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CHALLENGE 48

The Magazine of Science-Fiction Gaming



TWILIGHT: 2000™

Barbados

Loren K. Wiseman

MEGATRAVELLER®

Blue Eyes

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GURPS®

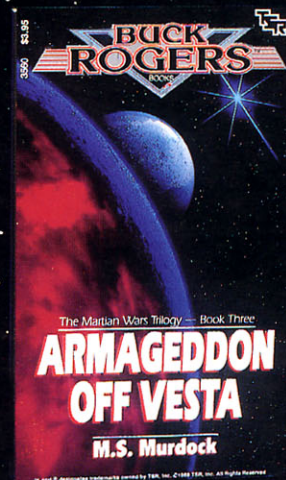
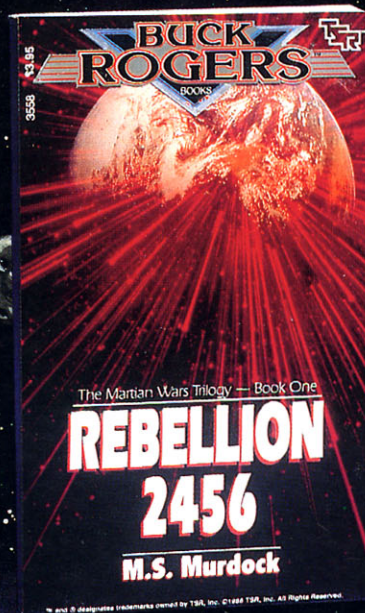
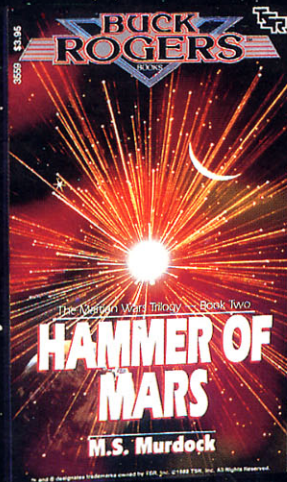
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About the Cover

David O. Miller brings to life the terror of the **Dark Conspiracy** universe. For more on GDW's new roleplaying game of modern horror, don't miss "Zombies of the Bayou" on page 50.

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CHALLENGE

The Magazine of Science-Fiction Gaming

Twilight: 2000

- 7 Barbados**
A three-scenario campaign for **Merc: 2000**. *Loren K. Wiseman*
- 13 Strangers in a Strange Land**
Escaped POWs roam the New Jersey countryside. How will the locals react to this organized group of Russians? *Adam Geibel*
- 16 Infantry Weapons Special Preview**
Special weapons to add to your collection. *Loren K. Wiseman*

MegaTraveller

- 20 Death Among the Stars**
Find out whodunnit in this mystery set in the Solomani Rim. *Kevin Scrivner*
- 26 Orbit City**
Execute a 5th column assault in this race against the clock. *Robert J. Cosgrave*
- 34 Behind Blue Eyes**
You are taken into custody after witnessing an assassination on Tiffany, dropping you in the midst of a whirlpool of political intrigue. *Charles E. Gannon*
- 42 An Overview of the Riies System**
History, geography, climate, and more! *Charles E. Gannon*

2300 AD

- 46 "We're Going Where?": Naval Reservists in 2300**
When shoot 'em up action is handicapped by restrictive legal limits, reservists are a valuable option for spaceborne combat. *Richard S. McEnroe*

Dark Conspiracy

- 50 Zombies of the Bayou**
A mysterious parasite takes control of unwary humans. *Frank Chadwick*

Space: 1889

- 52 Time Voyager**
George Wells is charged with the murder of inventor Averell Merritt. But he swears he's innocent! *James L. Cambias*

Features

From the Management.....	4	Briefs	58
Letters from our Readers	4	Reviews	91
Traveller News Service	19	Classifieds	94
Cartoon	33	Feedback Request	96
Conventions	49	Next Issue	96
Product Distribution	57	Feedback Results	96

Table of Contents

January/February 1991

Shadowrun

60 In the Name of Finland

All you have to do is help a mage retrieve a stolen rock. Sounds easy—right? Don't count on it! *Mark Galeotti*

Call of Cthulhu

68 The Bayou Ritual

A prominent occultist is murdered in Bayou Perdu. Local townspeople perform a mysterious ritual around an ancient circle of stones. Discover the secret of this tiny Louisiana town. *James L. Cambias*

Cyberpunk

72 CADS

Introduce these power-assisted armored suits into your *Cyberpunk* campaigns. *Legion G. McRae*

GURPS

74 Holdup at the Memory Bank

Liberate cell samples and a braintape of a prominent genetic engineer from Gold Cross Corporation. *David L. Pulver*

Star Trek

80 CommsLink Gambit

The *Monitor* is missing, the only sign of her a weak and unreadable distress call picked up from the Delta Triangle. Could this signal an imminent Klingon attack? *Jeffrey Groteboer*

Battletech

84 Wolftrap

Caught between the massed firepower of enemy 'Mechs and infantry, Wolf's Dragoons struggle to hold their ground. *Dale L. Kemper*

Renegade Legion

86 Hoplite Infantry Assault Carrier

The premier vehicle of a new class of TOG armor is now in limited service. *Rich Ostorero*

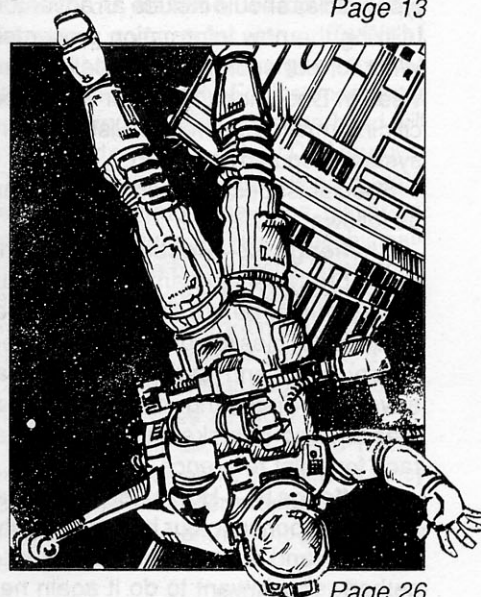
Warhammer 40,000

88 Space Ork Tactics

Skarbad Grimork teaches a class on Ork tactics. *Craig Sheeley*



Page 13



Page 26



Page 72



From the Management

Challenge has some exciting news for 1991: *We're going monthly starting in July*. That means twice as many issues and twice as many opportunities for aspiring writers to get their work published.

A good article length is 2000-6000 words. We are looking specifically for adventure scenarios. Game variants, referee's notes, and other sourcebook-type articles should include an adventure utilizing the new information presented. Write for our submission guidelines (revised in December 1990) for more specific information, as well as a list of gaming systems regularly covered.

Special issues planned for 1991 are as follows:

Challenge 52—Bestiary Issue: This one is pretty self-explanatory—we want new (or never before detailed) beasts or races. Articles should include the necessary stats and description, plus an adventure involving the new critter. Please send in a sketch of the animal/race for artist reference.

Challenge 54—Horror Issue: We had a great response to our horror issue this October (and we enjoyed putting it together), so we want to do it again next year. For some excellent examples of what we're looking for (and for some great reading), pick up a copy of **Challenge 46**.

Challenge 57—Introductory Scenarios Issue: Exciting adventures suitable for use by players right after they have rolled up a character for the first time. We're looking for a balance of monster and skill-level requirements equal to what's used by a beginning-level character. The goal is not to teach them how to play but to provide a format for a referee who wants to run an adventure for beginning-level characters. Think of this as a challenge, not as a restriction.

I hope you will enjoy the special issues as well as the general ones. As always, I'm interested in hearing your feedback, so feel free to drop me a line or use the form on page 96.

CHALLENGE

ROMANCE IS NOT DEAD

I like the idea of issues built around a particular topic and liked issue 46 especially. There were more articles useful to me in that issue than in any issue since number 34, which was for me the highlight of the past couple of years.

Issue 45's *From the Management* asked about how to deal with romance in RPGs. For my money, the game that has come closest here is *GURPS*, with its idea of dependents. Briefly, PCs in *GURPS* are built by allocating a fixed number of points, and anyone who takes a dependent (e.g., a sweetheart) gets extra points to build his PC with.

There are three disadvantages to this, though:

- If you lose the dependent, you lose the extra points too, which makes your PC worse.
- You gain no experience points for any scenario in which your dependent was hurt, however well you play.
- The bad guys like to kidnap PCs' dependents, and because of the first two disadvantages, you have to go get 'em back.

These rules make PCs behave as if they really cared about their dependents, at least part of the time.

Andy Slack
England

WARHAMMER

I read with great interest your recent article, "Balancing *Space Hulk*," when it appeared in **Challenge 43**. Unfortunately, I'm afraid I don't agree with most of your conclusions.

To begin with, I disagree with your overall conclusion that the game is unbalanced in favor of the Stealers. The system is, granted, a lot more forgiving to mistakes made by the Stealer player than the Marine player. On the other hand, if the Marine player does not make any mistakes, there is nothing the Stealer player can do to win; if both players play perfect games, the Marines will win. (This is the informed opinion of innumerable *Space Hulk* players, including members of the Games Workshop design staff.) The game system mirrors the assumptions of the game universe: the Marines (and their controlling player) must apply superior strategy and tactics to defeat their enemy, but if they do they are virtually unstoppable. Usually the key is to determine what strategy is appropriate for an individual scenario, based on the mission objectives and

the special rules. Once the strategy is determined, the basic forces suggested for the scenario are sufficient.

Second, I find the rationale and method for altering the command point system to be flawed. The rationale is flawed because low command points do not represent a case of the lieutenant spacing off in the middle of the battle; rather, the lieutenant is busy elsewhere (e.g., receiving orders from the captain or supervising other Terminator squads in other parts of the hulk). Command points are a bonus that represent the fact that sometimes the lieutenant can give a specific squad a little extra attention.

The method of "correcting" the command point situation is flawed because removing the 1 from the command point mix does more than "guarantee the marines a minimum of two or three points per turn;" it also raised the statistical likelihood that they will draw a 5 or 6. If both the 1 and 2 are removed, the statistical likelihood of drawing a 6 goes from 17% to 25%, and the probability of drawing a 4, 5, or 6 goes from 50% to 75%. This can add up over time. If a higher minimum number of points need to be guaranteed (a dangerous assumption, given the game design comments I made above), a more correct procedure would be to treat everything below, say, a 3 as a 3. That way, the likelihood of receiving abnormally high command points is not changed.

