starvation slowly becomes the norm; fear chases travelers from road and foreigners from cities. Many turn to the mercenary life or become outlaws, finding it easier to fall back on brigandage than to protect a family in this dangerous world.

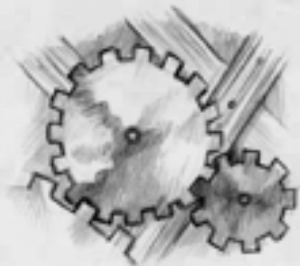
Playing with technology

Ex illis is a miniature game like no other. Instead of playing with dices, rulers, and thick rulebooks, you'll use a software on your iPod touch, Mac, PC or laptop to resolve battles. This combination of miniatures and software makes Ex illis a deep gameplay experience that's very easy to learn, yet a real challenge to master!

How does it work?

You play the game on a large battlefield divided into 'zones'. The units move on the battlefield from zone to zone. On a unit's turn, you choose between the various actions available to your unit in the gaming software, such as attacking, charging or casting a spell. The software then shows the miniatures fighting, blocking and evading hits, so you can see what happened during the turn.

The physical battlefield gives the players all the game's macro information, while the software shows only one zone at a time, but in more detail (hit points left, status effects, etc). This means you'll do all of your tactical thinking by looking at the battlefield, and you'll feel like you're right in the thick of the action as your troops exchange blows with the enemy.



Depth

A major advantage of combining software with miniature games is the increased depth of gameplay mechanics. Because computers are so good at remembering vast amounts of data and crunching difficult algorithms, you'll experience in Ex illis a level of realism and complexity that was simply not possible before!



Accessibility

Another great thing with Ex illis is that you can start playing right away, without having to go through hours of reading rulebooks. The game coaches you through your first few battles, and makes it easier to setup a game with one of your friends, even if they've never played a wargame before. Of course, this doesn't mean the game is simple or shallow! The gameplay works on many different levels, and veterans will discover more advanced and intricate systems as they get more and more familiar with the game.



Leveling

Ever wished your miniatures could earn experience with each passing battle, gain new levels, unlock new skills and abilities, and equip themselves with better weapons and armour? In Ex illis, each of your miniatures has a unique 'life' on our servers, which keep track of their progress automatically. It's up to you to decide how to develop your units so they best fit into your army. This means there's always something to look forward to, and the games you're playing with your friends in the beginning will be quite different from the ones you'll play when both your armies have reached level 60!

The Ex illis starter kit

This fall, Bastion launched a complete starter kit for Ex illis.

This starter kit contains everything you need to start playing: 54 miniatures which to be divided into two armies or kept all for yourself, a gaming board, an introduction booklet and, of course, the gaming software. These highly-detailed miniatures are cast in quality hard plastic, sculpted using new techniques to reach a higher level of realism and are delivered to you on their original sprue, unpainted and unassembled, to ensure the integrity of the piece during transport.

The units present in the starter kit are:

- **The Decurion:** an 8-foot tall, hard-hitting angelic hero clad in heavy armour. Capable of both offensive and defensive spells, he's a well-rounded hero suited for many different tasks.
- **The Billmen:** a rough-and-tough mercenary unit armed with large poleaxes. While they are not the best in prolonged fights, they are well-equipped to deal with armoured units like knights.
- **The Hobelars:** a fast-cavalry unit, well-versed in hit-and-runs, counter-charges and false-retreats. They are excellent for taking out archers or mages lurking behind the main line.
- **The Ympes:** a tricky unit of very offensive casters. These small demons are difficult to catch but quite fragile should they get hit by an attack.
- **The Longbowmen:** an elite archery unit, capable of shooting either quickly or accurately. Just be sure to watch their fatigue level to keep them effective.



- **The Marrenne:** a fairy hero with strong indirect magic. She constantly regenerates her retinue and is well-equipped to deal with both very strong and very weak enemies.
- **The Vileins:** a cheap peasant infantry. You'll be glad when they take damage instead of your more expensive units. With proper leadership, they can even pack a surprising punch!
- **The Franc Chevalers:** an elite unit of heavy cavalry with a devastating charge. Just make sure you don't waste this precious weapon on the wrong target...
- **The Soffrances:** two large monsters filled with dark essences. They are very resilient, drain the life of everyone near them, and inspire tourments in both friend and foe.
- **The Arbalestiers:** a ranged unit with decent accuracy and damage for a cheap price. While almost immune to enemy fire, they fatigue quickly while moving and are very slow to reload.



INTEGRAL Edition

This special edition replaces the plasticized cardboard game-board with a fully-modular plastic board, made from the same highly-detailed hard plastic as our figurines. This top-quality gaming board is ideal for hobby enthusiasts who enjoy playing their games on beautiful battlefields. The 20 unique tiles allow you to play on the standard 5 x 4 field, or create battlefields of various sizes for your own custom games and scenarios. And of course, you can always combine multiple boards to play truly massive games!



WWW.EX-ILLIS.COM

Hedley Coppock is ON THE SPOT

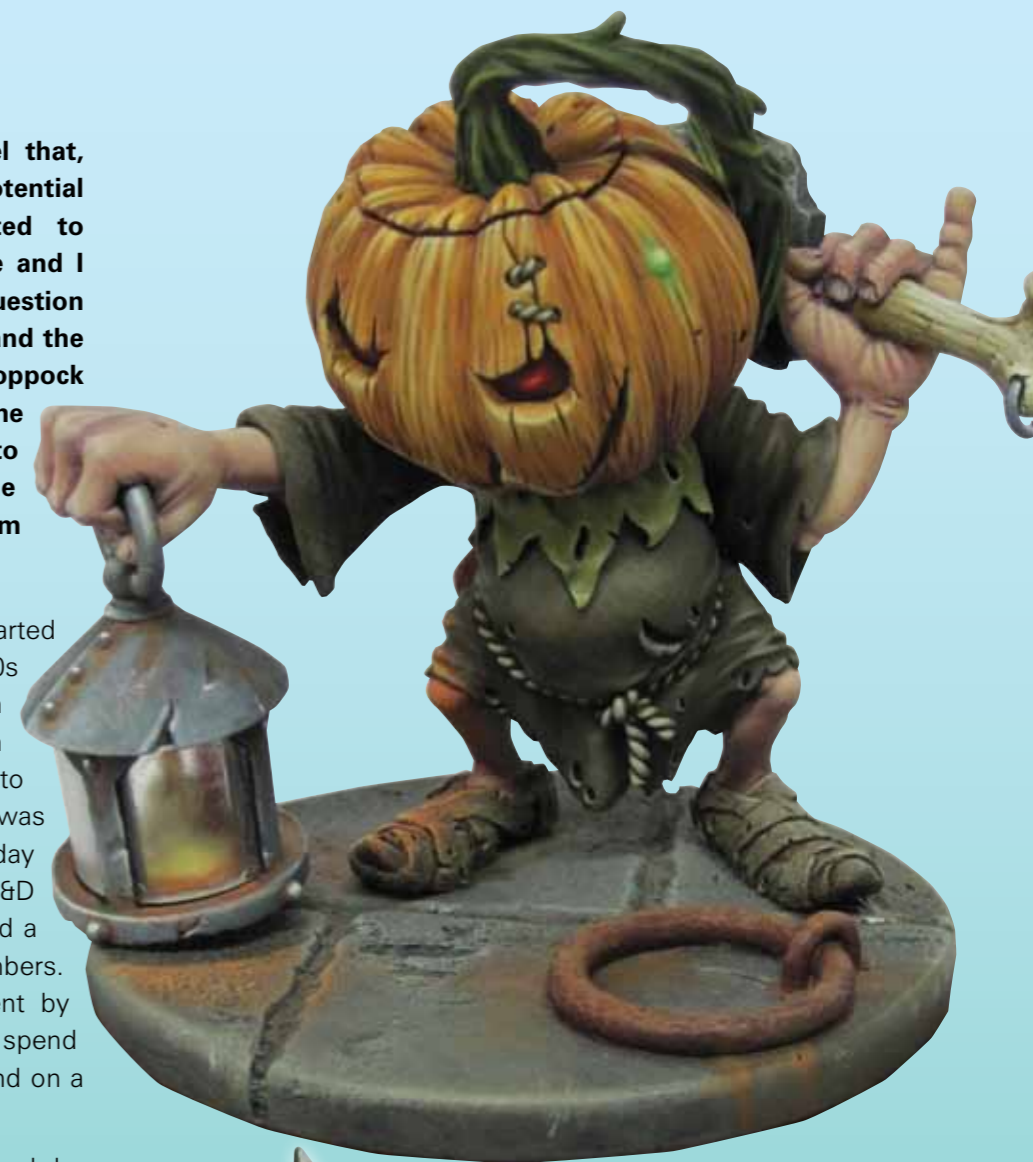
Interview by **Kenny Robb**

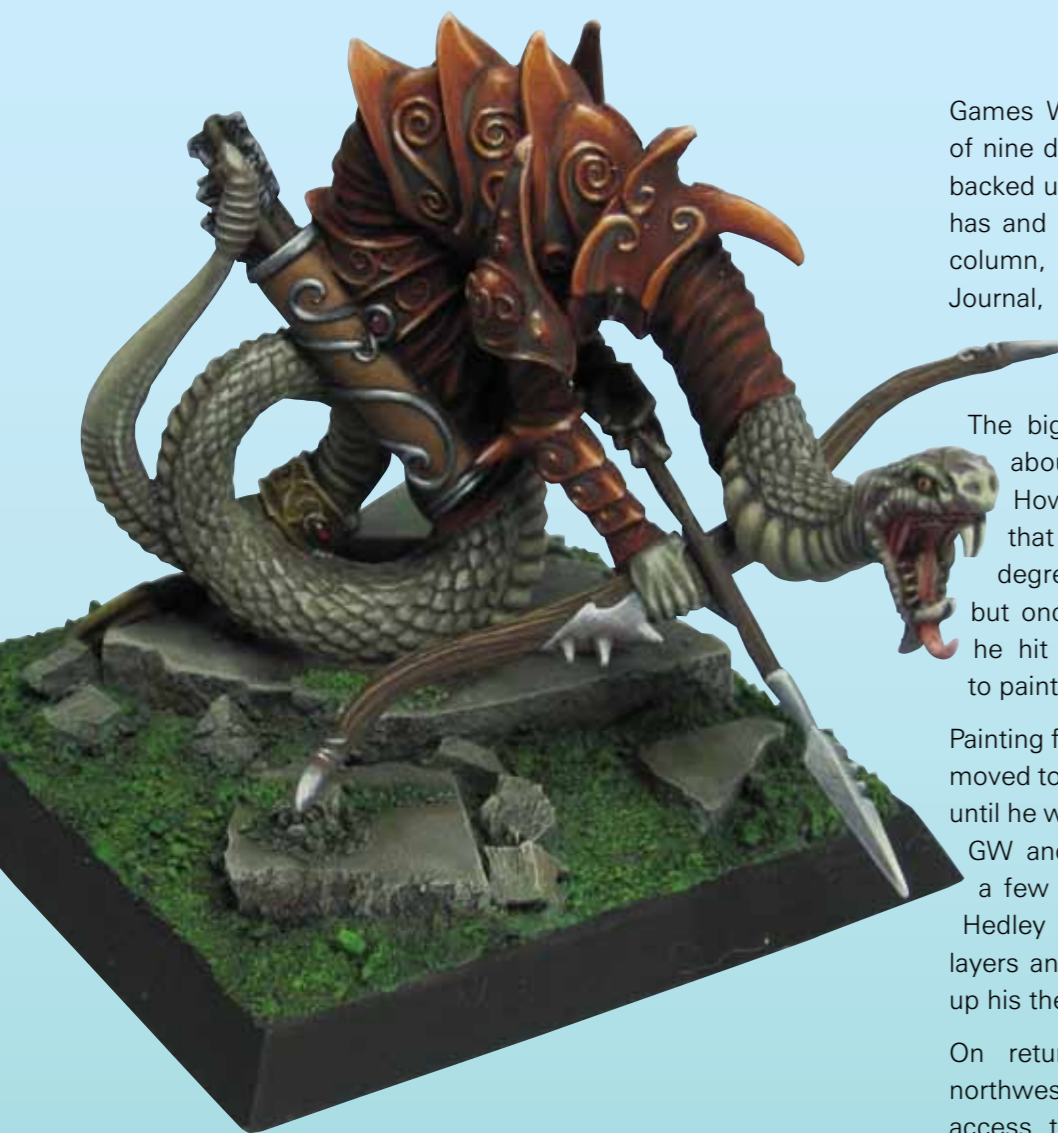
A while ago I saw a model that, unpainted, had massive potential and then pictures started to circulate of a painted one and I was proved right. The model in question was Fire Industries' Pumpkin Head and the painter responsible was Hedley Coppock or 'corpucle' as he is known in the online world. I tracked him down to his secret lair and asked him to tell me a bit about himself and what got him interested in painting and gaming.

His interest in RPGs and wargaming started in junior school in the early 1980s when one of his friends brought in his older brother's copy of 1st edition Dungeons and Dragons for the group to try out with some lead miniatures. He was hooked. At the top of his next birthday present list was the 'red box' Basic D&D set, complete with polyhedral dice and a little wax crayon to colour in the numbers. As each birthday and Christmas went by he'd accumulate more miniatures and spend the money earned from his paper-round on a subscription to White Dwarf.

"I'd read the 'Eavy Metal column and be amazed at the painted miniatures and finally had a try myself with some Humbrol enamels, white spirit and an old paintbrush that my Dad used to pollinate his tomato plants."

His early efforts were pretty basic colouring in with little to no shading or highlighting; that was until his first big revolution in miniature painting... acrylic paints!





Games Workshop/Citadel released two sets of nine different coloured acrylic paints, later backed up with a set of nine inks (that he still has and uses). At this point the 'Eavy Metal column, and the now discontinued Citadel Journal, started printing articles describing how to shade and highlight, sculpt and convert.

The biggest revelation of all was reading about layering to shade and highlight. However, A-levels followed by the fun that goes with 'studying' for a university degree put a temporary halt to the hobby, but once final exams were out of the way he hit the local GW store and got back to painting.

Painting fell by the wayside yet again when he moved to London to study for his PhD, at least until he wandered into the Oxford Street Plaza GW and picked up some Eldar minis and a few copies of White Dwarf. As a result Hedley began practicing painting in thin layers and used this as a break from writing up his thesis.

On returning to his roots in the rainy northwest of England Hedley's job gave him access to the internet, the ideal place to search for painting guides and tutorials. This was the second seismic shift in painting he experienced, when internet searches showed a strange and mystical website called www.coolminiornot.com! The work on display on CMoN blew away everything he'd seen in White Dwarf. Also there were, and still are, loads of great articles on techniques, and we highly recommend that anyone wanting to improve their painting takes a look and asks questions on the forum.