Third, "adjusting the victory conditions" by decreasing either the number of turns the Marines have to survive or the number of Stealers to be killed may have merit in some instances, but caution must be exercised. In "Defend," for example, I know of only one experienced Marine player who has managed to lose in 16 turns; the group I play with usually uses the bidding system explained below to keep the scenario from being too easy. That player, by the way, was me, and I lost because I did something mildly stupid and my opponent hammered me for it. Reducing the number of Stealers to be killed is usually unnecessary, once the proper strategy for the scenario is determined.

Fourth, "changing the physical parameters of the map" for the included scenarios may be a good idea, but the changes you suggest are of marginal improvement. Any Marine player who does not shoot out any doors that he possibly can when he has the opportunity to do so (using, for example, the "move forward and fire" option) de-

Letters from our Readers

serves what he gets; this is why removing the doors in "Cleanse and Burn" is unnecessary. Also, the Marines *like* long hallways, since they are equipped with ranged weapons. The only way, *by definition*, for the Marines to lose is to let the Stealers get into close combat with them. Long hallways allow the Marines many free overwatch shots that they wouldn't otherwise get. A perfect example of this is the first scenario, "Suicide Mission." Giving the Marines another flamer is unnecessary to seal off that long hallway near where the Marines first deploy; one Marine with a storm bolter on overwatch is more than sufficient. This is also true of "Exterminate," where the winning strategy is to seal off the lower Stealer entry areas (the flamer is good for this, if the Marine makes a point of positioning him properly) and then use those nice long hallways to rake up the kill scores. (The unofficial record, by the way, is in the low 80s.)

If the game needs to be balanced, there are two proper ways to do it. The first is to vary the forces available to the Marines. The Games Workshop *Space Hulk* League uses just this technique. Using a Terminator force list, both sides write down on a slip of paper how many points they are willing to spend on Marine forces. This side with the lower bid plays the Marines. Points can be spent to buy basic squads or to upgrade individuals. Overall, the system forces players to think about the capabilities of the Marines, both individually and as a group.

The second proper balancing method, in certain cases, is to alter the Stealer reinforcement schedule. I can only think of one specific scenario in "Deathwing" where this applies. We discovered that reducing Stealer reinforcements from three blips to two appeared to be necessary to even things out, although we suspect that maybe we just haven't caught on to the proper Marine strategy yet. On the whole, "Deathwing" scenarios are a lot tougher.

Please accept my apologies if I have been unjust or I sound too dogmatic. Based

upon the high quality of your past work, I am willing to bet that one of two things is true: Either your article was intended to be a "slow pitch" version for inexperienced players or it was based on quick playtesting involving inexperienced players. In either case, I'm looking forward to any further articles you may have on the subject.

Christopher Weuve

Thanks for the comments. Obviously, you've played a lot of Space Hulk. In the time since I wrote the article, I have, like you, discovered a number of satisfactory plans for many (but not all) of the scenarios. (Unfortunately, I can't play as often as I'd like.)

*I still think the article can help novice players until they have a few missions under their belt, however, as you suggest. But I no longer think the scenarios are unbalanced. By the way, whether the lieutenant is busy, asleep, or experiencing radio trouble, the results are the same to me. Finally, I'm certain **Challenge** would appreciate seeing your article. I know I would.*

Lester Smith

NUCLEAR THERMAL ROCKETS

Many thanks for **Challenge 45**—the magazine continues GDW's tradition of high production quality. I read the **MegaTraveler** and **2300** sections with particular interest—I'm glad to see these systems receiving renewed support.

Congratulations to Charles Gannon for the fascinating (and long-awaited) article on pregravitic spacecraft design. I was surprised to find, however, that there is no mention in the article of nuclear thermal rockets (NTRs).

NTRs use a fission reactor core to superheat a cryogenic propellant, which is then expelled in an exhaust plume. Some suggested performance figures for NTRs are shown in the table below.

J. Duncan Law-Green
United Kingdom

NUCLEAR THERMAL ROCKETS

TL	Type	TT	Mass	Volume	Fuel	F. Type	P. Rad.	PwOP	MCr
7	NTR	75 40	16	4*	0.05	Hydrog. Liq. gas**	0.6***	None	0.6

*This is the minimum size at which these engines may be constructed. Larger models are permitted.

**Refers to inert cryogenic nonoxidizing propellant (nitrogen, argon, methane, ammonia). NTR may refuel by skimming appropriate atmosphere. (See cryogenic fuel type in "One Small Step.")

***Power must be supplied by nuclear fission power plant (see **Referee's Manual**).

GREETINGS FROM THE GULF

I am an M60 machinegunner in the 101st Airborne (Assault) Division in Saudi Arabia.

Before we left Ft. Campbell I had a sneaking suspicion that Desert Shield might turn into a sit-and-wait affair, so I gambled that dragging a few games along might not be a bad idea.

I currently have two games going on, a **Twilight: 2000** second edition campaign that I am refereeing and a **2300 AD** game. While I think there is something bizarre about a bunch of infantrymen sitting around in a potential war zone roleplaying a bunch of soldiers stuck overseas in a war zone, there is one thing we all agree on—better on paper and in one's mind than for real.

Due to our situation, we do have one advantage over most other **Twilight** groups—the ability to settle arguments over military matters quickly. For instance, got a question over just what a Copperhead will do? Just find one of the FOs or DivArty guys.

The best example of this was an argument over encumbrance—one player insisted that because he was within his carrying capacity, he had a pretty much complete range of motion for leaping through windows, climbing up a grain silo, etc. So we got an M16/M203, Kevlar and flak, a .45, LCE 203 vest, night vision goggles, and a 5/25km radio (we used a PRC-77).

We suited him up, then asked him to demonstrate some of his character's fancy footwork. His character dropped the radio and about half the ammo and pyro shortly thereafter.

Andrew P. Sizemore
Operation Desert Shield

STAR TREK

It would be nice if **Challenge** could provide more *Star Trek* articles. Nothing is produced for the game at this time, and **Challenge** is the only magazine that can provide for the Trekkie refugees. I can report that because of the lack of material for *Star Trek* I am currently reading the rules for **2300 AD** and soon **MegaTraveller**.

Clint Williamson
San Antonio, TX

*Have any comments on this issue? How about gaming in general? Letters from our Readers provides gamers an opportunity to air their views. The opinions presented do not necessarily reflect those of the magazine. **Challenge** reserves the right to edit letters. Write to **Challenge Letters**, PO Box 1646, Bloomington, IL 61702-1646 USA.*

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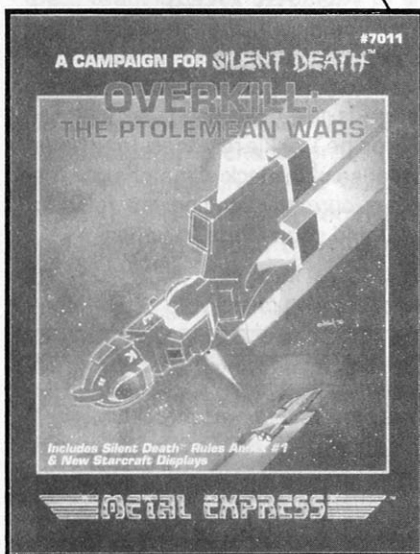
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MERC: 2000

Barbados

This three-scenario campaign is an expansion of an introductory minicampaign designed for Merc: 2000.

By Loren K. Wiseman

B

arbados is a small island-nation in the Caribbean sea, visited several times during the 16th century by sailors of several nations.

Its name, given to it by Portuguese sailors, refers to the bearded fig trees on the island.

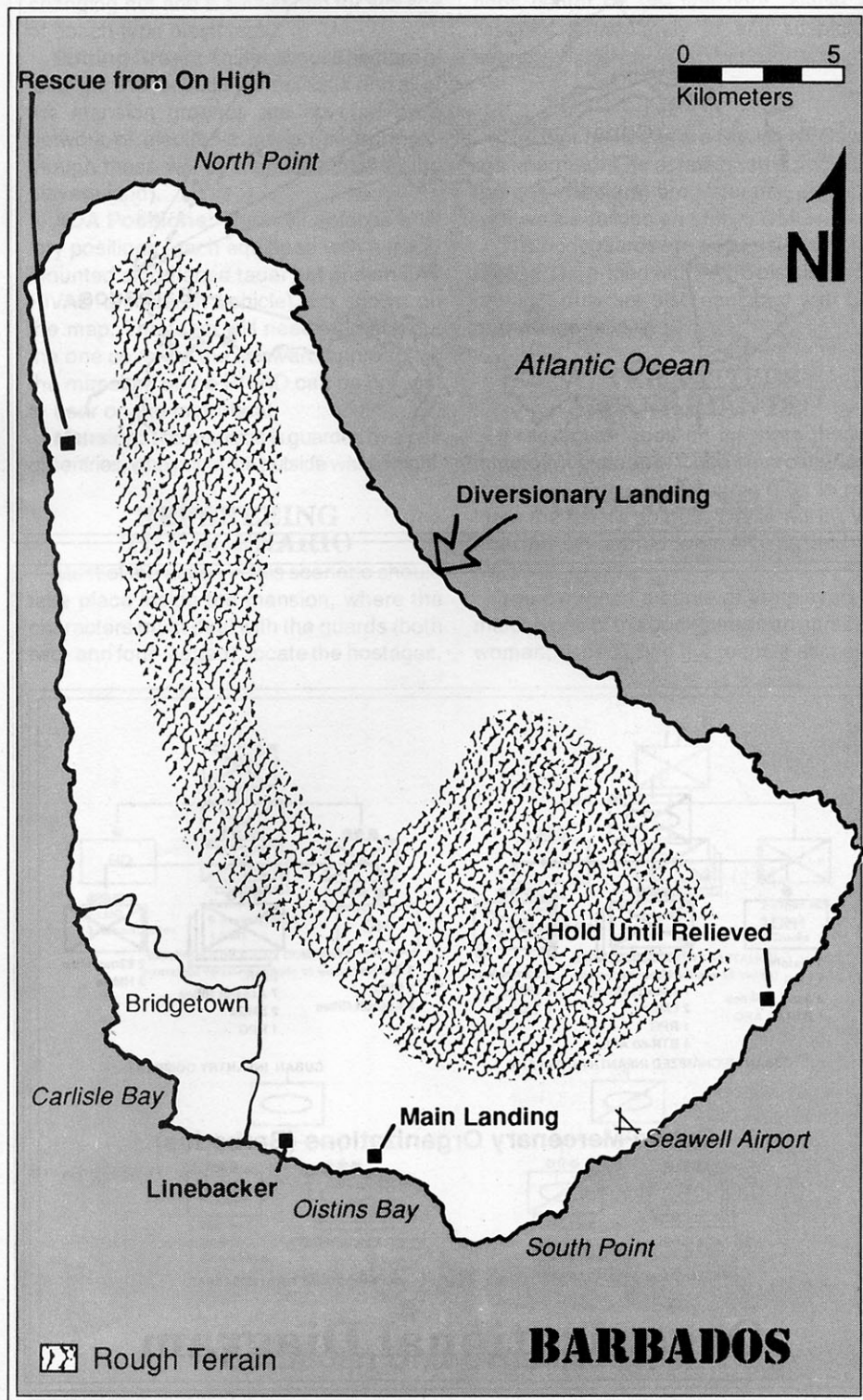
British ships first visited the island of Barbados in 1607, and the area was finally settled by the British in 1627, becoming part of the burgeoning British "sugar empire" of the Caribbean.