CMoN also showed him that there was more to miniature gaming than Games Workshop. The miniatures that really caught his eye were produced by a French company called Rackham, they were stylish (sometimes a bit abstract), detailed, well painted and beautifully presented in their online store. He ordered a few to paint and never looked back. This was when I first came into contact with Hedley. Speaking about Rackham, Hedley says: "To me this was what painting was about and as an added bonus Rackham published a short-lived magazine called Cry Havoc that

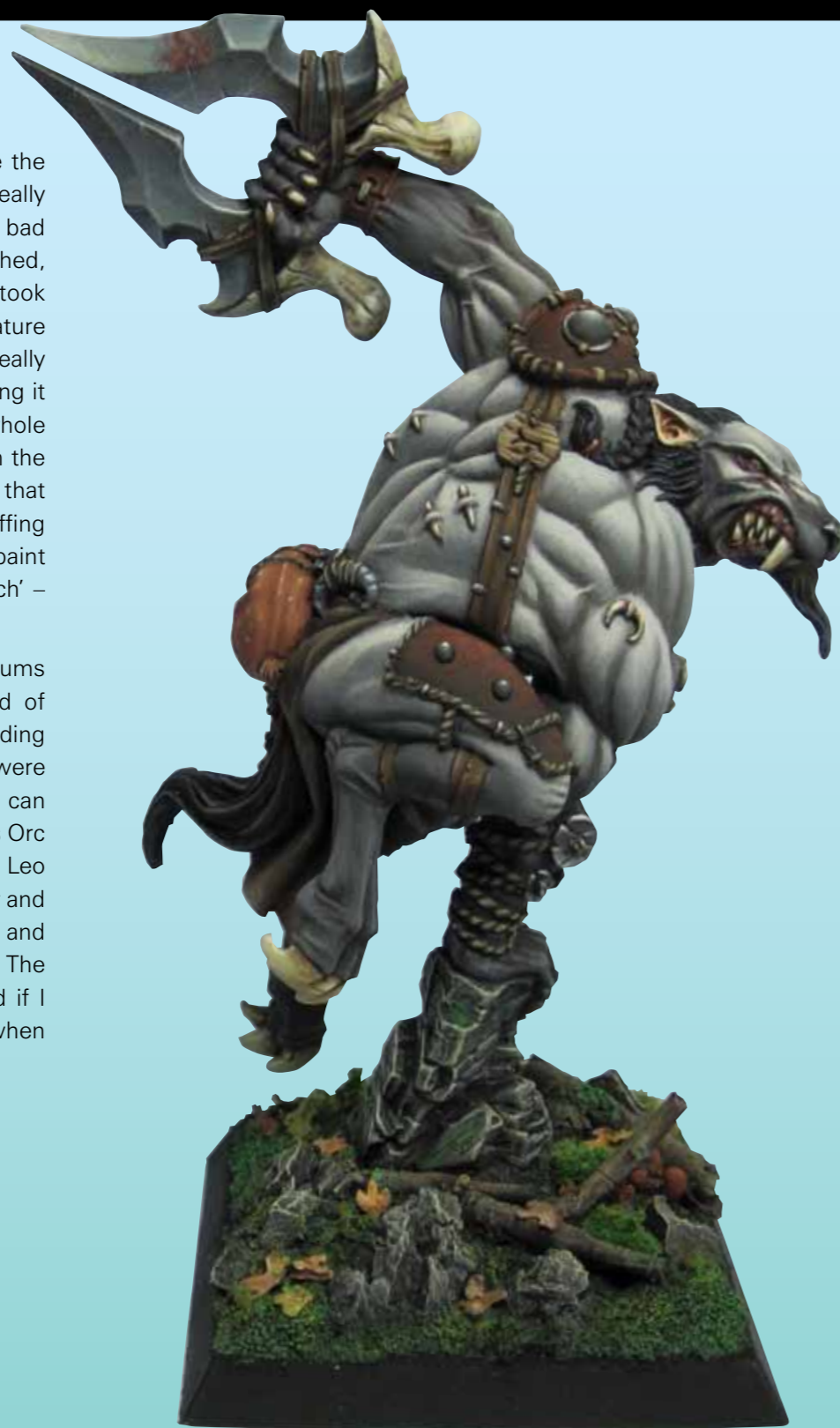
contained some of the best painting guides I've ever seen (coupled with some dodgy French-English translations)". As part of his love affair with the Rackham models, Hedley met a couple of freelance sculptors who were working for Rackham, Sean Green (who sculpted the Tarascus for Rackham and a large back-catalogue for ForgeWorld) and Simon Harris. A year or so later Sean got in touch with Hedley to ask if he'd like to work on a secret project for Fire Industries, a UK-based partnership with Rackham that was going to produce a range of resin kits. Obviously he jumped at the chance and ended up painting the studio copies of the large-scale versions of the Pumpkin Head, Goblin Ninja and The Crow.

Unfortunately, Fire Industries only produced a handful of models before closing down, but working with Sean had exposed Hedley to the world of historical modelling. These historical types are seriously talented at what they do (just look at Adrian Walters' work in issue 1 of The Ancible) and there's a whole heap of new tools and techniques that historical and fantasy/sci-fi painters are eager to share with each other.



The work he is most proud of has to be the Worg. The Rackham Wolfen models really caught his eye and these are the big bad brothers of the Wolfen. Ancient, sabre-toothed, uber-predators, which is the approach he took to painting them. This was the first miniature where Hedley, by his own admission, really pushed the highlighting of the skin, making it almost shine and played around with a whole range of greys to get smooth shading on the shadowed areas. The size also meant that a number of finer details like some scuffing textures on the leather armour and even paint on the skin markings of his 'packed lunch' – poor, poor Bambi – were possible.

Since starting to visit military modelling forums Hedley has come across a whole world of modelling he never knew existed, including busts and flats. Previously miniatures were just gaming pieces. These new models can be really inspiring like the JMD Miniatures Orc bust and the Yedharo War of the Zodiac Leo bust. "The Orc bust has bags of character and texture, making it really good fun to paint and giving it heaps of conversion potential. The Leo bust just looks totally "bad-ass" and if I admit it, I was a bit of a Thundercats fan when I was growing up," says Hedley.



So, what's on the horizon? Having only entered a few painting competitions, usually ones that are associated with a gaming convention, Hedley still managed to come away with a few trophies for best painted army. Only recently has he started entering military modelling competitions and has managed to pick up two gold medals at the South Cheshire Militaire 2009 meeting, however he is gearing up to enter Salute, the Golden Demon and Euro Militaire in 2010 and for those we wish him the best of luck.

To finish this all off I asked Hedley to sum up and provide us with some words to the wise:

"I've now been painting regularly for the last seven years or so and the biggest tips I can give to anyone who wants to improve their painting is to thin your paints and use a wet palette. If you want inspiration for colour schemes think about the background of what you're trying to paint: where does the model live? Does it look after its equipment? Is it a new recruit or a veteran? As an example, if you're painting a zombie and want to make it look believable don't paint its armour in beautifully smooth non-metallic metal effect armour, make it look battered and rusty like it's just clawed its way out of a grave, add a bit of dirt and blood. If it's a freshly re-animated zombie, paint it like freshly butchered meat, if it's from a dusty old catacomb, paint it in brown, chalky colours, and if it's extremely rotten then go for purples. Thinking about the background of a model and painting it to be consistent with the background really adds a lot. "Another good source of inspiration for monsters such as dragons, griffins and the like is to look at real-world equivalents such as crocodiles and birds of prey for colour schemes.

Nature can be a massive inspiration. If I can offer any advice to people then don't be afraid to ask your favourite painters questions on how they did something. Let's face it, we're all geeks and geeks like to talk and write about their favourite subject. If you can get them to demonstrate a technique in front of you then it's so much easier to understand. And never get complacent, there's always room for improvement!"





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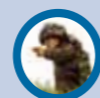
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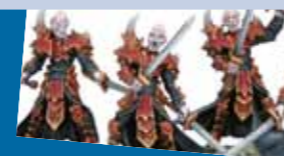
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Written by **Chris Duncan**

Art by **Sarah Millman**

Joel stopped, and time paused from its endless pursuit of the unknown. Glancing to his left with his eyes only, he could see a form on top of the nearest car. Carefully rotating his body the ghostly image in the corner of his eye focused into a wild, feral dog. But to call this horrific shadow of a creature a dog was a stretch by anyone's imagination. The drawn skin barely containing the skeletal frame and the slavering razor-sharp teeth dispelled the memory of a family pet.

Very slowly his hand went to his knife, a comforting, familiar feeling against his palm. This had to be done as quietly and quick as possible; never is a dog alone in this stagnant decaying hell. As he looked at the sickly, emaciated frame he sensed small changes in the muscle groups just as the dog leapt with a low, guttural growl. Joel presented his arm as a target for the opening jaws and as the dog extended to reach the obvious mark Joel twisted away, bringing his other arm around the dog's neck, safely behind the head. Quicker than it seemed possible he twisted back, throwing the dog to the ground and following closely behind, the knife already making its short journey to plunge into the chest of the beast. Bright grey mist escaped from the wound in the half light, giving the arterial blood an

ethereal feel as if the very soul of the creature was attempting to attack Joel.

Now it was over Joel could acutely hear other scraping from the debris and car wrecks all around. He rapidly cleaned his knife on the warm carcass, careful to remove all traces of blood and therefore scent from his belongings. Then, knife held at the ready, he moved forwards keeping low, the immediate danger avoided but just as quickly this moment could be the last. One dog with malnutrition was possible to overcome, but a pack of these creatures would not be so easily despatched with just a knife. Luckily for Joel they would have

plenty of food for the next hour or so, leaving time to put as much distance between himself and the beasts as possible. Keeping low and silent, he made his way across the wrecks of a previous life. After what seemed an eternity Joel stopped and turned; along the line of cars he had just passed he could see more than a dozen dogs all slavering over their fallen companion. Joel crept to the front of the SUV he was crouched beside and, after checking for traps, he eased himself between it and the saloon in front, always keeping his eyes on the dogs. Just as he was about to step from their line of sight, one of the



Part 2

dogs looked up, seemingly looking right at him. The moment passed and the dog resumed its meal, leaving Joel to slip completely between the two vehicles, finally out of sight of the animals.

Despite being concealed from the dogs, Joel was acutely aware of how exposed he would be both from the building behind and the church to the front but it was unavoidable if he was to put as much ground as possible between himself and the hunting pack. Inhaling deeply, Joel stepped out and dropped into a crouch; walking this way he waddled forwards, glancing back every four steps. It was painfully slow, but he had learnt a long time ago that rushing in a situation that seemed devoid of danger was exactly when you found it.

Up ahead he could now see the remains of the church, its spire collapsed onto the road in front. To Joel it seemed to resemble a giant wafer cone someone had discarded partly eaten. He had to struggle not to let out a giggle: was he losing touch with the reality of his situation? Probably, but then is it possible to retain all sanity after witnessing the things Joel had to endure? With a quick shake he brought himself back to the present, suddenly worrying that he was unsure how long he had been squatting there in the dark with danger all around. He checked the scene to the front again, this time seeing the reality of a church ravaged by war, observing that most of the roof was missing and not one window remained intact. There was no perceivable movement so Joel edged closer. At the front of each vehicle he took time to stop and check to the left and right and always checking his six.

Now the most dangerous part of his journey across the plaza was upon Joel, and between him and sanctity of the church was open ground with no vehicles to offer a semblance of protection. He paused for a final moment, knowing that he was once

more placing his life into an unknown lottery. Rising up into a run Joel sprinted for the safety of the ruined spire, resisting all urges to slide to a rest which would make an unholy noise in the relative silence of the night. He forced himself to continue until the widest part of the spire covered his entire frame and slowed to a walking pace before pausing to scan for activity. Checking ahead, behind and to his exposed left he was satisfied that no one was around. There was no sign that the pack had followed his scent and thankful for small mercies Joel stepped cautiously into the church, ducking under the fallen beams. The vast, solid oak doors had succumbed to the concussion of the explosions that had laid the church to waste. Stepping amid the debris-strewn floor Joel became acutely aware of his surroundings. Left and right the church spread down long expanses while to his front the church stretched forth creating a classic cross-shaped building. Carefully he checked both wings, keeping to the shadows as he slid his knife back into its sheath and drew his pistol. All around him were signs of troops bedding down, and although the tracks were days old it occurred to Joel that this was not a safe place to linger.

Moving swifter than he would have liked, he made his way to the front of the church, scanning all the time for danger. More signs of occupation were littered everywhere, but nothing worthwhile that Joel could use. From the front of the church Joel could see a way out; the cellar door lay open and he could feel a faint whisper of a cool breeze. Stopping to glance out of a shattered window, he could see how a crater had opened up the ground beside the church and the cellar roof had collapsed exposing it to the chilling night.

Cautiously Joel stepped down through the open doorway; the steps were of an aged stone worn smooth in the middle from the endless passage of familiar feet.

Uneasily he descended into the bowels of the holy ruin, the steps leading down in a spiral. As he stepped into the stone-covered room his first survey showed an ancient place ripped asunder by the war raging all around, and as he glanced towards the opening that had forced its way into this silent place of calm he suddenly spotted in the shadows a figure ominously leaning in from the crater beyond. Taken by surprise, Joel's hand whipped up instinctively and he fired several rounds in the direction of the figure while dropping down on his left side and rolling away from the stairs deeper into the shadows. The sound of gunfire was deafening as it echoed across the stone walls and floor, and fearing the worst, Joel sprinted for the crater, unslinging his rifle. As he closed the gap Joel raised the rifle, swinging it high and to his right before bringing the butt down upon the figure's skull with a sickening crack.

Up close Joel could see his mistake; this warrior had long since died and been left to silently guard this place of the dead. Both sides had stopped gathering and burying the dead. Alive or dead this soldier had given away Joel's position to anyone in the area. Joel wasted no time as he climbed into the foul crater, the lowest part full of the foulest stagnant fluids imaginable. More than one soldier had come to their last resting place here and sliding through the slime and filth Joel joined them, becoming one with the dead, or so he hoped it would appear.

What seemed like hours passed and there was no activity; no one came to investigate the shots fired and there had been no sounds of any search being made. Either no one cared, Joel reasoned, or there was only the dead to witness his foolishness. Eventually, Joel slithered up the crater to the rim, examining the area which remained mercifully quiet. Stretching so he could work the hard knots from his joints and muscles he tried to infuse life back into

limbs that had been so still for hours. Finally regaining full coordination Joel crawled out from the rim and took a knee. A quick 360-degree sweep confirmed he was alone and keeping to the grave stones and the remains of the church trees Joel rapidly reached the wall of the graveyard. Here he rested for a full five minutes, forcing himself to the discipline, taking stock of his night thus far. The encounter with the dog had been awfully close, he reflected with a shiver. His levels of anxiety were still heightened; in this environment you never truly relaxed, he thought, before smiling at his mind's statement of the glaringly obvious.



The wall of the graveyard stood maybe eight feet tall, but luckily the destruction inflicted on the area had led to a number of gaps through which he could move. One of these would be his egress from this place of the dead, out into the wooded area he knew lay beyond, one of the many inner city parks where the citizens used to be able to walk and enjoy the

sounds of nature. That life was long gone, the occupants of this metropolis now dead or fled. Gingerly, Joel edged to the nearest gap in the wall, debris spilled down from the hole as if the wall had been eviscerated and its guts had flopped onto the ground. Carefully he stepped on the wall's innards, attempting to make as little sound as possible. Able to just see over the lip of the gap, Joel could see a nightmare vision of a wood, where gnarled trees, warped by the constant destruction of battle, twisted and cried for a clear sky. Here and there whole sections had ceased to exist; areas had lost the lush lawns of grass, becoming a quagmire of pestilence. This vision of decay needed to be crossed. Checking his six, left, right and his point, Joel edged through the gap and slid down the far side of the wall.