The sugar plantations were worked by slaves until 1834, when slavery on the island was abolished.

From that point on, the plantations were worked by hired labor, under slightly improved conditions.

Gradually, more and more governmental functions were taken over by local politicians, and Barbados became an independent member of the British Commonwealth in 1966.

Throughout the 20th century, Barbados remained a political backwater, small enough to escape nine-tenths of the world's problems.



Tourism brought a constant income, and the most pressing danger was the occasional hurricane.

HISTORY OF THE COUP

Rogue financier and international fugitive Robert van Ruys had long sought a country in which he could be certain of living without concern for extradition. Wanted in 16 countries for various securities crimes of such size and scope as to have made him a multibillionaire, van Ruys is also a member of a number of criminal cartels and a major player in international financial manipulations.

His total lack of business ethics (indeed, of any sort of ethics) and his pathological desire to control everything around him have led him to finance the coup on Barbados as a means of securing a safe haven for his old age.

Generalissimo Joshua Gladstone, the other important member of the junta, is a former Barbadian official dismissed last year for gross malfeasance in office. Gladstone has no military experience whatsoever and serves as a figurehead for van Ruys' manipulations.

He is smart enough to realize that he has arrived in a position that his natural talents could never have gotten him to, and he is anxious not to "rock the boat."

ORGANIZATION OF BARBADAN FORCES

The new Barbadian Army is a creation of the van Ruys junta, and it consists mostly of new recruits undergoing training from "politically correct" officers and cadres of hired Cubans.

It includes seven infantry battalions, a light tank company, and a recon armored cavalry company.

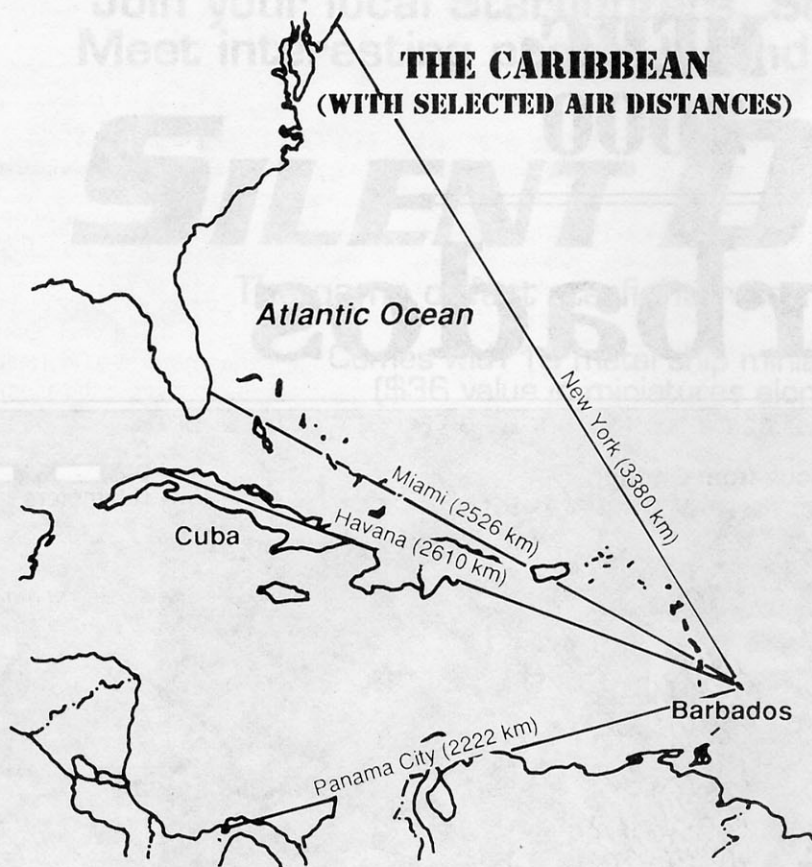
ORGANIZATION OF CUBAN FORCES

Cuban mercenaries retained by the van Ruys junta include two infantry companies, a mechanized infantry company equipped with BTR-60s, and a number of small, independent specialist units, such as anti-aircraft and heavy weapons platoons. The parachute-trained company hired for the initial coup was paid off two months ago, and the remaining Cuban mercs on the island are serving as garrison troops or training cadres for the new Barbadian Army.

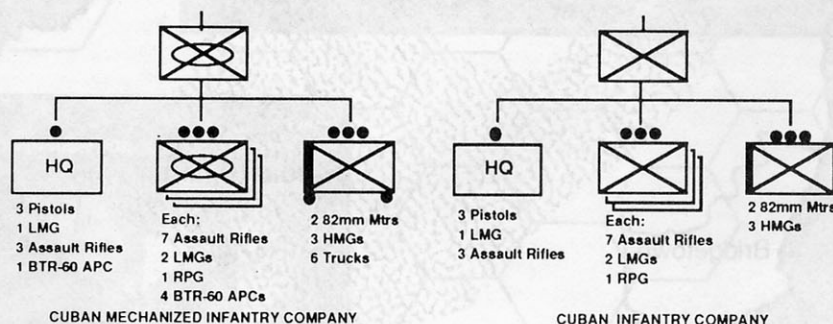
The contingent of Cubans on the island also includes a special elite bodyguard unit (in reality an oversized platoon) for Generalissimo Gladstone.

These men are secretly in van Ruys' pay in addition to publicly being in Gladstone's, the mercenary equivalent of "double-dipping."

THE CARIBBEAN (WITH SELECTED AIR DISTANCES)



Caribbean



Cuban Mercenary Organizations (Barbados)

Organizational Diagram

Rescue from On High

Before the counterinvasion can take place, a couple of loose ends must be taken care of.

MISSION BRIEFING

During the coup which deposed Prime Minister Forsythe's government, his wife and family were taken captive, while he managed to escape. These hostages must be rescued before the countercoup invasion can take place. The four hostages (Mrs. Forsythe; her daughter, Margaret; Margaret's husband, Geoffrey Forbes-Hamilton; and her granddaughter, Mary Catherine) are being held on the estate of billionaire industrialist and international fugitive Robert van Ruys. The estate is lightly held, with only a dozen or so bodyguards in residence in or near the mansion, but it is surrounded by a company-sized detachment of heavily armed soldiers, mostly Cuban mercenaries. A small radar installation and several weapons stations make approach by helicopter or small boat out of the question. The ground floor of the mansion is patrolled by several attack-trained guard dogs, who are given free run of the corridors at night.

The team must make a HALO drop onto the grounds of the estate since it is impossible to approach any other way and guarantee the hostages' safety. HALO gear and steerable parachutes will be provided by the patron. The team must provide any other equipment desired.

APPROACH

The patron has arranged to borrow an American cargo plane for the drop, which will be from 7000 meters up, at 0400 hours (shortly after moonset, to provide the darkest possible conditions). The LZ is a small putting green near the main house, surrounded by hedges and ornamental trees, which will provide some cover while the team sheds its HALO gear and parachutes. A sympathetic servant inside the household will place a small lantern in the middle of the green to guide the team in, and will arrange for electronic motion sensors that cover the green to malfunction.

RETRIEVAL

At a prearranged signal from the team members (flare, searchlight, whatever they wish), a small, high-speed motorboat will pull up onto the mansion's private beach. The team and the hostages will board the boat and make their escape. The team must see to it that the rescue goes fast enough that the Cubans do not have time to intervene.

MAP DESCRIPTION

This map uses the building interiors given on pages 72-81 of **Merc: 2000** but is drawn using the eight-meter tactical grid. The mansion, outbuildings, and several other points of interest are shown.

Perimeter Fence: This is an unobtrusive but very stout cyclone fence surrounding the property, concealed by hedges and other ornamental landscaping. It covers only the landward sides of the mansion. This fence is patrolled by sentries, who will respond to any alarm from the main house.

Beach: A small private beach, with a changing hut and a small shed for storage of beach-type playthings.

Putting Green: This is about a hectare of level ground for putting practice. It and all of the mansion grounds are covered by a network of electronic motion sensors (although these will be inactivated when the players land).

ADA Positions: Three air defense artillery positions (each equipped with a truck-mounted air defense radar set and an LAV PIVAD antiaircraft vehicle) are shown on the map. The team will need to knock out the one covering the seaward approach to the mansion, or the PIVAD can be brought to bear on the motorboat.

Mansion: The mansion is guarded by a pair of sentries, who patrol the outside wall all night.

REFEREEING THE SCENARIO

Most of the action in this scenario should take place inside the mansion, where the characters must deal with the guards (both two- and four-legged), locate the hostages,

TWILIGHT: 2000

and get them out, all within a few minutes. Bear in mind that most people in the mansion will be asleep and will follow the rules for waking up described in **Merc: 2000**.

Two bodyguards and one dog handler are awake all night, in a small communications center on the first floor. These will respond immediately to any suspicious sound.