Ahead lay the sanctuary of the trees. What was left was still good cover and he expected to be able to make good time through the park. There was a barbed wire obstacle, rusty and peppered with rotting corpses, but Joel had already spotted a point in which someone had detonated a charge clearing a gap wide enough to drive a bus through. Making his way towards it he noticed with a certain amount of detached revulsion that the flailing barbed wire had shot back from the burst of the explosion, tearing huge rents in the nearest captives of the wire's embrace. Joel was just about to step into the gap when something made him stop. Glancing all around, he sank down into the fetid bog. From here he could observe the gap in a different perspective.

Yes there it was; a slight difference in the ground. Experience told Joel the gap had been mined and from his new position he counted four or five uneven areas where the earth did not totally match its surroundings. Glancing around again and sure he was

clear, Joel reached for his map, found the location and marked the gap and the possible mines; if he got back this would be vital information.

His complacency had almost cost Joel his life and swearing silently he searched the sides nearest the gap. On the right it seemed that there was a way through the wire using his cutters, and although it would take some time he would choose that over the alternative any day. Replacing his map, Joel fished for the cutters, unfolding them and dropping them into place with a small click. Crawling to the area he was going to cut, he reached out and clipped the first piece, working methodically as he cleared a path away. Even cut, the wire was still a dangerous obstacle that could snag a man and drag him down as he struggled, entangling himself more and more until he had no fight in him. The various forms littering the wire's length was vivid testament.

Halfway through Joel heard a sound that chilled his bones... frozen in place, holding his breath he heard the unmistakable sound of a dog howl carrying on the swirling mists. Had the dogs got his scent? How far had they got – across the plaza? Into the church? Even now Joel's mind was conjuring images of them leaping up through the gap in the wall like the hounds of hell coming to drag him into the pit. Frantically now he cut his way through the wire barrier, the sounds of scraping and activity carrying over the ground like an ill omen. He was almost there... if he could just get through the last few strands.

Joel finally managed to struggle through the last section and as he sat upright he turned to face the way he had come, trying to pull his legs through, when out of the mist broke the leading dogs of the pack. Snarling savagely and with no regard for themselves, three of the dogs launched

themselves into the area that Joel had just been occupying, tangling in the wire and the tendrils that Joel had cut. Apparently oblivious to the flesh being torn from their hides, the dogs growled and slavered as they tried to inch forwards, hunger and fury driving them towards their prey. Pulling wildly away from the beasts, Joel finally managed to get his legs free and was staggering up, ready to run for the cover of the trees, when he spotted the rest of the pack diverting towards the gap.

Knowing that only death awaited him here, Joel ran for all his worth to the trees and beyond. Fifteen or twenty feet in he spun and sank down beside a tree, bringing his rifle up to his shoulder, and in one smooth movement he was on the ground in the aim position watching the gap just visible through the foliage. Just as he was taking aim the pack of dogs charged into the gap, over the uneven ground. When it happened it was a shock to Joel who had been expecting it, as suddenly the dogs all took flight as a series of bright orange balls mushroomed upwards incinerating the creatures at the same time as shredding them into a thousand chunks of flaming flesh. Whether the rest of the pack followed Joel could not be sure; he was already up and snaking

off into the woods, putting as much space as possible between him and the explosions at the wire. Dogs were suddenly the last thing on his mind. After maybe a full minute and breathing heavily, Joel purposely made himself slow to a cautious walk, resuming his endless search for traps, mines and tripwires. As he walked through the gloom he could see old tanks, held in place as if left by a shifting giant glacier field, eternally frozen while the world moved on around them. Joel knew that a massive tank battle had happened here not long after the city first came under siege. Nothing like it had been seen again. Tanks rarely moved across the urban remnants now, and only with infantry support; anything else was suicide.

Joel checked his compass and consulted his map, he had two clicks to go through this ghost of a forest and silently he moved off once more, sticking to shadows and cover as he went, ever alert and hyper-vigilant, his vision swinging left and right while checking his six every few paces. Evidence of past battles littered the floor and in places vegetation that was an affront to nature reclaimed the bodies for nutrition. He was thankful that no sounds of canine movements assaulted his ears. For now one danger had passed. Finding some shelter next to a burnt out tank, Joel took twenty, checked his equipment, drank a controlled mouthful from his water canister and snatched at some jerky with his teeth. Another look at his map confirmed that he was about half way through the warped woodland and if he could make it to the next buildings beyond the wood before the

excuse for a dawn broke he would be able to bed down for a few hours before moving off once more.

Leaning on his rifle Joel staggered up again, forcing his tired body on from his resting place to the next tank. Stop, check, move; this was Joel's rhythm, his dance. The woods in this part seemed to be less affected by the ravages of war, although they still looked unhealthy, and there were whole patches where the vegetation was thicker. Cautiously Joel stepped forwards, searching the ground with each footfall; he soon came upon the reason for the flourish of vegetation. Here were the ground troops of the historic battle, here where tanks failed to conquer infantry had met, neither side giving ground, and the landscape was literally covered in the remains of the struggle. The vegetation was fed by the blood of the dead.

Ahead the woods gave way to a small clearing where few thick old trunks had succumbed to gravity and kissed the ground. Joel slipped beside one and leaned over, scanning the clearing. Two things caught his attention.

One, a canister almost the size of a man, hung from a tree, its chute snagged in the gnarly branches. He knew it was from his own side for there was no mistaking the shape. The second thing he had seen was a patrol of four men gathered round close to the canister, their attention fully on the container. Joel could hear them discussing how to get the thing down. He was thinking the same thing himself.

To Joel, the container offered a visible beacon of hope after a night of hell. If he could get to it, the canister might contain a working radio, he could warn his side of the impending doom...

To be continued...

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Za'Tallian Station

By Alan Oliver By Alan Oliver

Introduction

The intention of this article is to provide an interesting location that can be dropped into any spacefaring Sci-Fi RPG. Obviously this place is not just any old way station, there is too much going on here for that, but whether you need somewhere dark and dangerous to send the players for a scenario, or the players need somewhere outside the reach of the law to base themselves, Za'Tallian may be just what you need.

The station is huge, easily big enough to accommodate any sub-plots, factions or locations that you need to add in. Even the public sector is hundreds of kilometres long, plenty of space for even extensive set pieces to be dropped in. Descriptions throughout have been kept relatively generic wherever possible, allowing the background to be easily ported into any gaming system.

Also please note that this article is aimed at an adult audience, so deals with unpleasant aspects of criminality.

Geography and the Station

The System

Za'Tallian station is a ring habitat that encircles a small moon which is itself caught in the L1 Lagrangian point between a large gas giant and the local star. This Lagrangian point is the sight of an FTL navigation point appropriate to the form of FTL travel in use in your game. This might be in the form of a hyperspace jump gate, navigation beacon or whatever. Aspects of the station itself further enhance these capabilities.

The gas giant is one of the outer planets in the system, 8th out from the star and well outside its life supporting range. There are two planets within the habitable zone of the star, both of which are occupied by a species called the Zards.

The moon that the ring was built around is relatively small, with a diameter of a little over 1000 km, and the ring is 120 km above the surface of the moon, giving the ring a circumference of around 4000 km. The moon doesn't provide any significant gravity to the ring, but the rotation of the ring does give it limited effective

gravity through centrifugal force. The moon is a compacted mass of silicon, hydrogen and oxygen, some of which is in the form of frozen water. There are many traces of other minerals in it, but not in sufficient quantities to be worth mining. As more of the moon's mass has been absorbed by the station over the millennia the moon itself is now riddled with a filigree of cavities, ranging from hairline to large enough for a man to walk down. This makes the moon more susceptible to weapons of mass destruction and could, in fact, be destroyed.

The Zards

These are the local intelligent species, who have only recently managed to make it into space under their own steam. They are humanoid reptiles, standing a little taller than humans. They have a high tolerance for heat and fire due to the high temperatures on their home planet, which is towards the inner edge of the system's habitable zone. Males are bulky and powerful, and are decorated with colourful frills around their necks and down their tails. The females are

slender and very fast, reaction times being fifty percent above human.

As a race they are highly individualistic, rarely forming into large groups. It has taken generations of strong leadership and iron discipline for their society to come together sufficiently to make it into space under their own steam. They didn't develop their own FTL technology, but once they reached space they made contact with the local interstellar government and acquired the technology through them.

Their first action on reaching space was to seek out the cold sister to their home planet, and there they discovered a similar race to themselves, just in an earlier stage of evolution, tool-using but non-vocal. To call it a war of conquest would exaggerate the chances that these primitives had, although they did try and fight off the invasion with rock and club. 95% of the primitives were wiped out, the rest went into slavery and their planet was colonised. The primitives are close enough biologically to be sexually compatible with the Zards, which has doomed most of their females to a

life of sexual slavery as they are very attractive by Zard standards.

In the fifty years since they have built their own fleet of destroyers and cruisers. They are influenced by the fleet of the local interstellar government but the ships are of their own design. These are relatively simple ships, probably not up to the standard of the warships of the major powers, but are solid enough. However their fleet is not strong enough to challenge the external defences of Za'Tallian station.

There are a large number of Zards on Za'Tallian station, making up a significant percentage of the total population. The males make for good soldiers, ground forces or boarding parties. The reaction time of the females makes them very good fighter pilots. There are also many of the female primitives enslaved within the sex industry on Za'Tallian to service the Zard population there.

The Station

The station is massive although relatively narrow in places. It is not smooth throughout, with docks, weapon emplacements and other structures bulging from the surface.

Running through the centre of it is an automated transit system that is capable of doing a complete circuit of the ring in just under six hours, without any sensation of movement. The transit pipes generally run towards the inner edge of the ring, putting them at the top of the internal spaces. They are a network of vac tubes inside which small carriages ride through them.

They are operated by dwarf war machines from the Last Blight. These were originally designed as pilots for their aerospace fighters that enabled the controlling AI to punch out of a crippled fighter and survive. They

are armed, originally as a precaution in case they landed in hostile territory. Now they are wired into the transit pods and are the only way of controlling them. This means that the Last Blight security know about all movements around the station.

The Sectors

Za'Tallian station is divided into eight sectors, which were originally each of around 500 km, however over time some of these expanded as their owners have taken more territory and thereby reducing the size of neighbouring sectors. Between each sector and its neighbour there are several kilometres of borderland, controlled by neither side. Six sectors are controlled by the ruling council members, one is controlled by the Last Blight, and the eighth sector is Port Town, the public area of the ring.

Taking Port Town as the top, clockwise the sectors are the Bank, the Neo Yakuza, the Shipmasters' Shipyard, the Last Blight's fortress, the Doctor, the Dragon Cartel and lastly the Huang Se Army.

Access to the different sectors depends on who is in charge. The Last Blight are not welcoming of outsiders at all, and their sector is closed off to everybody. On the other hand Port Town is open territory; pretty much anyone can dock there.

Port Town

This sector of the station is open to all the visitors. This is at the opposite side of the ring to the sector controlled by the Last Blight. It is a mix of docks, commercial stores, private offices and private residences.

Along the 500 km stretch of the sector there are a hundred major docks, each of which is capable of handling a military cruiser or similar large ship. Of these five are massive internal dry-docks with expandable bays that

can undertake major repairs to a ship. All of these dry-docks are operated by repair companies who charge for their services. The rest of the major docks are external, ships connecting to the station via umbilical systems. The main docks are mounted in the outer rim of the station, so access to them is through the floor of the station interior.

In addition to these main bays there are over a thousand minor bays, which are capable of holding fighters, shuttles or light ships. Of these around a hundred are operated by companies offering commercial services for ships, such as repairs, detailing and refuelling. Another hundred or so are controlled by the council members and are under stricter security. Many of the rest are empty and visitors to the station can dock in them for a small fee. The small bays are on the sides of the ring, on alternating sides.

There are coffin hotels throughout Port Town, and these are rented either individually or in bulk and either daily or for extended stays. These are often booked in bulk by mercenary units as billets while on the station. Bars and clubs are common throughout the Town, some tied to the larger powers, others as independent businesses. There are also hardware and weapon stores all over the place, and virtually any kind of military surplus, illegal, criminal or dubious hardware can be found somewhere in Port Town, if you know where to look.

While the sex industry can be found anywhere in Port Town, there are three 'red light zones' that concentrate on it specifically. Two are tied to the Dragon Cartel and the Neo Yakuza, while the third is under the control of an independent half-human woman who has built her own empire there.

There are a number of minor powers in Port Town, including Silent D and several potential councillors of the future. There are the offices, docks and facilities for at least half a dozen criminal operations that are based elsewhere, but need access to the Freeport. One of these runs a string of combined bar brothels operating throughout the five hundred kilometres of Port Town. They specialise in offering cheap girls and even cheaper booze.

History

The original ring station was built somewhere between a hundred thousand years and a million years ago by an unknown but technologically advanced civilisation. These aliens are otherwise unknown in the galaxy; no other artefacts of theirs have survived to the present day. They built the station to operate and protect the FTL navigation point, and the weaponry of the station has the range to strike ships using it.

There is some evidence to suggest that the people who first built this station were a widespread and powerful race throughout this part of the galaxy, and that they were a major power for thousands of years. What became of them is unknown, but the lack of any other relics from their civilisation suggests that whatever happened was rather final.

Since then the station and the navigation point have been inhabited a number of times, and each generation of inhabitants having left their mark on the station. There are parts of the station that have yet to be modified for current use that show signs that some previous occupants were giants, at least 5 metres tall, given the size of their architecture. Other parts show signs that whole sections of the station were filled with water to create an aquatic environment.

Za'Tallian was subsequently uninhabited for a long period up until about fifteen hundred years ago, when the first of the current generation of inhabitants broke in and started to remodel the place. The Zards were still using bronze weapons at this point and were unaware of their neighbours' arrival. The current system of government on Za'Tallian was established about three hundred years ago when the previous dictator of the ring was assassinated and his criminal and pirate empire broken up.

Station Life

The station has developed its own currency, the Za-bill. Everything that is required for survival on the station is paid for in Za-bills, oxygen, water, living space, access to communications, everything. Each person on the station is issued with an electronic Za-bill account, and for each day on the station this account is automatically debited sufficient funds, appropriate to the needs of the individual. Banks will exchange other currencies for Za-bills, but few of the local stores will accept outside currencies, which forces strangers to convert some of their finances into Za-bills.

Internal Security

Security on the station is provided by an army of AI war machines called the Last Blight. They were created some thousands of years ago by a race that were exterminated during that war, as were their enemies. This left the Last Blight without masters, free to follow their own path, but without purpose. They have settled on the station and provide independent security in return for the resources to maintain their bodies and a secure place to exist. Providing security here also gives them a purpose as a people.

The Last Blight are tall – easily over two meters – humanoid war machines with highly advanced, built-in

weaponry. They are constructed from tough materials but are not massively armoured. However they do have integral shield technology that makes them far tougher. They carry high order, inbuilt weapons, with plasma, fusion and possibly even antimatter available, with different units mounting different weapons. There are also the dwarf pilot AI machines that are now operating the transit system on the station.

This does make the security personnel on the station rather more heavily armed than the average guard, as the Last Blight war machines are elder race technology designed for battlefield combat. These aren't just a bunch of redshirts with phaser pistols.