NPCs

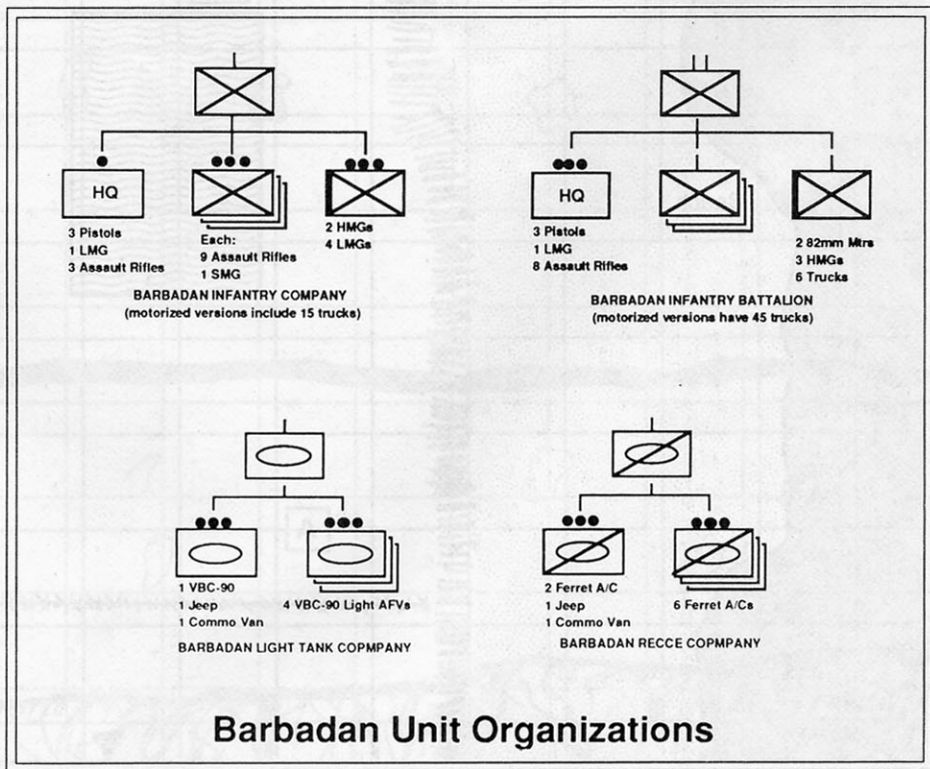
The four hostages are Novice NPCs and are unarmed. The estate guards (including the dog handlers) are Veterans, equipped with walkie-talkies and MP-5 SMGs.

The bodyguards are a special team of six Elite NPCs, armed with PA-15 pistols. Those on night duty are also equipped with Uzis and walkie-talkies.

ALTERNATIVES AND VARIANTS

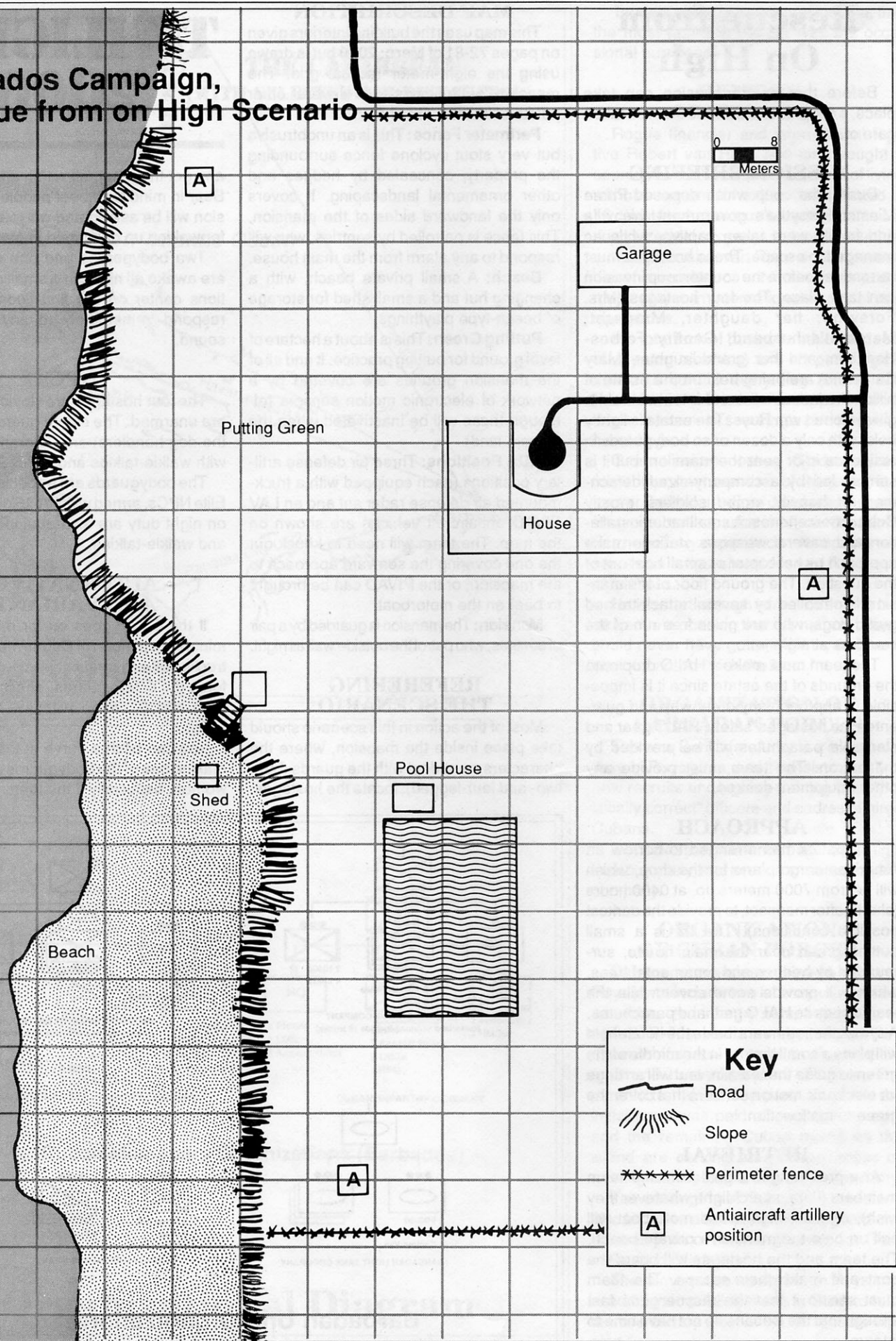
If the action goes on for more than 15 minutes, a platoon of Cuban mercenaries in trucks will arrive at the main gate to reinforce the estate guards. These will be Veteran NPCS armed with AK-74s and PK MGs.

You can pitch a curve at the players by making one of the bodyguards an attractive woman, especially if the team is all male.



Barbadian Unit Organizations

Barbados Campaign,
Rescue from on High Scenario



Linebacker

The team, acting as a Mike force for the main beachhead, is thrown into action to cripple a counterattack.

MISSION BRIEFING

The countercoup landings are in danger. Intelligence sources have identified a Cuban mechanized infantry force (a short battalion) headed toward the beachhead down a road which was supposed to have been mined and consequently is held only by light security forces. The attacking Cubans will, in all likelihood, overwhelm the meager forces along that flank, with disastrous consequences for the landings. All friendly forces landed are engaging main force New Barbadian Army units along the center and right flanks of the landing zone, and the few soldiers who can be spared are from the beachmaster's landing party.

The team must take what resources can be spared from the beachhead, set up a hasty defensive line, and block the Cubans for three hours until the next wave can be landed and brought into action.

APPROACH

The beachhead can spare 18 cargo handlers with M16s (Novice), an 81mm mortar team (Novice), three GPMG (MAG MG) teams (Novice), two TOW launchers with

three missiles each (Novice crews), and three deuce-and-a-halves with M2HBs, plus whatever the team happens to be carrying. The team and reinforcements arrive at the battle site 30 minutes before the Cubans, although the referee should not let them know that.

MAP DESCRIPTION

The map shows the most defensible piece of terrain along the Cubans' approach route. The highway cuts through a narrow defile between the sea and a cliff, less than half a kilometer wide, affording several rock outcroppings suitable for sheltering small detachments. The key describes the various terrain features and indicates which provide cover and which provide concealment. It also shows the direction from which the Cubans will arrive and other pertinent data.

This map uses the eight-meter square tactical grid used in **Merc:2000** and **Twilight:2000**.

REFEREEING THE SCENARIO

The team and detachment from the beachhead will have 30 minutes to set up whatever defenses they can. Give the players the map of the site and ask them how they wish to deploy their assets. Give the players a reasonable amount of time for discussion, then remind them that the en-

TWILIGHT: 2000

emy will be arriving soon.

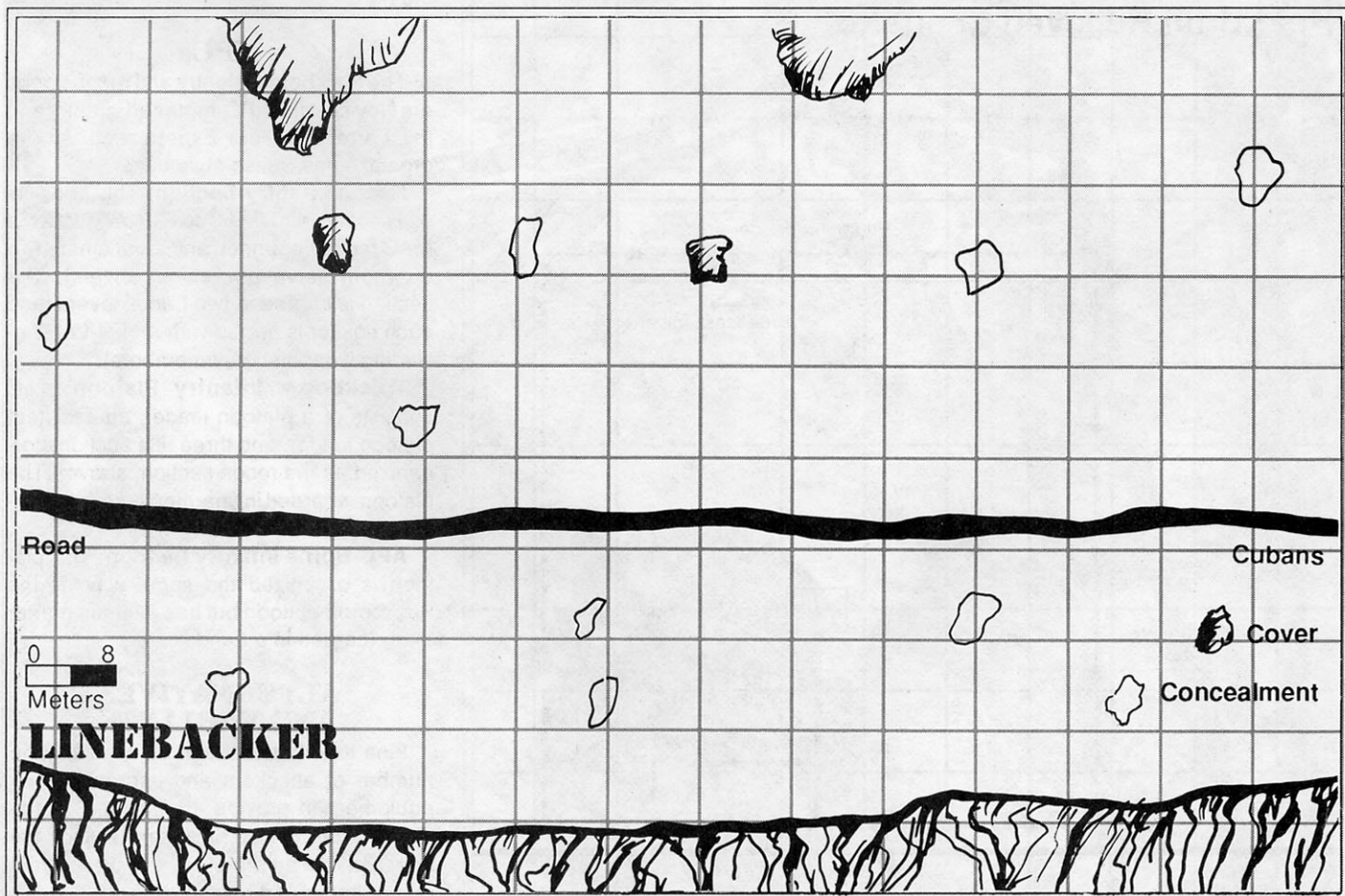
Thirty minutes after the team's arrival, the first elements of the Cuban force will enter along the south edge of the map. This will consist of a platoon of mechanized infantry spread out in a line and acting as a recon force. Two minutes later, the main body will arrive, spread out to attack the positions discovered by the scouting force.