While the nature of the ruling council does mean that there are a large number of criminals, pirates and other powerful criminal figures on the station, actual violence and crime are at relatively low levels, and the Last Blight are in themselves a powerful deterrent to violent crimes. However, as has been mentioned, narcotics and the sex industry are both very well represented on Za'Tallian, although drugs that cause violence are not encouraged.

Violence, when it does happen, tends to be serious. Normally it is either outside law enforcement agencies attempting to infiltrate the station and being picked up by either the private security of the council members or the Last Blight, or it is a serious fight between the major criminal players for control over part of their territory. An attempt by any of them to either try and take over the whole station, or to take the territory marshalled by the Last Blight, is not tolerated. Such stupidity is normally how a new position on the council becomes available; one council member tries to take on the Last Blight and is eliminated, opening up a position.

External Security

This comes mainly from the ancient weapons built into Za'Tallian itself. These are not under anyone's control, but any hostile actions taken against Za'Tallian results in its weapons waking up and unleashing massive destructive energies that leave the average warship a smoking wreck in a matter of nanoseconds. Clearly Za'Tallian itself is sentient to some extent, being aware enough to detect threats to it from a great distance and destroy them.

Za'Tallian station has 'feeder tentacles' that reach the 120 km down to the surface of the moon, where they extract minerals and raw matter which is then processed to replenish the material structure of the station itself. Self repair systems on the station operate at a near organic, nano-technological scale. There is evidence on the hull of the station that it has suffered massive damage in the past and that over time it has repaired itself. This may have been severe enough to wipe out all life on the station, but still have left the station intact enough to rebuild itself. These systems also replenish the atmosphere of the station.

Government

Za'Tallian and the interstellar route are outside the legal authority or control of the Zard government. Between the internal and external security, Za'Tallian is strong enough to maintain its independence against even a major interstellar power.

The internal affairs of Za'Tallian are run by a council of business interests that are all based on the station itself. These are the assorted shady business men/women/machines that cannot operate under more stringent laws in operation elsewhere in the galaxy.

In theory each of the six council members controls a 500 km stretch of the ring where their businesses are based. In fact the different council members each control a different sized territory, depending on how much space they need and how well they can defend it. The remaining 1000 km of ring is divided between the public port areas where most of the trade happens, and the territory of the Last Blight.

Not officially part of the council, the Last Blight always have one of their wardroids present at any council meetings. It is unknown if this is the same machine or a different one each time, or how much interest they take in the council affairs.

Embassies

Officially the Zards and other interstellar powers are unlikely to recognise the independence of Za'Tallian, given its status outside of most legal systems. However that doesn't stop it being a very valuable place for a great many people. Citizens of the different interstellar powers will want access to the station, and their governments will want to have some kind of representation in Port Town to look out for them. This is why the major and minor interstellar powers who can easily reach Za'Tallian will have established their own unofficial embassies in Port Town.

These government embassies are not officially recognised by either the council or their own governments, but they do provide a diplomatic link between the council and the relative government, which can be useful. These embassies are not the sovereign territory of their native governments. While they are generally allowed to bring in some of their own troops to secure the facility, the Last Blight

carefully monitor the numbers of troops involved and the quality of their hardware. If the Last Blight feel that anybody has overstepped the bounds they will move in and either kill the troops, or kill everyone in and connected to the embassy. As the Last Blight have persistently refused to tell anyone, even the council, how much force they will tolerate, most embassies keep their hardware low key.

As not all of the governments who have put unofficial embassies on Za'Tallian are friendly to each other there is a degree of espionage between them, with subtle spooks operating to infiltrate each other for information as much as acting against anyone on Za'Tallian itself. These spooks tend to come in two varieties; the covert and the full-on. Covert spooks are generally on the station under some sort of cover, accounts clerk, data archivist or some such, and never do anything to warrant attention. Then you get your full-on spooks, who only look like normal people but beneath the skin will be enhanced with every nasty little trick, gadget, drug and cybernetic implant their people can come up with, all of which makes them the biggest, baddest thing on two feet. Think James Bond with SF technology and an unlimited budget. Their job is to hunt down and kill the enemy spooks, or whatever else their government wants destroyed. The Last Blight will generally turn a blind eye to the first super agent that a government sends to Za'Tallian. But if more than one or two turn up then they tend to get tetchy.

Exactly which governments will have embassies on the station will obviously depend on what game system is being played. However the presence of at least two, preferably hostile to each other, is recommended for the espionage opportunities it opens up. However at the very least there should be one from earth, if it is now under a unified government, or more if it is still split up into waring nations, and one from the Zards.

The Council

The Shipmaster

This human male is one of the most powerful and well established of the council, and he controls around 700 km of the station. This sector has been developed into a major shipyard where vessels are repaired, converted and even built from scratch. Subsidiary to this are the docks where cargo ships deliver the raw materials required to produce these ships.

This shipyard is one of the few construction bases capable of building private warships in the sector. These ships are much more expensive to produce than they would be in a military yard, simply because the Shipmaster has to import the materials through smugglers and other obscure sources.

The Shipmaster has a deal with the Last Blight, cloning the AI cores of Blight 'volunteers' to provide the core awareness for the ships produced. This also means that the ships he produces could never be used against the station, unless their own AI cores have been removed or destroyed by

their new owners. As these ships are fitted with internal defences that are under the control of the shipboard AI, removing them is something of a hazard.

The Shipmaster produces ships to order, and they range from personal fighters and atmospheric craft up to cruiser size warships. This makes him practically the only place to go for warships like this outside of the military and accordingly his clients are an eclectic bunch. For a start there are the smugglers and free traders who are after a little something special in their ships, whether it is extra speed, concealed cargo storage or hidden weapons. Then you have the pirates and privateers who need long range warships with cargo space. Mercenaries need troop transports with military grade defences, and some offensive capabilities. Corporations who can't get hold of warships legitimately and can't build their own go to him to outfit their private fleets. He sells to them all.

Visitors to his sector are discouraged, unless they are clients coming to look at a commission. He operates a set of offices that can be accessed from the transit system, where he will meet clients to discuss commissions. Other than this place he really doesn't like people in his space. He doesn't leave his sector apart from for council meetings, and for those he has bodyguards from the Last Blight.

He has very heavy security both within his sector and outside it. The sector is heavily secured with AI controlled weapons. These are operated by the clone AI's that have yet to be installed onto the ships currently under construction. He has a number of Last Blight cloned AI-controlled warships that he has built, combined with a large number of star fighters with Last Blight pilots, all of which provides him with one of the largest fleets on the council.

The Banker

The banker is a very old AI that over the years has become fully sentient. It was originally from earth in the 21st century where it was a tax haven AI bank. Eventually it bought out its owners, stayed in banking and expanded its scale of business from year to year and century to century. Over time it has migrated from one stronghold to another, eventually leaving earth far behind it.

It came to the station years ago, and several council members were already banking with it. The Banker started out in Port Town but was soon able to buy out one of the other council members and took their place on the council. The nature of The Banker's AI development means that it thinks primarily in terms of financial assets and little else. As such it has neglected to hold on to the outer limits of its inherited sector, and the neighbours have chipped away at the borders till its territory is little more than 200 km long, of which it uses only about 100 km, known as the Attended Zone.

It combines its electronic financial storage with a physical vault, of large size and very heavy security. This bank is the only part of the Attended Zone that outsiders can access, but under very heavy security. This is made up of an assortment of living and AI guards who it employs. It also directly controls a number of inbuilt weapon systems which protect the memory cores where the electronic financial details are stored, the physical vault and of course its own AI core and backup systems.

It communicates with the outside world through holograms, the preferred image being that of an eight year old human boy in a blazer, shorts and tie, with visibly dirty hands. The image and voice are designed to be discomfoting to normal humans.

Obviously as a hologram, he needs no bodyguards to attend the council meetings.

The Banker also employs a human woman and two other females from the other dominant races of the sector. All three are beautiful by the standards of their races, and are dressed in suitably attractive clothing that enhances their appearance. They are employed to be liaisons with the other council members and clients, as many are uncomfortable with dealing directly with an AI. These ladies are protected by the best bodyguards that money can buy, but are free to enjoy their positions as the faces of one of the most powerful criminal banks in this part of space.

General Gang Shi Fu

A human woman of Chinese ancestry, she is the senior surviving officer of the Huang Se army. The Huang Se army was the armed forces of a major rebellion that went up against the local dominant empire. The rebellion failed and the army was not only defeated but nearly eradicated. General Shi Fu gathered the survivors of the army and brought them to Za'Tallian for safety. They held up in the Port Town while they recovered from the war, and many of the troops left at this time.

However the general had enough personal charisma to keep a respectable sized army together, which she turned to mercenary work. After working out of the Port Town for some time she made a move on a position in the council. The challenged council member, known as Silent D, didn't have the military resources to stand against her mercenaries and, presented with a fait accompli, resigned his place on the council. He was an arms dealer before and, as a reward for his practicality, now works exclusively for

General Shi Fu.

The Huang Se mercenary army has access to high technology weaponry, including armour, war machines, air support, transport FTL ships and even AI computer support. They maintain their high technology edge through the services of Silent D, who still has the contacts to get in state-of-the-art firepower. Their military forces are not as advanced as the Last Blight, but are still cutting edge by contemporary standards.

The Huang Se Mercenaries do not always operate together; most of the time smaller units are off working on individual contracts. However the General typically keeps about a quarter of the army on the station at any one time, just to maintain a sufficient armed force in her territory to stop any violence getting out of hand.

The Huang Se forces were originally all human, and predominantly Chinese, but have diversified over the last fifteen years. They now include around 40% non-human troops, and a number of human and alien-made AI war machines. Their armour and aircraft are also no longer 100% human manufactured and they have been buying in from whatever sources they can find.

General Gang Shi Fu is a small Chinese woman in her late forties, a bit dumpy looking with a plain face. Outside of her power armour she is small and unassuming, however she wears heavy duty battlefield power armour most of the time, even for council meetings, this being the military version of vanity.

Outsiders are more welcome in this sector, which neighbours Port Town, than in most other sectors. This is because the troops living in the sector have families, partners and friends outside of the mercenary

company who have to come and visit them. This means that they have to maintain their security pretty tightly, so they have built their own security force from within the Huang Se, whose only job is to protect the company's base of operations. The troops for this security force tend to be members of the company who are that bit older and want a more sedate career, or those who have married and settled down. The company also operates its own flights of star fighters that patrol outside the station. Their local aerospace fleet is smaller than that of the Shipmaster, but still respectable.

Doctor Calapi

Human man, over a hundred years old, but due to his anti-aging treatment means he only looks in his sixties. He appears always dressed like an old earth gentleman, with no evidence of any heavy security.

His business is in human and alien trafficking and slavery. He deals in human, alien and even AI slaves. Calapi also buys up human and alien children and puts them through specialist training to increase their value. He will buy practically any sentient life form offered for sale, but never gets involved in capturing slaves himself. The closest he comes are the cloning tanks that he operates, growing his own specialist clones to order. If it were cheaper to produce slaves by cloning, there is no doubt that he would, however paying slaves captured by professional slavers is definitely cheaper than raising clones from his own tanks, which he reserves for the most particular and wealthy customers.

He sells erotobots as well as live slaves. These appear as human or alien, down to the last anatomical detail, but have relatively simple machine intelligence. They are not

self aware AIs, but much more limited androids with very limited learning potential. He could probably improve the design to make the AI, however the few one-off AI slaves he sells already puts him on difficult ground with the Last Blight, and actually producing AIs for slavery might well push them over the edge. He is well aware that his own security droids would not hold off the Last Blight for long.

In addition to his slavery business he also operates the hospital and surgeries operating in the Port Town. These don't offer free medication but services are provided pretty much at cost, as part of his role as a member of the council. These surgeries also provide illegal cybernetic enhancement and spare part surgery unavailable in more law abiding locations.

His territory is not massive, but contains many hidden slave camps, training facilities, holding cells and other facilities, all scattered around to prevent one strike from taking out the entire inventory. Hidden away within his territory are his production facilities where the erotobots and security droids are manufactured.

Security is provided by non-sentient security droids, not as smart or powerful as the Last Blight, but built on his own production lines so loyalty is hardwired into them. In addition he has a number of elite females of assorted species who have all been raised from birth to be his personal bodyguard. He will attend council meetings with a small selection of these women, but takes more of them when he goes out on the town in Port Town itself. He has a small number of droid star fighters that provide external protection, but only about a dozen of them, and it is felt that these are more for show and status than anything else.

The doctor doesn't operate brothels, bordellos or other sex industry establishments himself, and prefers to keep well away from the sharp end of business. In his own eyes he is only a commercial businessman providing a specialist product – what others do with that product is not his problem.

The Neo Yakuza

The fifth place on the council is held by a family of Neo Yakuza. They control a large organised crime operation based on the station, but with links to crime throughout the nearby systems, and back to other Neo Yakuza families within the human sphere of influence.

They would like to be the only organised crime family operating on Za'Tallian, however they have a rival family to contend with – the Dragon Cartel. There are ongoing tensions between the two families and open violence breaks out regularly. Their home sectors are on opposite sides of the ring, mid-way between Port Town and the Last Blight. This means that most hostilities take place in Port Town or out in open space. This violence is limited by the Last Blight, who will prevent them from causing too much damage to the station.

The head of the Neo Yakuza on Za'tallian is an old woman, who has been part of the Yakuza for over a hundred years. She doesn't look her age however, as many years ago she went fully prosthetic. The body is a full combat model; it looks sexy but is obvious even to the eye that she's not human.

There may be an organic brain in her skull, or just a ghost running around in a fully artificial body, depending on the level of technology available.

She is generally known as Lady Kyoto, her real name being a secret known only to a very few of the clan. She attends the council meetings in person and does not bother taking bodyguards with her, feeling her inbuilt combat abilities are sufficient without additional guards. She can often be seen even in Port Town on her own, cruising the bars and clubs. Assassination attempts by the Dragon Cartel against her have so far proved fruitless. Anything small enough not to upset the Last Blight is not powerful enough to take out her heavily upgraded combat chassis. Not to say that she walks away unscathed, rather it's her that walks away and not the Dragon Cartel assassins.

The Neo Yakuza operate their own pleasure resort within their territory, which visitors to Port Town are also welcome to visit, if they have the money. This resort provides gambling, drugs and prostitution for those who want it and can pay their prices. Clients are a mixture of out-of-system Yakuza coming to party with Lady Kyoto and local party goers from Port Town, although most of them are human rather than alien.

Security within their sector is mainly Yakuza soldiers, although they do have access to some heavier weaponry. They also have some star fighters with pilots, but not a significant amount, as well as some armed smuggler ships that can be used in a push.

The Dragon Cartel

The last place on the council is held by another organised crime family; they do have their own name in their own language but nobody else can pronounce it so they are known simply as the Dragon Cartel, or sometimes just the Dragons.

They are originally from the Zard home planet, and relocated to the station as a secure base for their operations. They only use their own race among the higher ranks of their organisation, but will use anyone or anything among their foot soldiers.

Like the Neo Yakuza, they would prefer to be the only crime operation on Za'Tallian, however to become this they must destroy the Neo Yakuza. To this end there is often violence on the streets of Port Town between Dragon and Yakuza soldiers. With a large number of Zards in Port Town the Dragons are able to hide their soldiers with more ease than the Yakuza, so ambush and misdirection are their typical tools.

Their current representative on the council is a sinuous female Zard with jade green scales. She is known by various names, the Snake Woman, Dragon Woman, the Viper and Miss Venom being the most common. She is protected by four male Zards, all of them with crude prosthetic weaponry.

The Dragons are interested in all things criminal, and particularly specialise in protection racketeering, both on the station and back on their home planet. As is the nature with all Zards they appear to possess almost no conscience or guilt whatsoever, and they will touch things even the Yakuza balk at, making them ruthless and deadly. They respect nothing save naked power, and because of this it is only the presence of the last Blight which keeps them in check.

The Dragons have been known to work with Doctor Calapi on occasions, and are happy to take a cut from him in return for reaching out to the sort of contacts that provide the Doctor with his most expensive and unpalatable commissions.

Game Implications

For a start, the level of security on the station is such that the players simply cannot outgun station security. If they get into a fight with the Last Blight, they will just die. Their only hope would be to get off the station and start running, very quickly. It is rare for most character groups to be in a location where the local security is better armed than they are and they cannot simply outshoot them. This means that they will have to think about how they do things much more than normal, which is probably a good thing.

This is a dark and violent location. Only characters involved in crime or espionage are likely to be coming to this station, although military or mercenary-based games might lead here. This location could be used as the source of the enemy for a group of law enforcement characters, although if they actually enter the station and get caught, their chances of survival are pretty low. An interesting plot-line might be to put them on board as a team of covert operatives directed to infiltrate one of the organisations detailed.

The nature of FTL travel in your game will determine how important the Lagrange location is to the station. It may be that this is the only way of getting to the entire solar system at FTL speeds, in which case Za'Tallian station will be key to the economic survival of the local race. At the other extreme, Za'Tallian station may have no significance to FTL travel to the system, and its importance will be entirely down to being outside the reach of the authorities.

Most action will take place within Port Town, as this is the only sector that is readily accessible to outsiders. The station is most likely to be introduced

into a game as a location to visit, with the characters going there to resupply, or because some plot twist by the Games Master takes them there. It would be quite possible to set an entire game on the station, with the characters being part of one of the council member's forces or independents living in Port Town.

If the inhabitants of the station are being used as the bad guys then the nature of the place sets some of the challenge. For example if the characters are coming after the Doctor to end his slavery business then brute force is not going to work. Instead they will have to work out how to infiltrate the station, and then get the Doctor into a position where he can be forced out of business, killed or even trick the Last Blight into killing him. The station is not a good location for violence-based games, as the inhabitants are very dangerous (two armies in residence on an ancient artefact), unless the slaughter of the character group is the aim of the game.

No attempt has been made to tone down the unpleasant adult themes that go with a lawless setting. It is assumed that anyone using this location is running a game where adult themes are an accepted part of the overall tone of the game. It could still be used with a younger group, however certain aspects of the inhabitants would need to be toned down somewhat, and more of the background would need to be modified.

In the future it is intended to return to Za'Tallian station, with additional articles further developing the background provided here. For now we hope you enjoy the background and remember to keep one hand on your Za-bills at all times!

Steel Crown Productions -

Review

The Guild Exodus Wars Miniatures

by Ian Barstow

It's been quite a while since I've either played or seriously looked at any 6mm (we used to call it 1/300th back in the day) miniatures so I was very keen to take the opportunity to review the Exodus Wars models sent to us by Steel Crown Productions. The models we have all belong to the Guild faction as far as I can tell, although as most of the models are not labelled I am working in conjunction with the web site to confirm the identity of the vehicles.

As an overview these are science fiction forces, usable with rules provided by Steel Crown themselves or with the very good Future War Commander, which has an army list for The Guild.

The infantry supplied are the *Guild Legionnaire Centuria* infantry pack, which contains 150 models in four poses - a standard rifleman, an officer/NCO, a missile launcher and a light repeating laser. They currently retail at £8.95, which is pretty reasonable at 6p each. I would have liked to

see a little more variety in the way of the standard grunts but it's not as big an issue in 6mm as it would be in, say, 15mm. The casting is good with an acceptable level of flash and I think they will paint up easily using

Armypainter products which, these days, is my template for buying miniatures.

Next up is the Hoplon APC, the transport for the infantry. This is quite a sizeable miniature for a 6mm model, but works well alongside



the infantry. The model is a half-track, which seems slightly at odds with a sci-fi feel, having gone out of vogue after World War 2. Still, the good thing about sci-fi is that you are only really limited by your imagination and willingness to accept what is put in front of you. The Hoplon is best described as a cross between an American M3 and a German Hanomag (should that mean anything to you!).

Following on I appear to have two-thirds of the weapons support pack, probably the H64 Heavy Repeating Laser Platforms and the M9 Howitzers. Neither of these comes with crews. The laser looks like it could be automated but the howitzers look like they should have crews, although nothing obvious is on the web site. It would be easy enough



are pointing firmly skywards, leaving one in no doubt as to the intention of the vehicle. I like all these vehicles although I would have liked to see some variety in the chassis used. I appreciate that many modern vehicles are designed around a core platform, which gives a feel of 'realism', however on the tabletop there is an inclination to 'sameness', which I'm not keen on. The turrets are all different, of course, and I am being intentionally picky, being as we pride ourselves at The Ancible on independent reviews.



to convert some of the infantry however, so not a big deal. I would describe the castings as solid rather than inspiring. However they will do their job more than satisfactorily and they are likely to survive clumsy handling without suffering.

The final three selections provided are heavy armour types, namely a main battle tank, a multiple rocket launcher and a self-propelled anti-aircraft gun. Taking the tank first, it is the Achilles MBT, to give it its full name. I really like this model, and the detailing on the sloped turret is particularly nice. The turret is perhaps a little small for the chassis but not so that it matters.

The Cerberus MRL comes on the same chassis as the Achilles and looks pretty good. It has some sort of multi-sided sphere on the top of the turret which looks very nice and may be intended as a radar array or similar. That's how I'd paint it, anyway. The final vehicle is the Icharus SPAAG, again on the same chassis, and sporting twin Gatling-style guns which



In conclusion, arguably the models are closer to 1/200th (10mm) than 6mm but as long as there is a consistency this again is no big deal, and the models benefit from the additional sculpting size. I'm getting into Future War Commander and from what I've seen here this may be my producer of choice to start off. Recommended.



Infinity Miniatures Review

by
Jez
Fairclough

If you're an Infinity player than the past few months have seen a bumper set of releases. So let's have a look at what we've been sent of late by faction.

Yu Jing

Kuang Shi
Celestial Guard
Japanese Sectorial Army

If you're a Yu Jing player it's been especially pleasing of late. The Japanese Sectorial Army box set combines various blisters into a single starter army and is a good starting point for many. If you're not a veteran Infinity player you need to be careful of the swords as there is a lot of flash on them. If you get too knife-happy you could end up cutting off something you need.



Mercenary

Valerya Gromoz

The HMG Veteran Kazak and Loup-Garou certainly add some hard hitting power to the Ariadna forces, not that with the likes of Mirage 5 they need anything more to upset the enemy. The mercenary Valerya Gromoz could bring some handy Hacking ability to the Ariadna side as well.



Nomads

Tomcat Emergency and
Rescue Special Team
Lunokhod Sputnik



I have to say I love the Tomcat team; they look really nice and their multi-capable role sees them as being usable in any Nomad army. Along with the very nice stopping power and the sheer destructive capability of the Sputnik you can't really go wrong.

Combined

Cadmus Shasvastii
Rasyat



The Combined have had a good mix of additions with the Rasyat being the one I really like the look of most.

The elite Asawira have given the Haqqislam another small unit capable of either holding an area against pretty much all comers or as a main spearhead taking on the enemy face to face. Yet to see any Odalisques in action so I'll reserve judgement till I do.

Pan Oceania

Aquila Guard
Fusilier

Finally, the Pan Oceania Aquila Guard with Multi rifle and shock close combat weapon is going to bolster an already solid army.



With Human Sphere out as well – a book I hope to review in earnest very soon – it's been a great few months from the guys at Corvus Belli.

Haqqislam

Asawira Regiment
Odalisques



Filla-Glu

The thing about being a wargamer is that there is so much more to it than gaming. For starters you need to buy the miniatures, assemble them, paint them and then when that's done they have to be stored away to stop all that hard work from going to waste. It tends to be the little things in the hobby we take for granted. Like Glue.

Now I'll be one of the first to admit that I have just bought any old superglue to stick my minis together and have never given it a thought. So when Jamie Lamb from Filla-Glu (<http://www.Filla-Glu.com>) offered us a sample of their Filla-Glu products at first I thought it's just glue isn't it? They are all the same aren't they? In a word: No, it appears they are not the same at all.

The blurb supplied says that the guys at Filla-Glu have had 30 years in the adhesive market so they should certainly know what they're doing and the range just seems to be expanding. As a starter they sent us seven different types of their glue as well as the intriguingly named Kicka Pen.

Filla-Glu Instant comes in three viscosities (or for those who don't want to look that up it's the amount of time it takes to dry). The low (LV) will dry in 2-6 seconds and the high (HV) in 10-20 seconds giving you a little more time to position the parts to be glued. The medium (MV) gives a drying time in between the others. Having tested them I can confirm this stuff really bonds and they say it'll bond pretty much any material to anything.

A word of warning – the bottles these products come in are very soft plastic so you don't need to be putting much pressure on them to get the right amount of glue. Just a gentle squeeze and you're sorted. One of the other products supplied with the sample pack was some Filla-Glu Undo which, as the name implies, is for removing glue from any surface it might have accidentally got on. Which we all know can happen. So, no more scraping tools clean when just a few spots of this and you're going to be sorted in no time at all. They also recommend that you use the Undo to clean the nozzles of the applicators after use, which is pretty sensible;

I've lost count of the times I've gone to use glue only to find I didn't seal the lid properly and the whole bottle has cured.

The Filla-Glu Wicking is the fastest setting glue they currently produce giving you 3 seconds before its sets on you, making it good for those fast jobs where you don't have the time to be sat holding parts together. Used in conjunction with their Filla-Powda you can bridge gaps which gives you the ideal combination for those difficult parts and no real need for trying to get Green Stuff into awkward areas.

The Kicka Pen is great as it's a Primer/Cleaner/Activator all in one handy Felt-tip-style pen. Simply go over any tricky areas and the Kicka Pen will clean off any grease or residue. Then apply the Filla-Glu of your choice and it acts as an activator and speeds up the curing time. They also advise its use under certain conditions, so it's not so effective if it's too cold, dry or you are trying to fill larger gaps. Pretty much the usual obvious things that we all merrily ignore in reality!

As a product range I have to say I was more than impressed by what the guys have to offer (although Ian Cook had problems trying to use the Filla-Glu Black which took a considerable time to dry when applied in relatively thick form). They answered every question I asked and that's a huge does of kudos on the customer service front. You can't ask for better than that when you're stuck – sorry I had to get the pun in somewhere [*somewhere else might have been better – Ed*]. If you need to colour match check out their Colours of War range for a little more fun.

I think that the price of these products is very reasonable as well. The Filla-Glu Black/Clear are £4.99, whilst the other products we saw are priced at £3.99 so in many ways it's a lot cheaper than buying from your local DIY store, especially as they come in 10g bottles which is about four times the amount you get in a standard over the counter superglue tube. Recommended.



Malifaux from Wyrd Games is one of the latest skirmish combat wargames on the market and for any that have been trying to buy it you'll know it's been selling like hot cakes. It's also a game that although you have need of a random element doesn't use a single DIE!!!

This is what have the guys at Wyrd got to say about there success to date?

"Of course we are surprised we've had so much success in a market that is both very competitive and filled with a lot of high quality products. We did, however, think that we were bringing something different and interesting, so we had hopes that it would catch people's attention and gain a following. We are very

happy with the response we've gotten, which makes the long, long hours worth it, as we try to keep up with everything. Malifaux has always been something Nathan and I believed in, and we're just thrilled that people are really enjoying the game."

Malifaux is a turn based system that works on the idea of 'I move a model, you move a model' and so on. Each model has a certain amount of action points that allow it to complete basic things like walking, shooting, casting spells and so on.

So what Genre is it? Well in the words of the Creator Nathan Caroland it's... "Steamvictoriohorrorwestpunk!"

Well what he's saying is it has a style all of its own. Okay, so that is always a nice cop out when you don't want to stick a game in a pigeon hole. But in the case of Malifaux it's very true. It draws its ideas from Victoriana, Steam Punk, Horror, the Old West and I'm sure if you sit down and really look you'll find a dozen other genres and styles shoehorned in some place. Now you might think this would clutter a game and make it lack a single direction but I have to say it gives the game its own direction which.

The next question is: where is Malifaux?

Malifaux is set in a world separated from our own by, at first, a single Portal. It's also prior to the Malifaux setting that we have tried to colonise before. Tried and failed rather horribly as well. The running fluff through the book also introduces you to some of the main protagonists you'll have waving your flag, from the dedicated Lady Justice to Zoraida the Hag. You also get an understanding of the forces that they have at their disposal, from the re-animated dead to the likes of the Guild Judges and Death Marshals.



If you love background info I also suggest that you take a look at the Wyrd website (www.wyrd-games.net) for the webzines they have done. They have a few more stories from the Malifaux universe as well as info on what's up-and-coming. They are a great resource for those fluff junkies out there, of which I confess to be one.

The fluff gives the game a very dark and eerie feel to it. Some of the ideas for scenery only heighten that feel as well. The areas of play can be from the dusty, lawless frontier, much like the Wild West, to the sprawling city itself with its ruined buildings and gothic architecture. Or, if you're feeling really adventurous you can go and explore the bayou and swamps. There are a lot of times you really don't know what's around the corner because of the style of this game, and I happen to like that a lot. I'm certainly interested in seeing what direction Wyrd takes the game as it expands and as more information is let slip through the webzines.

The Crews

Moving on to building forces, Malifaux lets you create small bands its calls Crews, split into Masters (the leaders) and Minions (the followers). These Crews owe their allegiance to one of the four main factions. As with most games of this style, we also have a fifth faction, the so-called independents made up of a mix of the indigenous Goblins and those who have Guns/Fists/Claws for hire.

Resurrectionists

Resurrectionists certainly bring the horror element to the game. This is accentuated by the fact that a lot of the minions they bring along come from the recently dead and then re-animated. This can make them a fun army to collect and paint, letting that red paint brush wander over the mini to great effect. As a force they are a major outcast of the game, hunted by The Guild for their actions and hated by the populace as a whole for their ability to bring back people's loved ones and dangerous criminals alike. For me, Seamus the Mad Hatter captures the quirky aspect of the Resurrectionists, dressed in his Victorian

best and a bevy of beautiful (-ish) re-animated women following him around. Nicodem is the undertaker, dressed well and ever willing to bring back those he's buried for later use; Dr Douglas McMourning is a well rounded Master, being a doctor and pathologist. He's also what you would think of as the archetypal Victorian mad scientist, taking his skills into the many sewers under Malifaux City where he lets his abandoned creations roam around. After all, he has no use for anything that didn't quite work out as expected.