NPCs

No special NPCs are part of this scenario.

ALTERNATIVES AND VARIANTS

If the player characters' team is particularly Experienced, or if it has excessive amounts of personal weaponry, the referee can make things tougher on the PCs by allowing the Cuban recon troops to encounter them sooner than expected. An extremely dirty trick would be to have the team and the Cuban recon troops arrive at the site simultaneously.



Hold Until Relieved

Propaganda is vitally important to any political/military operation. The side that controls the airwaves gets to broadcast that it has won.

MISSION BRIEFING

Only one television station broadcasts from Barbados, and its control will be vital in the counter-coup to reinstall Prime Minister Forsythe. The team must take the station and broadcasting tower intact. It must then bring in a Barbadian military officer loyal to Forsythe (to make it all official) and the patron's propaganda specialists (three technicians and a newsreader, along with 800 kilograms of electronic equipment including about 60 videotapes containing harangues and political statements for every conceivable situation). The team is then to establish a defensive perimeter and hold the station against all attackers until a more permanent garrison can be landed (six to eight hours).

APPROACH

The team land near a coastal village and meet a sympathetic local with a five-ton

truck. The truck will transport the team and the others to the station, where they will overcome the gatekeeper and take over the station with minimal bloodshed (none of the station personnel are soldiers). The technicians will then disconnect the cable linking the tower to the studio in the city, install their equipment, and commence broadcasting. Enemy forces can be expected to try to silence the station. The team must prevent this.

RETRIEVAL

The team will be extracted by the same trucks that bring in the relief force.

MAP DESCRIPTION

The map shows the station and surrounding area on the eight-meter tactical grid.

Broadcast Tower: This structure holds the TV antenna at the correct altitude for optimal broadcast range.

Generator Building: This is little more than a tin shed containing the generator that powers the broadcast equipment.

Equipment Building: This installation is a broadcast tower with emergency backup equipment to continue broadcasting a signal if the connection with the studio (located elsewhere) is broken. The equipment

building was never intended to serve as a fully equipped broadcast studio. It will have to be modified with additional equipment that the patron's technicians bring along with them.

Tool Shed: A tin structure holding grounds maintenance equipment for the installation.

Perimeter Fence: This is a light cyclone fence intended to keep out casual intruders. A small gate is shown.

REFEREEING THE SCENARIO

The four staff members at the station are unarmed Novice NPCs and will offer no resistance. They will take the first opportunity to run away if left unattended. Two hours after the station begins broadcasting Forsythe's propaganda, a recon section of enemy soldiers will arrive in Land Rovers and look the place over, securing the road from the south. An hour later, an enemy truckborne infantry platoon will arrive along this road, supported by two Ferret armored cars. This platoon will deploy and attack the station.

If this attack fails, one hour later another platoon will arrive as reinforcement, this one mounted in M113s and supported by a 60mm mortar team.

At the end of seven hours, the enemy will retreat due to the approach of a company of loyalist infantry from the main landings to the north.

NPCs

The truckborne infantry and recon troops are Novices; the APC-mounted infantry and the Ferret crew are Experienced. All are organized as British-style units.

Recon Infantry Section: This consists of a section leader, a Carl Gustav gunner, a MAG machinegunner, and six riflemen (two of whom serve as vehicle drivers). The section is carried in two Land Rovers, and each soldier is armed with an FN-LAR (including weapons crewmembers).

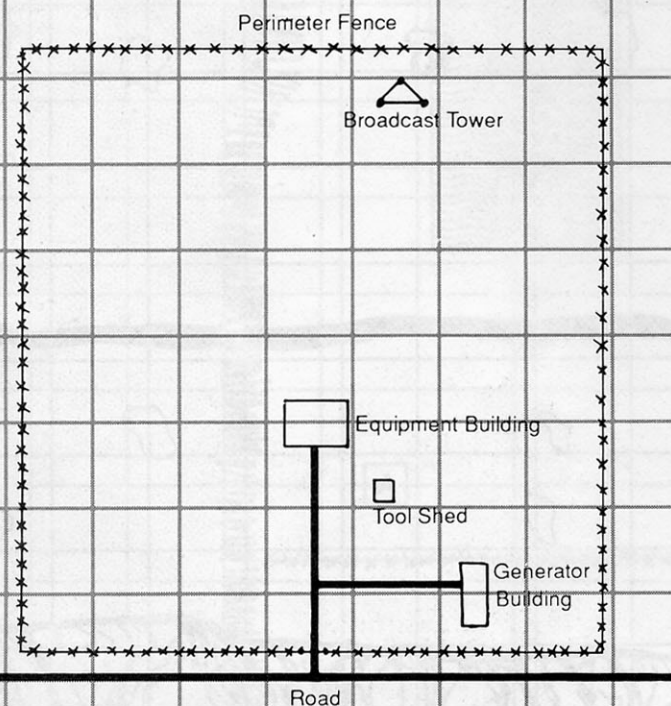
Truckborne Infantry Platoon: This consists of a platoon leader, an assistant platoon leader, and three rifle sections (organized as the recon section, above). The platoon is carried in unarmed American 2½-ton trucks.

APC-Borne Infantry Platoon: This platoon is organized the same way as the truckborne platoon but has a 60mm mortar team (carried in a Land Rover).

ALTERNATIVES AND VARIANTS

Fine tune the scenario by adjusting the number of attackers and improving their equipment to provide a challenge for the player characters. Tanks are out of the question, but an armored car with a 20mm gun or larger can be introduced. Ω

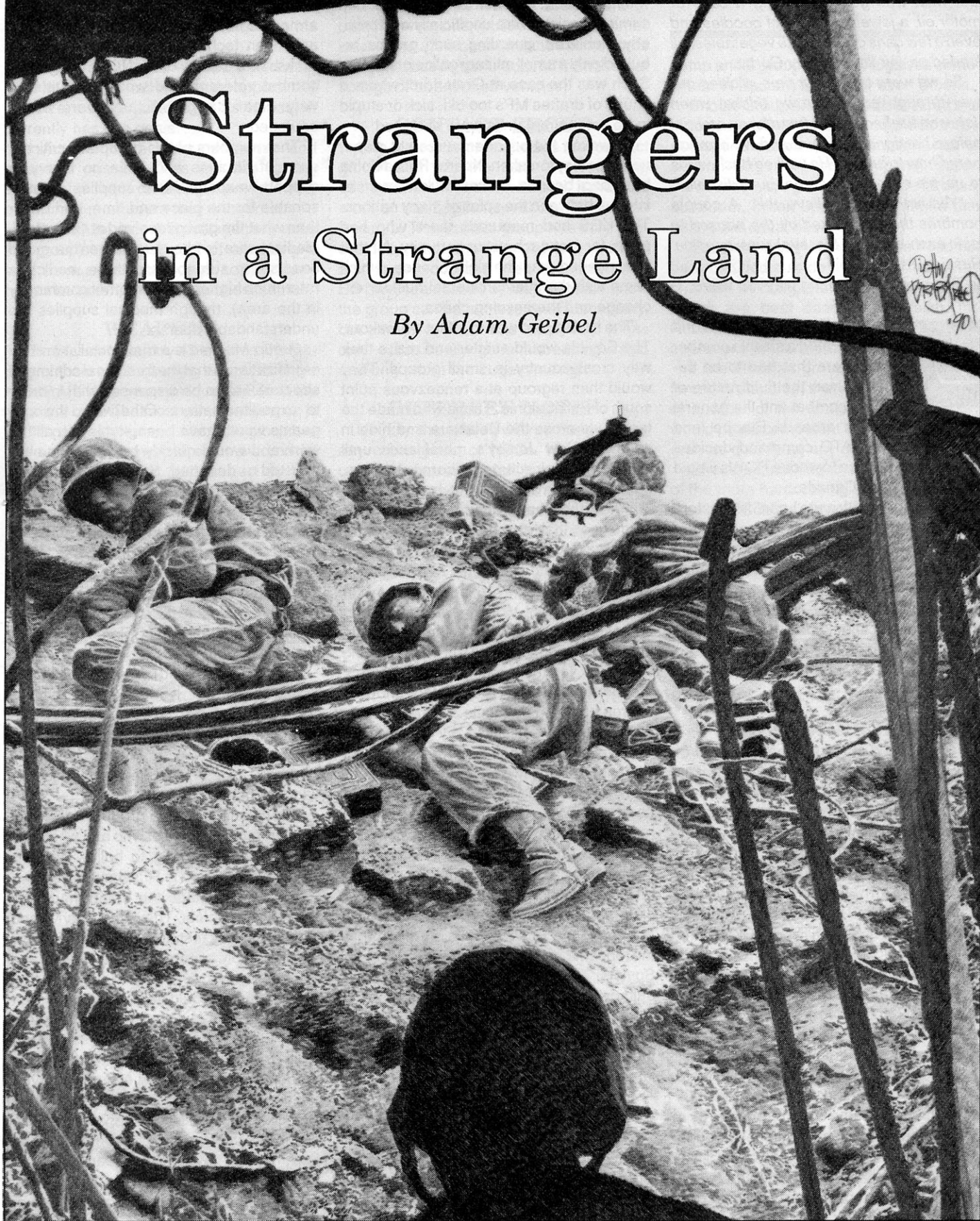
Barbados Campaign, Hold Until Relieved Scenario



TWILIGHT: 2000

Strangers in a Strange Land

By Adam Geibel



We were lost. Nothing new, given that our only map of the area was a triple A highway special that threatened to disintegrate every time we opened it. No big deal—just head south until we reach the bay, then turn left. Our haul was good, including a case of motor oil, a jewelry box full of goodies and even a few cans of Delmonte vegetables, all loaded on our little donkey Gorbey.