The Guild

The Guild is the local law enforcement in Malifaux. Their approach is in many ways taken as being what they feel is best for the populace, so you could call it draconian to say the least. It was created when the breach was re-discovered by the magical community. The Guild's initial remit was to ensure that Malifaux Soulstones kept flowing and the breach was kept safe from ever being closed again. Whilst some of what The Guild does isn't exactly welcomed by certain of the antagonists they fight, they are well known by the ordinary residents who applaud The Guild's attempts to keep that sort of undesirable down. The Guild crews in Malifaux are split into three main groups, the Neverborn-hunting Ortegas who are as apt at killing them as they are at laying down a hail of lead. Sonnia Criid's Witch Hunters have anti-magic and anti-mage written all over them, as the title suggests. The Witchling Stalkers are capable of making it hard for mages to cast spells with them around and Samael Hopkins, a particularly sturdy minion, is well designed for taking on those with high casting skill. Lady Justice and her Death Marshals pick up the final element of Malifaux's villains: the Undead. They are probably the ones most respected by people as well, as no likes to see their nearest and dearest rise from the grave and go on a killing spree.

Neverborn

No one is really sure how the Neverborn came about. What the people of Malifaux do know scares them to the very core. Some of the

creatures like the Nephilim have the look of monster's about them. But some like Candy and Kade (two VERY scary – and slightly troubling, it has to be said – children) show that the Neverborn must be in some way attuned to the human sub-conscience. They know the things that really scare us and then manifest those forms to the greatest of effect. People are hoping the more of the lore they discover and understand the better equipped they will feel against this terrifying enemy. Lilith with her band of monstrous of Nephilim is known for her lightning raids designed to strike as much fear and terror wherever they go. As the book says Lilith is the Malifaux version of the bogeyman and parents use her name to great effect with unruly children. Pandora with her soft and sweet looks hides the fact that most of the minions she employs are far closer to looking friendly than they really are. Zoraida, on the other hand, may look like her hag but her machinations behind the scenes can be felt by all.

Arcanists

The Arcanists, or the Miners and Steamfitters Union to give them their proper name, are an organisation that represents the normal worker in Malifaux, or at least that's the front it puts out. Behind the scenes Ramos, along with other well known Arcanists, tries to recruit new talent into what's in fact a criminal organisation. As every man, woman and child in Malifaux can have at least a tiny spark of magic in them it makes them a target for Guild Witch Hunters. Ramos brings with him his horde of metallic spiders (which instantly remind me of the movie Wild, Wild West and for all the good reasons). Rasputina is connected to an ancient Cult of December and if you are looking for someone to bring winter into the game then this is the lady for you. Her Ice Gamin and the towering Ice Golem can certainly make the area very frosty. Marcus is the final master in the Arcanists' bag of tricks, with his ability to become different animals and his control of those magical creatures that the Arcanists have chosen to create.

Independents

Beyond these groups we also have the Independents, those capable or either looking after themselves for a short period of time or those really capable of staying out of the political schemes of any side. People like Leveticus and Viktoria are Masters who can rally a small band to whatever cause they happen to be involved in and some of the minions like Bishop or Hans could offer crews what they think they are missing. In other words as a player you can take a look at your Crew, analyse the weak spot, and potentially remedy that with an Independent – in other words, they are effectively mercenaries.

Soulstones

So what brings all these forces apart from the Neverborn to Malifaux? Soulstones is the answer. What to the uninitiated might appear to be a simple rock but to anyone with magical abilities (and as we know that's nearly anyone in Malifaux) it brings great wonders to life.





Soulstone is a rock mined by those The Guild lets into Malifaux. Sometimes these are people hoping to make their fortune but a majority of them seem to be people trying to repay their debt to The Guild. The other unique thing about Soulstones is they recharge in the prescience of those dying. Creating ways to reuse this precious commodity is something worth fighting and indeed dying for, and using Soulstones is a key element of the game itself.

When creating a crew both sides decide a starting Soulstone pool with which to purchase its crew from. Those left over go into the Crew's pool. They thus act as a points system for the game.

Crews in Action

So what does each faction bring to the table?

Resurrectionists

You're never going to be short of bodies if you're a Resurrectionist. If your opponent can't put your models down for good or keep his own casualties down then they are just extra minions for your army. It's also very handy when you have people like Mortimer who can find new bodies as well. Though a Resurrectionist army can lack some distance firepower they shouldn't be underestimated; once they have shambled into close combat range they are more than capable of dragging a model down and none do it better than Flesh Constructs or the mindless violence that's hidden behind Bete Noire or the Hanged Man.

The Guild

If you're looking for lots of guns and then some more guns then The Guild is for you. A good majority of The Guild's available models are packing some sort of gun or another. This amount of firepower can keep your enemy off guard whilst those better designed for face-to-face action have the time to sneak closer to finish the enemy off. The Witchling Stalkers can be used to shut down the enemy's magic as well, making the battlefield and action all to your liking.

Neverborn

The Neverborn bring some subtle combat to the game. With a mix of magic designed to draw people in closer for the kill by your big nasty monster or those designed to make what you thought you were fighting a lot harder. I just love the idea that your small Terror Tot can, in the right situation, end up as a Mature Nephilim.

Arcanists

The Arcanists have a good mix of minions. Some, like the Arachnids, might not look that much to worry about but give them the chance to swarm up and they can cut a mess through anything stupid enough to stand in the way of progress. You also have access to the beasts and creatures created by some of the Arcanists and I certainly would want to wake up to find the Sabertooth Cerebus watching me. Rasputina's Gamin are nasty as well, with their Aura ability (effectively a template of damage centred on the model) they can wander about dealing damage to anyone that gets in close, though they are susceptible to being killed by bigger opponents, although when they shatter they may just get the last laugh.

So, building a Crew is pretty simple. The first thing is to agree your starting points and whether you're playing a Scrap or Brawl. Scraps allow you to bring a single Master, where a Brawl, being bigger, allows the use of multiple Masters. It's simply a case of how big a game you want.

In this example I'm using one of the starter sets: The Guild's Witch Hunter and her Crew, led by Sonnia Criid.

Sonnia Criid – Free (You don't pay for your master)

Samael Hopkins – 8 Soul Stones

3 Witchling Stalkers – 4 Soul Stones each

So that gives you a nice 20 Soul Stone starting force. The various starter sets have between 20-25 Soulstones of troops in them, although being able to add spare Soulstones to the cache that comes with each master means that boxes can be set on each other without the addition of any other models, which is what starter sets should be about.

This is a nice, easy force to play. The Witchling Stalkers are pretty nasty considering their average points cost, with the fact they can both shoot and have an Aura that causes spell casters in the area to have negative flips (this refers to the system of drawing cards which replaces the use of dice in Malifaux) which can make getting past them very frustrating. Samael is just designed to take down the opposition's Master, with the fact that his combat skills are better if the enemy has a casting ability of 6 or more, and with spells like Flaming Bullets it's best to try and keep something big between yourself and him. Sonnia is just the icing on the cake; her fire spells can be used either like an artillery strike dropping on several models at the same time or her Flame Wall can be used to block areas off, channelling enemies into killing zones.

All the models can shoot as well, so they can certainly keep people back. For some variety and if I wanted someone more capable of going head to head with, for example, Neverborn monster's or Resurrectionist undead, a good Executioner never goes a miss.

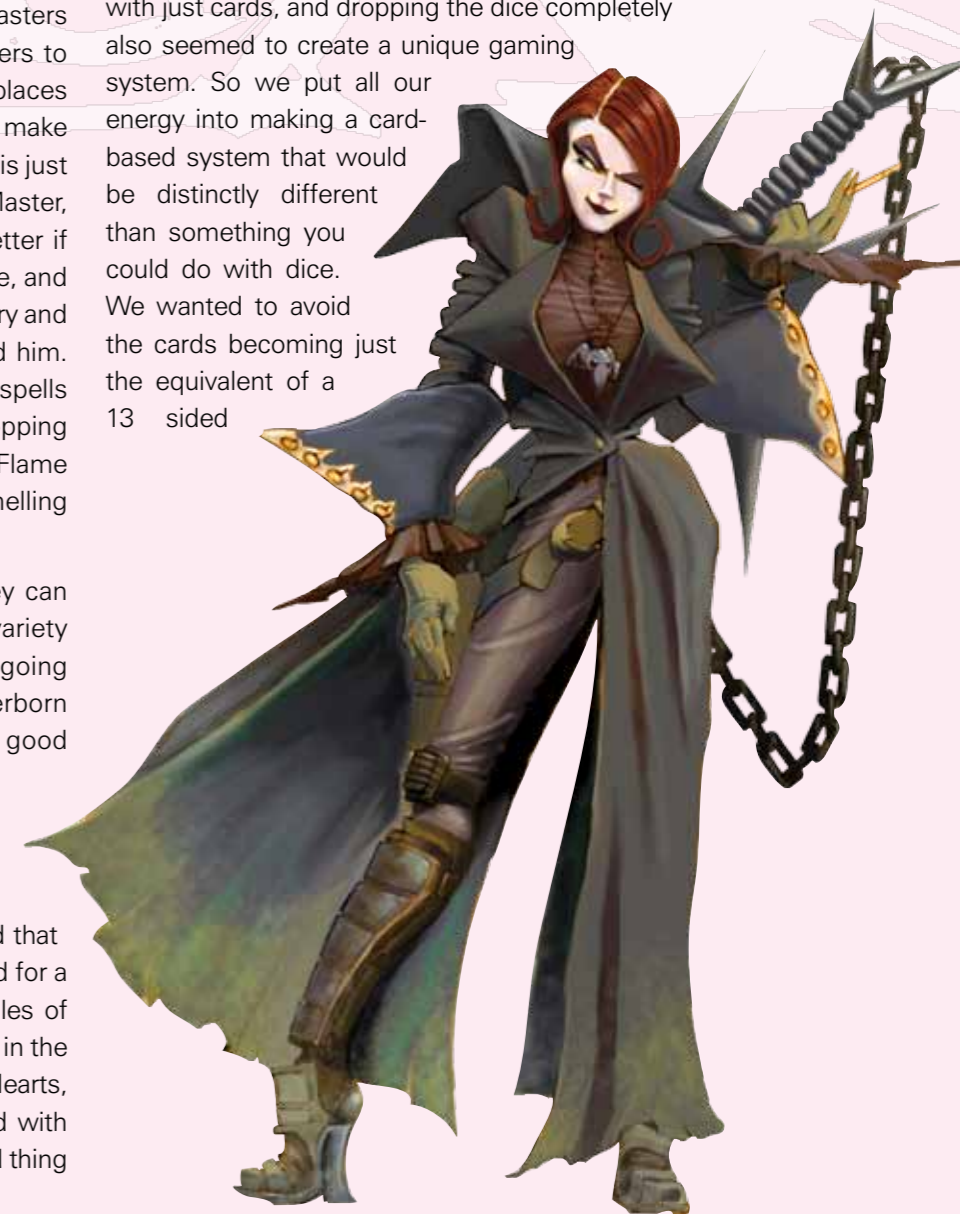
The Fate Deck

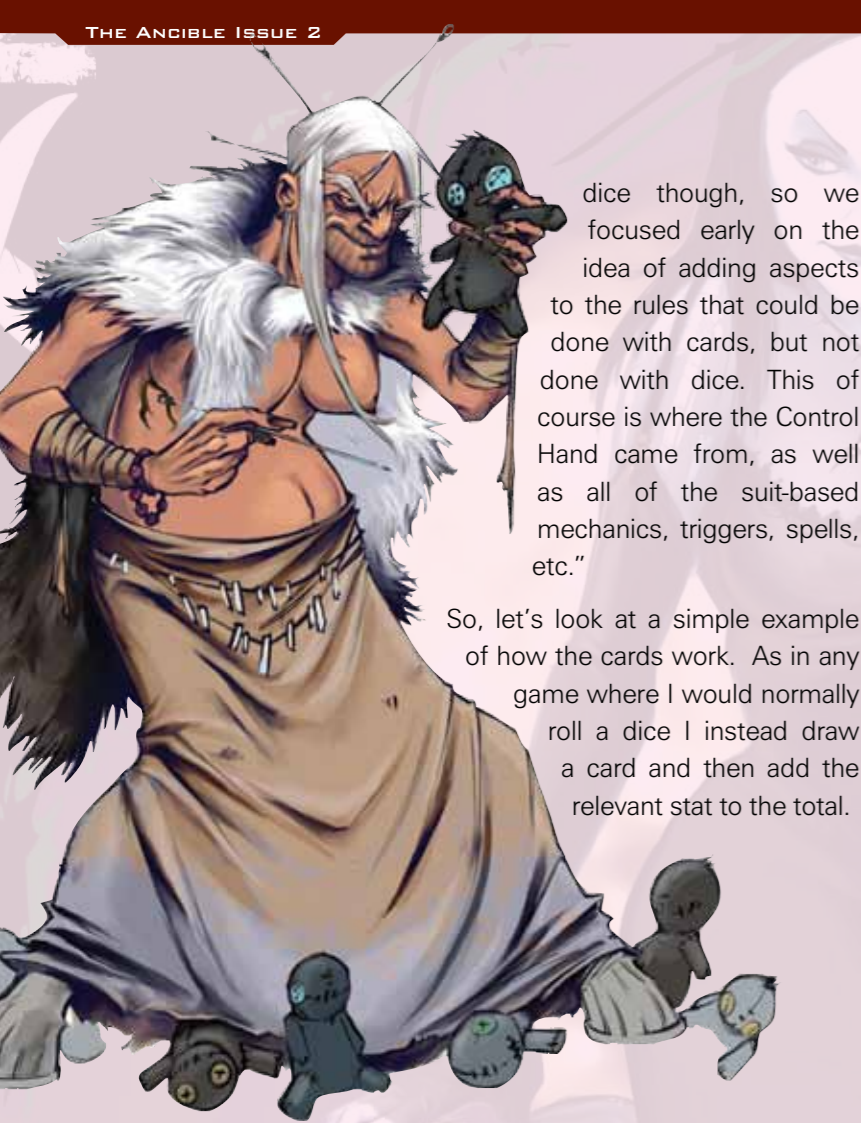
Right at the start of the review I mentioned that Malifaux doesn't use dice. It still has a need for a random element but replaces the usual piles of plastic with a deck of cards, or as it's called in the game a Fate Deck. The normal four suits of Hearts, Diamonds, Spades and Clubs are replaced with Tomes, Masks, Crows and Rams. The good thing

is you don't have to actually buy a Fate Deck as the rules explain how to convert a normal deck if you want to, But some of the artwork is stunning and it really adds to the feel of the game. There is also something of a kudos thing going on here. It's very likely that turning up to play with some ropey pack of cards you borrowed from a former Christmas present is going to make you look like a right cheapskate, but you'll know from the nature of your own gaming group whether that is likely to be an issue.

I asked the guys how early on in the game development they thought about dropping dice completely:

"We decided to go diceless very early in the development process. The first couple of drafts had both dice and cards, but I saw very quickly that we could do everything we wanted to do with just cards, and dropping the dice completely also seemed to create a unique gaming system. So we put all our energy into making a card-based system that would be distinctly different than something you could do with dice. We wanted to avoid the cards becoming just the equivalent of a 13 sided





dice though, so we focused early on the idea of adding aspects to the rules that could be done with cards, but not done with dice. This of course is where the Control Hand came from, as well as all of the suit-based mechanics, triggers, spells, etc.”

So, let’s look at a simple example of how the cards work. As in any game where I would normally roll a dice I instead draw a card and then add the relevant stat to the total.