So we were taking our time, picking our way through an overgrown thicket when Johnson flashed us. We froze for an eternity before he signaled again, and we remembered how to breath. He walked backwards to us, his expression one of pure disbelief.

"Yer not gonna believe this. A couple hombres that jes walked by (he paused to look each of us in the eye) was speakin' Russian!"

This place was getting way too weird.

Like all conflicts, the Third World War generated a sizable number of prisoners that had to be secured. Given the fluid nature of modern combat and the general lack of secure rear areas in Europe (and later, Iran), the NATO command decided that the safest place for those POWs would be in the US and Canada.

"Strangers in a Strange Land" is the story of one such group.

This **Twilight: 2000** miniadventure is presented as part of the adventure possibilities in post-holocaust New Jersey. However, considering the number of prisoner of war camps, it should be easy enough for a referee to change the names and facts to fit whatever location his players are roaming through.

BACKGROUND

Upon arriving in North America, most of the POWs were placed in military prison camps. Often, though, it was more convenient to squeeze them into civilian prisons and add a military guard. One example of this solution was Compound 26, a collection of 400 Warsaw Pact POWs confined in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania's Graterford prison. The POWs at Graterford were a mixture of Soviet, Polish, Czech and Hungarian officers and senior NCOs from almost every conceivable branch. All of them were captured in Eastern Europe between October 1996 and March 1997.

Surprisingly little was done to the state prison to accommodate the new boarders. Ten large trailers were brought in and set up in the unused portion within the prison's walls. The POW camp was surrounded by a razor wire fence and access limited through one tiny gate. The mess and medical facilities of the civilian prison were beefed up (albeit inadequately) to account for the enlarged population. As POW egress was strictly

curtailed, food and care were brought to the POWs (or were supposed to be). This became a sore point for the International Red Cross.

POW Compound 26 became a prison within a prison. If elements of the American criminal society were unofficially and properly mobilized, guarding such groups required only a small military police presence. Such was the case at Graterford, where a squad of draftee MPs too old, sick or stupid to be sent to real units were assigned.

However, the prisoners were not alone, nor were they forsaken. Nearby Philadelphia had long been a center of low-intensity intrigue between the spies of many nations. The KGB had resources there who had plans for just such an opportunity. All that was needed was the right chance, which came with the intercontinental nuclear exchange and the ensuing chaos.

The KGB's plan was to effect a breakout. The Soviets would scatter and make their way cross-country in small groups. They would then regroup at a rendezvous point south of Philadelphia. Those who made the trip would cross the Delaware and hide in southern New Jersey's marshlands until signaled by their submarineborne rescuers, due in the area sometime in January 1998.

When the chance came, many POWs made good their escape with no intention of ever making the rendezvous. America seemed as good a place as any to make a new home.

The KGB agent, working with underworld contacts, managed to break the Soviets out in the confusion following the Thanksgiving exchange. On the morning of December 5, the northwest gate evaporated under a charge of stolen dynamite. The explosives were hidden in a hijacked dry goods truck, which also carried half a dozen hired guns. After neutralizing two guard towers and four MPs, the raiders withdrew, followed by a flood of POWs.

A few select groups of Soviets, primarily the higher-ranking officers and members of the camp's clandestine committees, made for hidden caches of weapons, identification, clothing and transportation. Perhaps a quarter of the POW population made it to the rendezvous—not surprisingly, all of them Soviets. The fate of the other prisoners is unknown to the survivors. Certainly some died at the hands of vengeful Americans, and almost as assuredly some are still out there. They might even have been assimilated into the population.

MEDVED IS RUSSIAN FOR BEAR

The surviving Soviet group is known as Group *Medved*. Group *Medved* currently musters 112 effectives, including 27 senior NCOs, 75 field grade officers and 10 staff

grade officers. They are organized into four 25-man platoons and a battalion headquarters. The Soviets come from almost every branch of the armed forces, with a fair majority of the field grade officers being pilots. In addition to a handful of combat arms officers, engineers, medical personnel and even technical specialists are in the ranks. The majority of the NCOs are ground combat veterans and would constitute a very clear danger if they were better equipped.

The members of this group are critically short of firearms and have no heavy or support weapons. Food supplies are reasonable for the place and time, and better than what the group received at Graterford. Medical care is above average (the group boasts one surgeon and three medics, a ratio much higher than any other community in the area), though medical supplies are understandably sparse.

Group *Medved* is a true socialist military organization in that the traditional command structure had to be dispensed with in order to expedite matters. Otherwise, the sergeants would have been stuck with all the work and would quickly have become exhausted or deserted. Below the command echelon, Group *Medved* has rotating command positions linked to the principle of "each according to his strengths." As mission requirements change, the people most knowledgeable about the given problem become the leaders, regardless of rank. This system works due to the strict discipline which was originated by Colonel Brionovisk back in Graterford.

Group *Medved* is led by Colonel Alexander Brionovisk, formerly of the 5th TD. His second in command is Major Sambor Illiyeh Rasmoninov. Group *Medved's* Intelligence Officer is the KGB agent who made its members' escape possible, Major Theodore Vanonovich.

The colonel gave his group a name that would remind his men of who and what they were without resorting to hollow patriotic platitudes. *Medved* is Russian for bear.

The colonel made the group members' priorities quite clear. They must survive and return home. At first, that required lying low until the submarine appeared. Weeks and months passed, and it became clear that the submarine would never return. This left the colonel with few choices. The only reasonable option in the spring of 1998 was to seize a vessel large enough to make for the motherland. Unfortunately, even if Brionovisk could scare up a workable crew from his ranks, there were no reasonable targets. Not unless they wanted to attempt a raid on the American naval base at Cape May.

By the middle of 1999, the rumor mill had brought another option: link up with one of the Soviet fighting groups already in the

United States. This would require a trip to Texas or Alaska, which from New Jersey would be an epic journey worthy of the tales of classic mythology. Unfortunately, these tales of Russians in America are, to Group *Medved*, only that—rumors or hopes. Brionovsk could not and did not stake his command on fairy tales.

It was decided that the group would wait, build its strength and look for an opportunity to seize a ship suitable to its needs. It currently has two goals:

- Acquire more arms, wherever and whenever possible. This includes trading salvage for them or taking them from the occasional marauders they encounter.

- Search for valuable salvage to finance the group's eventual goal of acquiring a boat. If one can be purchased, so be it. If one has to be taken, then that is possible, too.

WEAPONS

The Soviets have only 41 firearms, the majority of them civilian hunting weapons. Three Uzis, 2 AR-15s and an antique BAR form the firepower core. The most common weapon is the 12-gauge shotgun, of which the group has 11 (four of them former police pump-action riot guns, three automatic, and the rest double-barreled). There are 12 rifles (one Garand, eight .30 bolt-actions and three .22 semiautos) 12 pistols (five H&K 9mm automatics, two .38 S&Ws, three M1911A1s and two .44s—a Desert Eagle and a S&W, the personal weapons of the colonel and Major Rasmoninov.

Ammunition is equally sparse, with the group

having only a case apiece of 12-gauge, .22 and .30 ammo. The group also has 100 rounds of 5.56, 125 of 9mm, 40 of .38 and 23 of .45 ACP. The 20 rounds of .44 Magnum are split equally between the two officers.

Group *Medved* has an assortment of primitive weapons, mostly spears and small knives, though crossbows and short swords are now issued (manufactured from the leaf springs of abandoned vehicles).

CONTACT GROUP

One platoon is organized as the "contact group" and has the task of maintaining contact with the "outside" world. It musters most of the English-speaking POWs and firearms. The contact group has very successfully mingled with locals. It has imitated a salvage group and even negotiated with US Navy teams. Led by Major Rasmoninov, the group can be ruthless when necessary, but always to ensure its anonymity. It has only occasionally gone marauding itself, and only when the target was right.

REFEREE'S NOTES

Usually, the referee will run this group as any other group of NPCs. However, any outfit with this range of skills and experience should be run with as much imagination and desperation as any group of PCs. An alternate would be to offer this group to the players to run, rather than their usual pack of characters. Conversely, with a little work, this adventure could be modified to chronicle the background of a Warsaw Pact POW

TWILIGHT: 2000

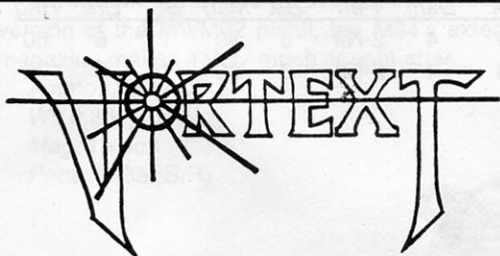
camp and a group of NATO fugitives somewhere in Eastern Europe or even Siberia.

Should Group *Medved* be discovered and reported to US authorities, and should those authorities act on the information, one of several things will happen. Depending upon the situation, the group might move its base, surrender, break up, or go for broke and attack the naval base.

Even attacking the naval base need not be a certified suicide mission. Though the chances of complete success in such an attack are best described as slim, the Russians could still severely hurt the navy's operations in the area.

If the Russian group were cornered or forced to disperse, that need not be the end of it. Most of the factions in New Jersey would pay a competent Soviet combat veteran as quickly as any good ol' American.