All characters have the following stats (those in italics are most likely to be added to cards): Walk/Charge, Height, Willpower, Casting Ability, Damage and Wounds. Weapons also have range, Combat and damage stats. In a lot of games that’s it, your opponent makes its responding roll and you see who came out best. However in Malifaux it’s a little different as at the start of the game you draw six Control Cards from your fate Deck into your hand (some Masters let you have more.) You can use these Control Cards to swap with a card you’ve already drawn – this is called Cheating Fate. Thus if you had a Combat of 5 and drew a 4 you might swap it for the 13 you have in your hand to make it harder to resist. The lower card drawn always gets to Cheat Fate first and then the winner can up his total if he wants to or has become the loser, should he have a card able to do so.

If you’re a Master or a model that can use Soulstones you can spend one of those for a change to either Cheat Fate again or in some cases add the card to your total for that real killer hit.

Everything works in the same manner, be it casting a spell or resisting the terror caused by some 20-foot-tall teddy bear (trust me you’ll never look at

your ted the same way again). The only thing that’s slightly different is Damage. Once you’ve worked out if you hit the other guy/girl/thing you work out the difference between your scores. This then tells you if you get any extra cards to add to your damage flip or take away. Beating them by a small amount could see you pulling a lot of cards for damage but having to take the lowest one. But with the addition of Triggers both in defence and offence you can find that sometime you end up doing a little more damage than you expected.

Triggers are like skills but they need something to actually trigger them. A lot of the Triggers are based on the need for a certain suit to come being able to Cheat Fate from your Control Deck with a card of that suit. For instance let’s look at one of the simple ones from The Guild’s Sonnia Criid.

Cb(RAM) Absorb Magic: After hitting defender with a Runed Blade Strike, defender must discard 1 Control Card for each RAM in this model’s final attack total. This model draws 1 Control Card and heals 1 wound.

Sonnia Criid already has a single Ram as part of her Combat stat and, if you can win the combat and get another one in there you’re going to start stripping away the enemy’s ability to Cheat Fate. Once they run out of Control Cards you’re going to hopefully have an easier time yourself. That’s as long as they are not doing the same to you and why shouldn’t they be after all? She’ll also be healing herself of a wound as well, so this is a very versatile Trigger.

Some Triggers can give you a subtle edge and some can really deal the extra damage, turning your 1-2 wounds into 3-4 or more. Coupled with the right spells even a weak wound can put a model out, if not down for good.

Because they were in the answering-my-questions mood I asked the Wyrd guys where the idea for Triggers came from.

“As I mentioned, when we decided to develop Malifaux as a card-based mechanic, we spent a lot of time thinking up ideas that really worked much better with a card mechanic as compared to dice. Triggers were one of these developments that seemed to just work perfectly going hand in hand with the cards. The fact cards offer both value and suit means that we needed to give suits important meaning, while the card value resolved the duel. Triggers fit this role wonderfully, as they offer powerful adjustments to the way your models play, and are based completely off of the suits of the cards you play.”

Malifaux is pretty easy to get your head round, but it’s going to take you a while to master it, what with the Triggers, the spells and the fact that the Fates can sometimes be so against you. There are enough reasons to want to keep playing again and again to hone your skill to that killer edge, and to develop and expand your Crew For those who love stat grinding, the presence of imponderables like Triggers makes for a far harder time calculating that uber-Crew. This can only be a good thing.

The miniatures for the game are also something that really bring out the fun aspect, I love minis like Seamus the Mad Hatter who, with his wide grin just always reminds me of some insane Victorian gentlemen, while others like the subtle elements weaved into Marcus or Myranda certainly show that Wyrd went out of their way to bring a good depth of character to the game. The only model so far for me that doesn’t do anything is the Nurse. It’s well sculpted but the model just seems to be from the wrong era to fit in with all the rest. But if all I can find is one mini in among a great pile of stuff then really should I worry? I don’t think so.

Conclusion

If you are looking for that new game and you like the idea of something so far removed from anything else its going to really make you think, then take a look at Malifaux. I don’t think you’ll be disappointed by what you find.

But what about where the game is going? This is what Wyrd had to say on that.

“I am currently working on the follow up expansion to Malifaux, which will involve some new game mechanics, but primarily you will gain a large number of new options for your Crews. Additionally it will include at least one new Master for each Faction. The success of

Malifaux has also given us the ability to pursue a couple of other projects as well that we have been thinking about for quite a while. This includes both additional products which tie into Malifaux, but also games which are separate from the Malifaux world. I can’t say exactly when we will have these available, as they are fairly early in development, but we’re working very hard on them and excited about the possibilities.”

In conclusion, this game has gone down very well with just about everybody at The Ancible and it comes as highly recommended.



WYRD MINIATURES

MALIFAUX

BATTLE REPORT

Wyrd Miniatures' Malifaux
 Players: Kenny Robb and Ian Barstow
 Overview by Ted Chang

Perdita Ortega stood by the back door of the Red Lizard Saloon and looked across the small township. Somewhere out there Rasputina and her gang of ice creatures were waiting. Perdita had information that the Cult of December were planning to hit the town's Gun Shoppe looking for loot and supplies. To Perdita and the rest of the Ortega family this didn't matter. What mattered were the bounties on their heads and the reward they would get for taking out Rasputina and her minions.

Behind her Papa Loco was happily juggling three sticks of dynamite while her brothers, Francisco and Santiago were talking quietly, carefully avoiding their crazy father's eyes. It was better to just let him get on with whatever was left going on inside his head. Finally, sitting quietly and studying the lie of the land was Nino, the rifleman. He would be the one protecting their backs, making sure they would all come home again. Hopefully...

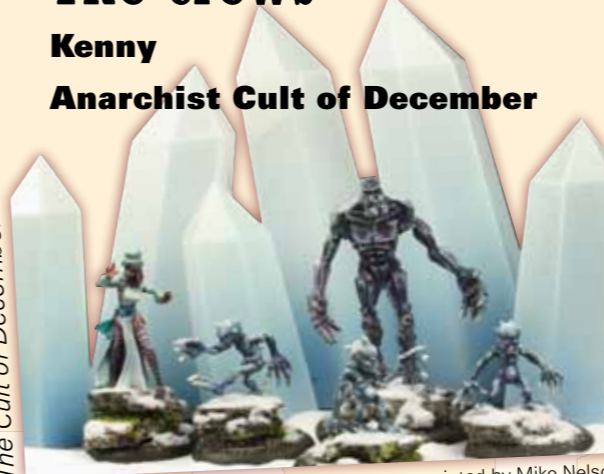
A CHARACTER-DRIVEN SKIRMISH GAME
 SET IN THE WORLD OF MALIFAUX

The Crews

Kenny

Anarchist Cult of December

The Cult of December



Miniatures painted by Mike Nelson

I have never been one to go for the easy option. I have always felt a bit like the guy who bet it all on black when it came up red. And so it is when it comes to picking which faction I am going to play in a game. All the other guys look at it scientifically and decide based on how much shooting a group can do. I either look at the models and go 'ooh I like them' or I draw the short straw and have to go with one that hasn't been picked.

With all that in mind I really quite like the Cult of December. They are not a shooty crew and they require a bit of tactics to use correctly so I thought it would be an ideal opportunity to try them out and give game players another alternative to shoot, shoot and shoot some more.

All the miniatures I am using are straight out of the basic Rasputina box set. I have not added any other models to the set so it straight out the box into the encounter.

The Box set consists of:

Rasputina – Master, with a Soulstone cache of 4

Ice Golem – Soulstone Cost 9

A direct manifestation of December, the ice golem is a sorcerous construct, conjured from the base energies of the world and infused with a rudimentary intellect. It is a rugged loyal servant. The creatures are often bound into magical contracts to serve as bodyguards and bruisers, protecting Decembers chosen as they pursue his schemes.

3 x Ice Gamins – Soulstone Cost 3x4 = 12

Conjured from the frigid energies of snow and ice, these small golems are effective in battle. When strength and durability are less important, or a large Golem unwieldy, these creatures are used to overwhelm the enemy with sheer numbers and icy talons.

Total Cost 21

As I have said the style of this war band is not about shooting the area of effect spells and abilities are the thing that are most useful and I hope to use to best effect providing that I have enough terrain to hide from the rain of bullets I am expecting from Ian's Crew.

Ian
 The
 Ortegas



The Ortegas

I've always loved the Old West and I tend to prefer defensive, shooty armies, so when the club got into Malifaux I was instantly attracted to the Ortegas. Wyrd have done such a great job with the miniatures that pretty much whatever crew you are attracted to will contain a really good selection of models. I first picked the Ortegas based on a combination of looks and what was clearly a crew based on firepower, and it was only after I got them that I started looking in depth at their potential. It's huge.

Clearly they can all fire (or throw dynamite in the case of Papa Loco) but what really gives this crew the edge is their Companion (Family) talent. This means that if they are all within six inches of at least one other family member then they can activate simultaneously. Malifaux devotes call this the Alpha Strike, and it can

be devastating. However I have found that the talent is most useful for splitting the Ortegas into fire teams. My standard groupings are Perdita and Francisco, Nino and Santiago, with Papa Loco well out of the way on his own. Papa really is a loose cannon and can cause massive damage to anybody if things go wrong so he's best avoided and used like a one-man tactical nuke.

Kenny and I are regular opponents at Malifaux so I knew he would already be aware of this. I also knew that to date he has never been able to stop it, so I'm working on the theory of 'if it ain't busted, don't fix it'.

The Ortegas all come in one box set and break down as follows:

Perdita – Master, with a Soulstone cache of 2

Francisco – Soulstone cost 5

Papa Loco – Soulstone cost 6

Santiago – Soulstone cost 7

Nino – Soulstone cost 7

That hits the full 25 Soulstone points allowed in this game, and is just one more reason why I like the Ortegas so much.

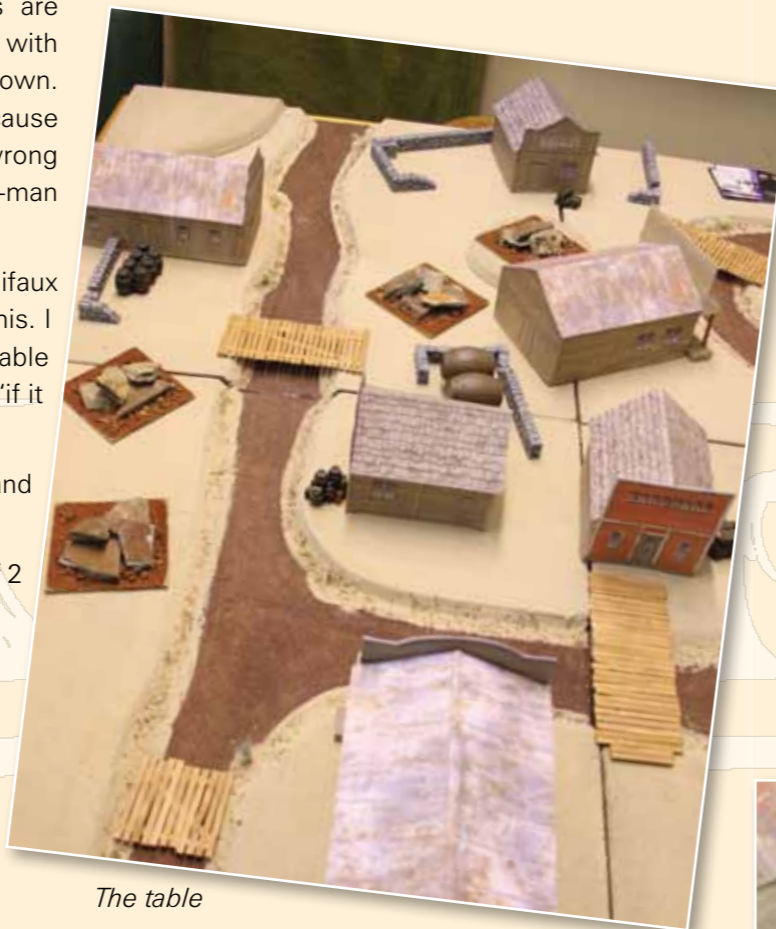
Setup Phase

Okay, before we get down to it we need to set up the Encounter between the Crews. This is done by using the fate decks and drawing cards. On this occasion we were loosely following the instructions set out in the rule book on page 90. Ian flipped a 7 so we are playing downtown. We took the buildings we had available and set them out on the table. I kept on placing buildings until we ran out and then I placed some obstacles just to make things more interesting.

Next flip was an 8 which dictated that we had a standard deployment as described on page 92 of the rule book. (Standard 6" deployment zone at opposite end of the table)

The next bit was a bit different and could really make us think hard. We each flipped to determine what our crew's Strategy was Ian drew a 6 (Slaughter) and I drew a 9 (Claim Jump). In simple terms Ian was trying to kill me and I was trying to take and hold an objective.

We both had the option of having some schemes which are private strategies that don't



The table

need to be made public but by this time we were just itching to get going so we decided not to use that option in this game.

Deployment

Ian won the draw for deployment, making Kenny set up first. He put his gaggle of Ice Gamins on his right flank, with Rasputina and her Ice Golem on the left flank, leaving the centre space empty. Clearly it looked like Kenny was planning on circling Ian on both flanks before hitting the store in the middle of town which was the target of his Claim Jump. The Ortegas arrived in a style familiar to everybody in the Ancible Office, with Perdita and Francisco lining up opposite Rasputina, Nino and Santiago in the centre by the saloon, and that raving loony Papa Loco on his own on the left facing the Ice Gamins. My guess was that Nino would be heading up to the balcony of the saloon to maximise his sniping potential while Santiago protected him from unwanted attention downstairs.



The Ortegas arrive

Turn 1

Kenny won the initiative draw and the Ice Golem rumbled forward out of cover towards Perdita and Francisco, although it was too far away to do anything other than carry out two walk actions. In fact all anybody in Turn 1 did was move forward, and as expected with the exception of crazy Papa who headed off towards the Ice Gamins it was clear that the Ortegas intended to make the Cult of December come onto them, and ominously Nino took up his hunting position as expected on the balcony of the saloon.

will always trigger at least one extra point of damage, which is needed against the mighty Ice Golem which has Armor 2 meaning that two is automatically subtracted from any damage taken down to a minimum of one. I was a weak hit anyway, meaning that the creature took just a single point of damage.



The Ice Golem cometh

Turn 2

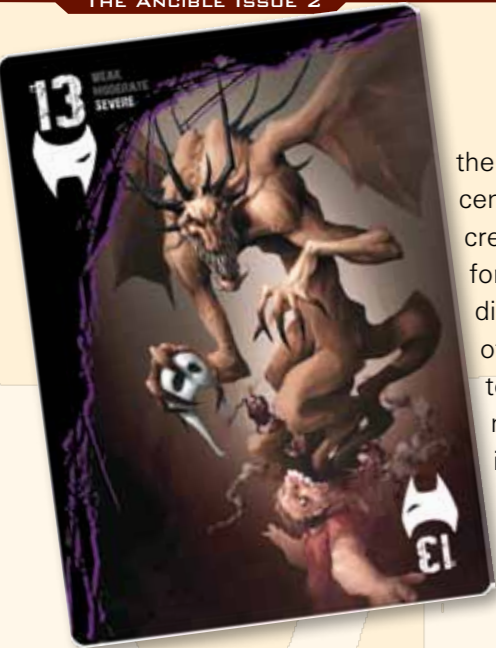
Kenny again won the initiative flip, and it was clear that he was getting unhappy about this. The reason? We work on Gamer's Logic in our office and that means that in due course when Kenny actually wanted the initiative he would probably lose it. The Ice Golem again rumbled forward at maximum speed towards Perdita, who then promptly moved forward into cover behind some packing crates and fired off a shot from her Peacebringer at the golem, hoping that she was in range. As it happened she was fractionally inside the 10 inches required, much to Kenny's disgust. One of Perdita's triggers is a Critical Strike and because she has the Rams symbol on her stat line it means that she



Perdita and Francisco take aim at the Golem

Meanwhile, Francisco, being two inches per Walk action slower than his nimble sister, had to use both actions to move up and take position alongside her, ready to rain hell down on the golem next turn, no doubt.