Of course, nothing is ever simple. Some of the more hardcore rightist groups would hunt the Soviets down like animals, and certain elements would rebel outright if the Soviets were taken into the army. The referee will have to play such situations according to the motivations and composition of the groups the Soviets encounter. Ω



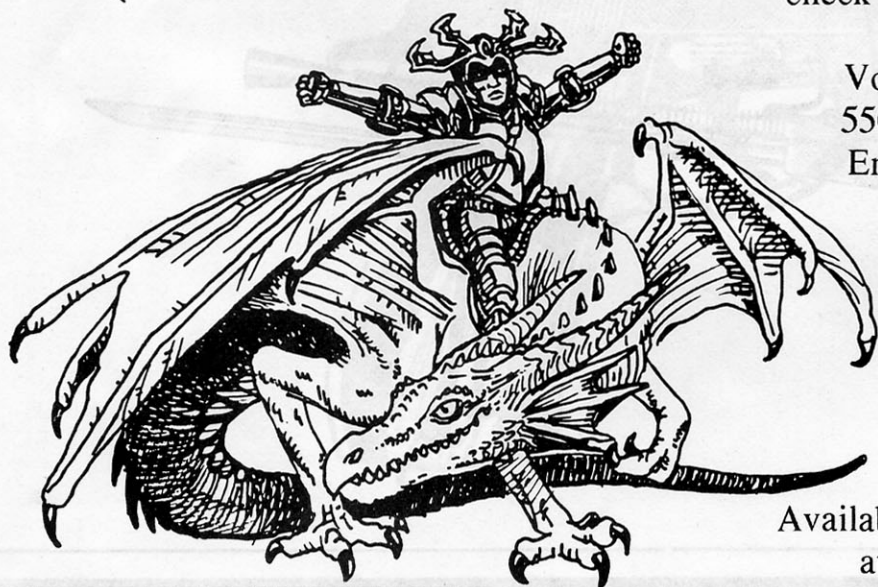
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INFANTRY WEAPONS

Special Preview

Infantry Weapons of the World releases this month from GDW for both **Twilight: 2000** and **Merc: 2000**.

The following are additional infantry weapons in the same format as used in **Infantry Weapons of the World**. They were originally intended for that guide, but were left out due to space limitations. Feel free to use them to allow your PCs an even greater selection of small arms in your **Twilight** or **Merc** adventures.

By Loren K. Wiseman

Type 62

Type 62 (Machinegun): A Japanese, general-purpose, bipod-mounted machinegun, the Type 62 is chambered for the 7.62mm N cartridge.

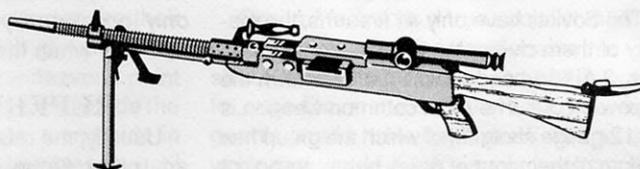
Ammo: 7.62mm N

Wt: 13.6 kg (*Tripod Wt:* 6.8 kg)

Mag: 50 belt

Price: \$2000 (R/—)

Weapon	ROF	Dam	Pen	Blk	Mag	—Recoil—		
						SS	Brst	Rng
Type 62	10	4	2-3-Nil	6	50B	1	6	65
bipod	10	4	2-3-Nil	6	50B	1	3	90
tripod	10	4	2-3-Nil	6	50B	1	2	125



Type 99

Type 99 (Machinegun): A Japanese WWI-era machinegun.

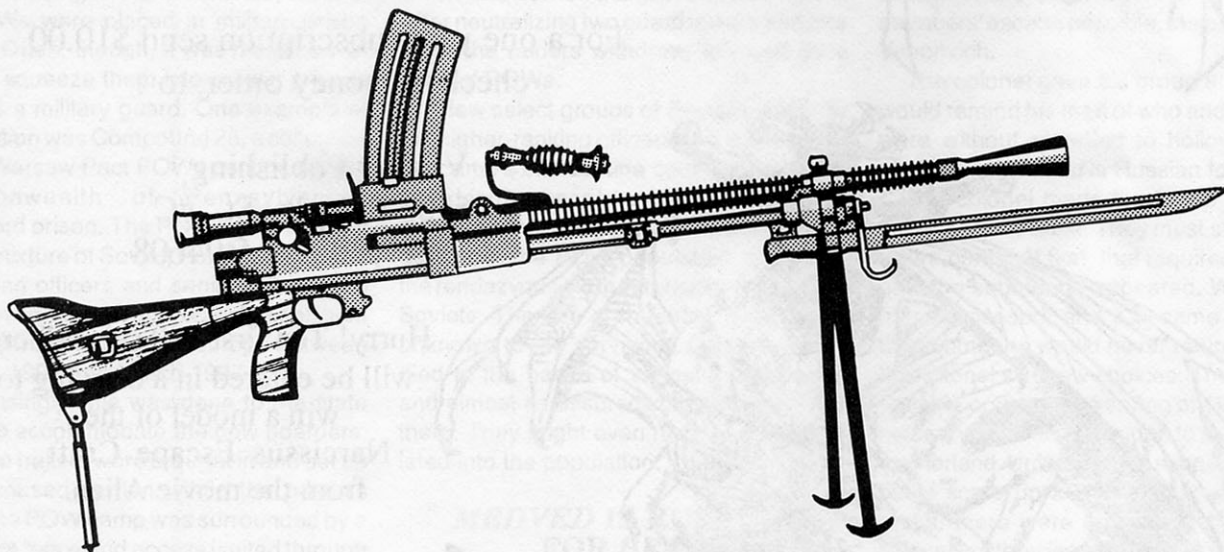
Ammo: .303

Wt: 12 kg

Mag: 30 box

Price: \$1400 (R/—)

Weapon	ROF	Dam	Pen	Blk	Mag	—Recoil—		
						SS	Brst	Rng
Type 99	10	4	2-Nil	6	30	1	6	60
bipod	10	4	2-Nil	6	30	1	3	75





Beretta M1951

Beretta M1951 (Semiautomatic): The M1951 Brigadier is in extensive use by several armies, including the Israelis.

Ammo: 9mm P

Wt: 1.1 kg

Mag: 8 box

Price: \$500 (S/R)

—Recoil—

Weapon	ROF	Dam	Pen	Blk	Mag	SS	Brst	Rng
M1951	SA	1	Nil	1	8	3	—	12



Beretta Model 84

Beretta Model 84 (Semiautomatic): Essentially a smaller version of the M9/M92 pistol, the M84's extended capacity magazine makes it very much sought after.

Ammo: .380 ACP

Wt: 0.8 kg

Mag: 13 box

Price: \$535 (S/R)

—Recoil—

Weapon	ROF	Dam	Pen	Blk	Mag	SS	Brst	Rng
Model 84	SA	1	Nil	1	13	3	—	10



A New Idea in RPG Supplements

At the end of September, White Wolf Publishing will release the first in a series of Campaign Books. These innovative RPG supplements provide information to run more than just a RPG *adventure*, they help you run an entire *campaign*.

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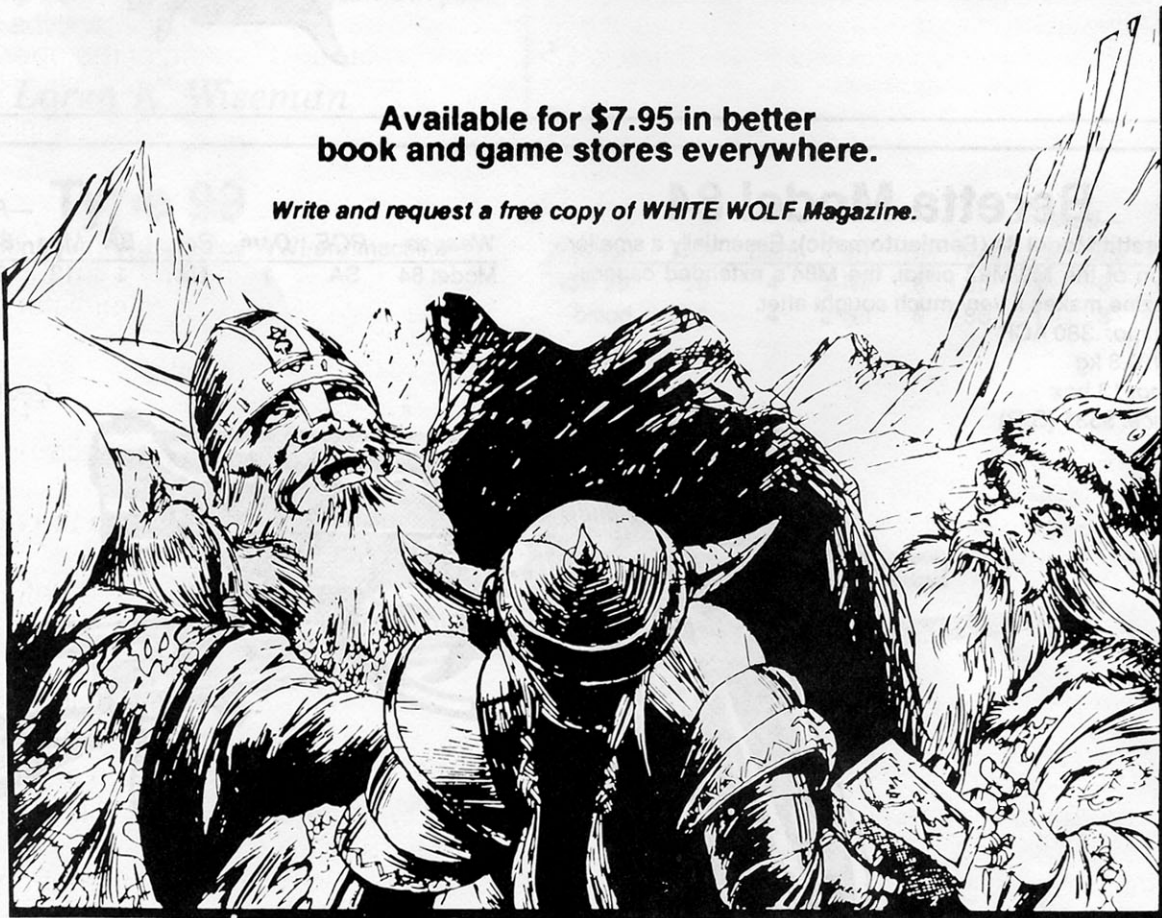
- As faithful servants of the Emperor, it is your duty to root out treachery and treason wherever you find it. Word of revolt is spreading through the Empire. Who is the source of this new feeling? Who can you trust?