Ice Gamin #2 (Kenny's naming is highly imaginative) edged out to the left of his two buddies, and into the centre area of town, looking to draw Papa Loco back towards his family, although next up was Santiago who rather unexpectedly came forward to counter



the move. Ice Gamin #3 took up the central position of the three little creatures, also continuing to come forward as fast as it could, and this did indeed have the desired effect of drawing Papa Loco back in towards town. Ice Gamin #1 then moved out wide, presumably in an attempt to fry poor old papa's feeble mind further. Nino, comfortable on his balcony but well out of range just watched, leaving just Rasputina to come.

This was the moment Kenny had been waiting for. He intended to use Rasputina's Ice Mirror ability to power a December's Curse spell through the Ice Golem, which was within six inches of her after she used her first action to move forward, remaining completely hidden from the waiting guns. Kenny already knew he was in range and if things went well Rasputina could do some serious damage. Despite suffering -3 from his casting total for the Ice Mirror Kenny comfortably got the spell off, drawing a 12, or so he thought...lan had drawn a 2, but he Cheated Fate by using a 12 from his own hand to make Perdita's Defense (Df) resistance a massive total of 20, easily trumping Rasputina's 16 -0 no effect! Using Rasputina's special Casting Expert action (allows an extra spell per turn) Kenny attempted to do the same again, but this time drew a 2 against lan's 9. Kenny looked disconsolately at the cards in his hand and shook his head, suggesting he had nothing available to beat the Df of 17. So, another spell fizzled out and Kenny was now looking decidedly unhappy, muttering about bad luck and rubbish cards!

Needing to see for myself, I decided to take a look at both of their Control Hands – Kenny had nothing over a 5 and lan had nothing under a 10. I did my best not to laugh a lot.

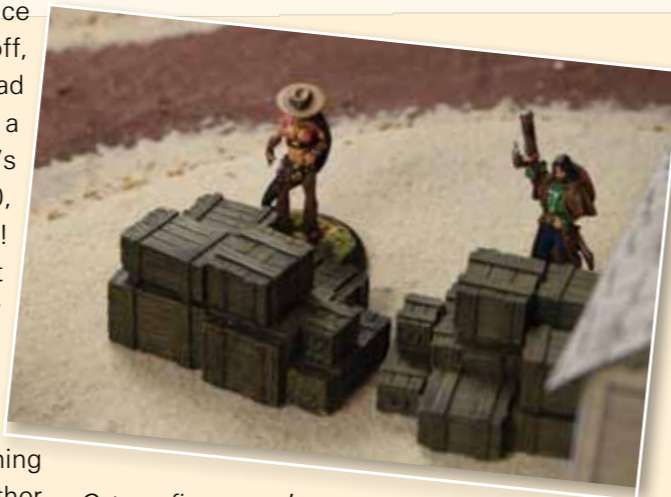
So, first blood (or icicle) to the Ortegas.

Turn 3

As per the inevitabilities of Gamer Logic lan won the initiative, much to Kenny's total disgust and various braying laughs from the rest of the

Lyneham mob who by now had stopped what they were doing to watch the game, presumably hoping for a name check in the article – fat chance, Parky...

Without further ado lan proceeded to unleash the hell that is the Ortegas' Family ability. Perdita began by using her Fast action to fire three times at the Ice Golem, which she already of course knew was just inside the 10-inch range of her Peacebringer. Despite drawing relatively poor cards for the shots lan was able to inflict three hits thanks to the stunningly good set of cards in his Control hand – Kenny still had nothing but rubbish in his! Despite the Golem's Armor 2 protection a total of four points of damage was inflicted meaning that the creature was already below half wounds. Activating Francisco immediately using the Companion ability, lan used him to fire off two more shots, causing another two points of damage, leaving the creature reeling with seven wounds taken and only two left.



Ortega firepower!

Shaking his head in disgust, Kenny girded his loins and looked over to his Ice Gamins. He knew now that the battered golem would take no further damage this turn and as such Rasputina's revenge could wait. Ice Gamin #2 continued to advance threateningly toward Santiago, who was positioning himself to stop the creature succeeding in its mission to seize the store. Santiago in turn moved into a shooting position before popping off a shot at the Gamin, but lan drew the black joker from his deck, which is the worst card possible and meant instant failure for the shot.

The central Ice Gamin, being #3 of course, also kept on moving forward, and appeared to be on the way to surrounding Santiago, or at least that's what lan seemed to think as he then moved Papa Loco back across the dirt track again. It appeared that when it came to moving papa lan was overcome with some of the model's own insanity, as all Papa seemed to be doing was running around like a headless chicken. lan no doubt would say that he was simply playing in character...However this seemed to work for Kenny, who moved forward Ice Gamin #1 which cast its free spell Bite of Winter which is a six-inch aura inflicting +1 damage on any models without armour. Papa Loco was inside range and promptly took a hit.



Crazy Papa Loco about to head off across the street

Annoyed by this, lan decided to see if Nino was in range of troublesome Ice Gamin #1, but the shot fell some distance short. This once more left Rasputina and Kenny decided to unload three spells through her Ice Golem conduit while it was still standing, in the hope of causing some major damage of her own. Going for zero subtlety Kenny went for three December's Curses, hoping no doubt to trigger the potentially lethal explosions available to all but weak damage, which would then hit Francisco as well as Perdita. This was actually a serious mistake – if Kenny had targeted

Francisco, who has Df 4 rather than Perdita's Df 8, things might have been a lot different. As it was, the first spell drew a black joker and fizzled out harmlessly, while although the next two were successfully cast, lan produced two 13's in succession direct from his deck to negate the spells. Kenny then had to leave the room for a while to bang his head on the wall in the corridor, adding to the collection of marks made over the years.



The height of the battle

So, at the end of what looked like the decisive turn Papa Loco was the only Ortega carrying any damage, while Kenny was praying for another initiative win to allow the doomed Ice Golem another chance at redeeming itself before the inevitable hail of bullets put it out of its misery.

Turn 4

On the back of two 13's, lan drew a 12 for initiative and Kenny looked at the 3 he had just turned, sensing what was coming next. It was too ruthless to even count as being horrible. Perdita was immediately activated and everybody knew that if she got off two hits that would be enough as the Ice Golem only had two wounds left. Two shots – two wounds, although lan needed high Control Hand cards on both occasions to score the wounds. Although neither shot was anything special they didn't have to be, and the creature shattered into a million fragments (okay, I made Kenny lie it on its side). Francisco, activating as usual on the Companion ability, rushed forward to begin to threaten Rasputina's position. It was overly aggressive considering the situation, but lan

clearly thought that if necessary Francisco was expendable, but it was also a possibility that he could draw Rasputina out into the open.



The Ice Golem snuffs it

Ice Gamin #2 then rushed forwards towards Santiago, also casting Bite of Winter to inflict a point of damage. In return Santiago missed again with his first shot before Ian decided that caution should prevail and moved him back away from the threatening creature. Ice Gamin #3 also pressed forward, threatening to swamp the Ortegas on this side, and causing Papa Loco to run in yet another direction, drawing the attention of Ice gamin #1 who did another point of damage on Papa thanks to its Bite of Winter.



Nino Ortega in action

Nino finally got a bead on Ice Gamin #1 from his high perch and inflicted two points of damage with his two rifle shots, drawing low cards and failing to activate any of his impressive array of triggers, much to Ian's annoyance. Once more this left just Rasputina to go in her usual last place, although it was hardly worth waiting for as she ignominiously fled from the advancing Francisco, refusing to be drawn into the open and instead hiding behind a building!



Rasputina about to run for cover!

Turn 5

Kenny finally won the initiative again, and proceeded to enact his plan of destroying Papa Loco and Santiago. The fixation on Papa Loco appeared to have come from his annoying habit of running around pointlessly, but Ian repeatedly harping on about the damage his dynamite could do seemed to ensure Kenny stayed focussed on the volatile maniac. Sure enough, Ice Gamin #1 charged Papa, inflicting a point of damage from its Bite of Winter aura before using its Icy Claw attack to inflict another two points of damage.



Is there method in Papa's madness?

On the other flank Perdita and Francisco moved forwards to begin surrounding Rasputina while back where the climax of the battle was taking place Ice Gamin #3 did yet another point of damage on Papa Loco with its Bite of Winter. Everybody thought that Ian must now activate Papa Loco and actually do something with him but instead he chose to activate Santiago who used two actions to get as far away from Papa as was possible. I suddenly began to see what was going to happen, but Kenny was oblivious as he moved Ice Gamin #2 to within six inches of Papa and used Bite of Winter to reduce the crazy old man to one wound. However Kenny had forgotten Papa's most dangerous feature – his Take Ya With Me spell. Actually, Ian had Kenny totally trapped regardless of what had previously happened. Papa also has the BOOM! Ability, which means that when he is killed all models within three inches suffer 5 five damage, enough to almost kill an Ice Gamin outright, except for its armour. However, what Ian really wanted to set up was the Take Ya With Me spell. Needing only a casting total of 10, Ian produced another 13 from his Control Hand to ensure the three Gamins would need to get 18#s to survive. With a Df of 4 it was almost impossible barring a red joker, and needless to say that didn't happen. All three gamins promptly disintegrated in the massive explosion as Papa Loco went out in style. It was a brilliant trap that was timed to perfection, and it effectively ended the battle. Seeing her minions massacred and four very healthy Ortegas ready to hunt her down, Rasputina put her hands up and surrendered.



The big BOOM!

The Result

Cult of December – 0 VP

The Ortegas – 2 VP

**The Ortegas
win!**

Conclusion

Kenny

I thought when I was setting up the board that I would use the maximum amount of scenery I could and I did. I will need to make up some more buildings for the next encounter. The plan was to stay in cover and not be caught in the open. Well what can I say...my plan didn't work. To be more exact my spells didn't work. If Rasputina had managed to get some of the spells off then the left flank might have been a different story.

The little Ice Gamins are ace and if you can keep them in cover and user their auras you can inflict lots of damage for zero loss. Then, when your opponent is down to a couple of wounds you pounce and finish them off. However to do this you really need to keep away from anything that shoots. The only thing I could hope to do was to get to the objective and hold it until the end of the game. Bad positioning and forgetting what I was trying to do meant I got the Gamins too close to Papa Loco and he took them all out in one POP! Having lost nearly everything Rasputina decided that going off to the spa for a treatment was better than hanging about to get shot.

It was very frustrating with all that magic; I prefer guns and lots of them, and I am still not 100% comfortable with the Cult of December and may change the crew around for the next outing. I would also like to point out that I was 4 points short of Ian's Ortegas which would have made all the difference (That's my story and I'm sticking to it). *[Using your Soulstones might have helped as well! – Ed]*

I find generally that the Guild is quite tricky to go up against as they have so much firepower but this does not mean that I won't keep trying. They can be beaten but in this case not by me.

The totally random nature of the cards is great and the Cheat Fate part of it adds so much more – if you have the cards to do it. Next time I am going to have a second pack up my sleeve with only 12's and 13's, then we will see.



Ian

Well, that couldn't have gone much better. I was really pleased the way my plan worked out, although I must admit I only really saw Papa Loco's part in it emerge during turn 4, so Ted is being a bit kind (which is unlike him) by suggesting it was part of my cunning scheme from the beginning. I think I was at a decided advantage throughout, being as I have had a lot more game time with the Ortegas than Kenny has had with the Cult of December. The Ortegas are also very easy to play. The trick with Malifaux is knowing what your characters are capable of, and that is the core of what makes this such an exceptional game, in my opinion. Too many people bandy about the term 'elegant' when it comes to gaming systems, but for once the term can be fairly applied. The rules are easy to learn and extremely difficult to master, because the onus is on playing to the strengths of your characters.

In this respect shooty crews are much easier to handle when it comes to developing – and following through – with a strategy. Mainly it's just staying out of melee range and hurling lead. The trick is making use of the Companion (Family) ability and never wasting it. I nearly always stick to the same pairings and that gives me the solid foundation, with Perdita and Francisco advancing and engaging at pistol range while Nino goes on overwatch, protected by Santiago. Meanwhile Papa really is the loose cannon, causing mayhem in unexpected and fun ways. Even just running him about seemingly pointlessly can be entertaining, although he is most handy as a psychological weapon, which is why I kept on about him, hoping to get Kenny so irritated with Papa that he'd really want to make sure he killed him. Getting Slaughter as my objective played right into my hands as well. Nothing sophisticated – just straightforward shooting!

The victors go back to the saloon



Kill 5 Minutes Online...

...and Learn Something New

By Jez Fairclough

Okay, so here we are at the end of the second issue and many thanks to all those who have suggested places to spend five minutes online whilst the paint dries. Some of them folks I'll have to leave for a different publication as the site name speaks volumes.

For those who want to keep sending me new places to look you can drop me an email at jez@the-ancible.com.

The first site this issue has to be one of the kings of the school of sticky back plastic and "here's one I made earlier".

TerraGenesis

<http://www.terragenesis.co.uk/>

This is the home of an ever expanding community dedicated to helping you turn some of that old junk you have laying around the house into some stunning scenery. The various ideas found on the site range in complexity but there are enough idea's to keep you busy with all that spare stuff your hording. Though family members may also enjoy you finally using the stuff as well.

The second site is:

Matakishi's Tea House

<http://www.matakishi.com/>

Now I have to say in my time I've garnered loads of ideas from here. When I was building some

houses for a Semi-historical Samurai game [*the rules of which he can never remember – Ed*] I looked on here for ideas for how to create foam core buildings. I have also used some of the ideas that Matakishi has suggested for 'Nam style buildings. It's a good site and one to keep your eye on as lots of stuff is always being added and even if you don't feel up to taking on a project it's always good to have a look at what others are doing out there. If you can't find inspiration for a project here you're not looking hard enough!

The last site for this issue, but by no mean's the least, is:

TerrainThralls

<http://www.terrainthralls.com/>

Whilst it doesn't have the amount of projects on it that TerraGenesis and Matakishi's sites have, what it does have is none-the-less of a very high standard. Some of the projects come with all the information you need to do it yourself, be it down to just the components, to in many cases the actual templates used to do the whole thing.

So, hopefully enough there people to keep you busy for a few moments and I hope to read more idea's in my inbox very soon.

In the next issue...



Future War Commander
Martian Army List

Threshold of
Darkness Part 2



Space Vixens Adventure

War on Edadh - It's war Jim but not as we know it
Brutal - trust me it is
101 things to do with card stock



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Platoon Britannica Hobby Weekend

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