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CAMPAIGN BOOK



TRAVELLER *News Service*

Leroy/Hinterworlds (1231 C574969-9)

Date: 064-1121

¶All fusion power systems connected to the commercial power grid on Leroy involuntarily shut down over a period of 17 hours yesterday. The time period is associated with the local day.

¶The massive power outages resulting from the main power failures were alleviated for a short time by stand-by systems and local backups, but these systems were, of course, not intended to maintain the full primary usage of the planet. Power plants which were connected to the primary commercial power grid all experienced failure within three hours of each other. Power systems which remained isolated from the main system were not affected.

¶Although for most the power failures were only an inconvenience, extensive casualties were reported when the active seawall protecting low-lying Gintle province collapsed and the resulting North Sea flood inundated several thousand square kilometers of residential settlements. Days later, search and rescue teams were still transporting small groups of survivors from their positions on scattered pieces of high ground.

¶Heavy casualties were also reported in the polar under-ice city of Nesabbar. The power failures caused environment failures and several structural collapses.

¶Efforts to restart the commercial power grid were plagued by continued failures and a lack of suitable spare parts.

¶Initial investigations placed responsibility for the failures on the installation of faulty component software which confused a string of local date and time data for a system-wide priority emergency shutdown instruction.

¶Full power was restored six days later following a complete replacement of the operating software for the overall system.

¶Charges that the software was deliberately sabotaged were dismissed by Ministry of Energy officials.

Capital/Core (2118 A586A98-F)

Date: 061-1121

¶Sarir Gormakii, Lucan's minister of protocol, returned today from an extended vacation on Sylea. His vacation was not previously announced, and speculation about his post as minister of protocol and who would fill it have been rife in recent weeks.

Terra/Solomani Rim/Sol (1827 A867A69-F)

Date: 058-1121

¶The conclave of the Solomani Party began this week amid controversy as the liberal wing of the party called into question the definition of Solomani.

¶Hard-liners objected strenuously to even considering a revised definition, and the rules committee remained deadlocked after days of testimony and speechmaking.

¶The original definition of Solomani covered only humans born on Terra. This definition was later changed to cover members of the Solomani race.

¶A simple saliva test is available which can confirm Solomani status.

¶Liberal party members are divided into three factions: the Humanists, who believe that all human races (because they all ultimately originated on Terra) are eligible for membership in the Solomani Party; the HDV branch (from the initials of *human, dolphin, Vargr*), which wants to extend the definition of Solomani to include all intelligent races originating on Terra; and the Sophontists, who believe that the Solomani should embrace all intelligences within their ranks.

¶Until recently, the inability of the liberals to agree on a course of action kept them from being a force in Solomani internal politics.

¶At a pre-Conclave meeting at Vega, the Humanists, HVD, and Sophontists agreed amidst heated debate ultimately to back the Humanist perspective in order to present a strong and unified front (with the HVD and the Sophontists obviously expecting further movement toward their own positions as time passes).



Death Among the Stars

An Agatha Christie-style murder mystery for one to four players.

“Death Among the Stars” is set aboard a nobleman’s yacht in the Solomani Rim sector, but referees can adapt it to any campaign where two interstellar governments have had a strained relationship.

Since the fragmentation of the Imperium, the Solomani Rim has been fraught with constant conflict. Elements within both the Solomani Confederation and nearby Imperial subsectors have recently been agitating for improved communication and an end to hostilities. Representatives of the Imperium and the Confederation have agreed to meet quietly and unofficially to discuss their differences. The talks are to take place aboard a private yacht while six delegates, three from each side, are wined and dined in high style.

The PCs can get involved in two ways. First, they might be selected as delegates, especially if they have above-average social standings and appropriate “people” skills, such as Administration, Liaison, or Carousing. In this case, they will be contacted by an Imperial official who will offer them “appropriate remuneration” for undertaking a clandestine task. All expenses will be paid, but the player characters must be discreet.

If, on the other hand, the player characters aren’t quite respectable enough to be representatives, they could be hired to staff the yacht. In this case, the PCs will be contacted by a intermediary about a hush-hush flight with extra pay. Eventually they will be interviewed by the delegates’ host (and yacht owner), Neely von Snark III.

Snark is snobbery personified, and the PCs should receive one negative die modifier on the Reaction Table for social standings of less than nine, and two negative modifiers for social standings below seven. But the referee should give positive die modifiers for skill levels of two or more for the appropriate job skills.

If things really look bad for the players, Snark’s wife, Fidelia, will give the most handsome male character an approving look-over and put

By Kevin Scrivner

in a good word for the adventurers. Snark will acquiesce to his wife, muttering something about "plebian riffraff."

If the PCs choose to be offended, they will have van Snark's bodyguard, Vsial Vilni, to deal with.

ABOARD SHIP

The talks will begin immediately after an elegant shipboard bon voyage dinner. But negotiations will not go well.

It should take at least two days to reach jump point, and during this time, icy politeness will thaw into bickering and personal hostility.

Personnel assignments on board are as follows. Player characters may fill some positions, but a full complement is listed.

Neely von Snark III: A huffy, class-conscious aristocrat, von Snark is owner and pilot of the yacht *Blue Yonder*. He is an extremely jealous husband and a crack shot. He occupies stateroom 1.

Fidelia von Snark: Young and sexy, Mrs. von Snark got her training as a confidence artist on the streets. She managed to pass herself off as the daughter of a wealthy merchant to marry Neely but prefers his dashing bodyguard. During the last year she has spent most of her allowance paying off an unknown blackmailer. She occupies stateroom 2.

Vsial Vilni: This aggressive ex-marine gave up his mercenary career to become Neely's protector and Fidelia's lover. He is obsessed with defending his honor and loves a fight. He is in stateroom 6.

Sir Gabrielle Harms: Neely's personal physical and ship's doctor, Harms learned of Fidelia's shady past while seeking her medical records. He is deeply in debt because of his passion for gambling and turned to blackmail to pay it off. (He is blackmailing Fidelia.) He is in stateroom 12.

Karina Edson: Karina uses her position as chief steward to go through passengers' luggage for valuables. She also pilots the ship's boat. If caught pilfering, she may become desperate enough to offer violence. She is in stateroom 7.

Arto Phillip: The ship's assistant steward and gunner is a member of a fanatical Solomani fringe group that views moderate Solomani officials as traitors. He is in stateroom 13.

Sedrik Namath: Namath got his engineering position with a forged ID. In reality he is escaped convict Alvin Connors. He will kill to preserve his secret and his freedom. He is assigned to stateroom 8.

Aristarchus Darby: Darby is an Imperial negotiator. He opposed talks with the Solomani but insisted on being on the team if it had to be done. He is in Stateroom 5.

Harnoth Isgog: Imperial negotiator, brilliant criminologist, and drug addict, Isgog

is willing to "borrow" supplies from the ship's sick bay to satisfy his cravings. He is in stateroom 4.

Dame Bander Flan: Flan is an Imperial negotiator. She is passionate and emotional, and panics at the sight of blood. She is in stateroom 3.

Earnest Vestron: Vestron's controversial political views have caused several hard-line Solomani factions to put a Cr500,000 price on his head. He suffers from a rare metabolic disorder that requires him to take daily medication or face debilitating and potentially fatal seizures. Vestron has kept his condition a secret but has confided in Harms. He is a notorious ladies' man and is in stateroom 10.

Vland Emiril: Emiril is Vestron's aide and would-be successor. He is openly distrustful of the Imperials' intentions. He is in stateroom 9.

Johannes Afft: This Solomani negotiator is actually a Solomani security agent with orders to monitor Vestron. He is in stateroom 11.

SHIPBOARD "ENTERTAINMENT"

The player characters should run across these vignettes to highlight the tension as the *Blue Yonder* approaches jump point:

- Any attention paid to Fidelia von Snark will cause an outburst by her husband. For instance, if Fidelia stumbles while climbing a ladder between decks and a male player character catches her, Neely von Snark will have harsh words for her rescuer.

- Player characters could catch Vilni and Mrs. von Snark kissing passionately in an out of the way location on the ship. If the couple has surprise, they will separate quickly and pretend to be doing something else. If the PCs have surprise and don't choose to avoid the encounter, or if neither party has surprise, Vilni and Fidelia will make excuses. They will ask players to not say anything about the incident because "Neely might misunderstand." Vilni will use threats, and Fidelia, bribery, to encourage silence.

- Vestron will insult Vilni's honor, eliciting a challenge to a duel.

- Negotiations between Darby and Vestron will turn into a shouting match punctuated by bitter accusations of bad faith.

- Players who are on the ball may notice that their luggage has been gone through and that some items are missing.

- Phillip will avoid Vestron and will grumble in private about "that damned traitor."

- A "friendly" gambling session between Harms, Namath, and others will turn ugly when Harms accuses Namath of cheating. Harms exclaims, "I'll turn you in, you crook."

- Players passing Harms' room may see Vestron alone inside. He will act embar-

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rassed if they take notice. Harms will arrive and order everyone out. Players will hear Harms and Vestron arguing as they leave.

- Vestron will shamelessly flirt with every woman on the ship. One evening at dinner he will pass a note to Flan, who will wink at him. During the same meal, after too many drinks, he will make a pass at Fidelia. If the PCs or his associates don't escort Vestron to his room, he will grow more insistent, drawing challenges from von Snark and Vilni.

VESTRON'S MEDICINE

Vestron's medicine is a liquid that must be injected in two-gram doses. Characters who experiment with it will experience effects similar to combat drug, but the damage taken by the user when the drug wears off will double for every two grams more than the normal dose they take. The medication is stored with the other drugs in Harms' room, which serves as the ship's sick bay.

FIRST MURDER

Karina Edson will discover Vestron's body in the passage near the air/raft berth during the night after Vestron's drunken, fateful dinner behavior. She will alert everyone else with her screams. The corpse has a gash across its forehead, and the air lock in the berth has been cycled.

If the PCs carefully examine the body they will find a fresh scratch on Vestron's shoulder. Player characters with Medical or Forensic skill can identify this as a medical injector wound. Harms will supply this information if the PCs don't have the needed skills and will be able to determine that Vestron hasn't been dead long.

Harms also will report that his equipment and drug supplies have been tampered with. Several items are missing, including Vestron's medicine and a medical injector.

TELLTALE REACTIONS

Nonplayer characters will react with shock, then outrage.

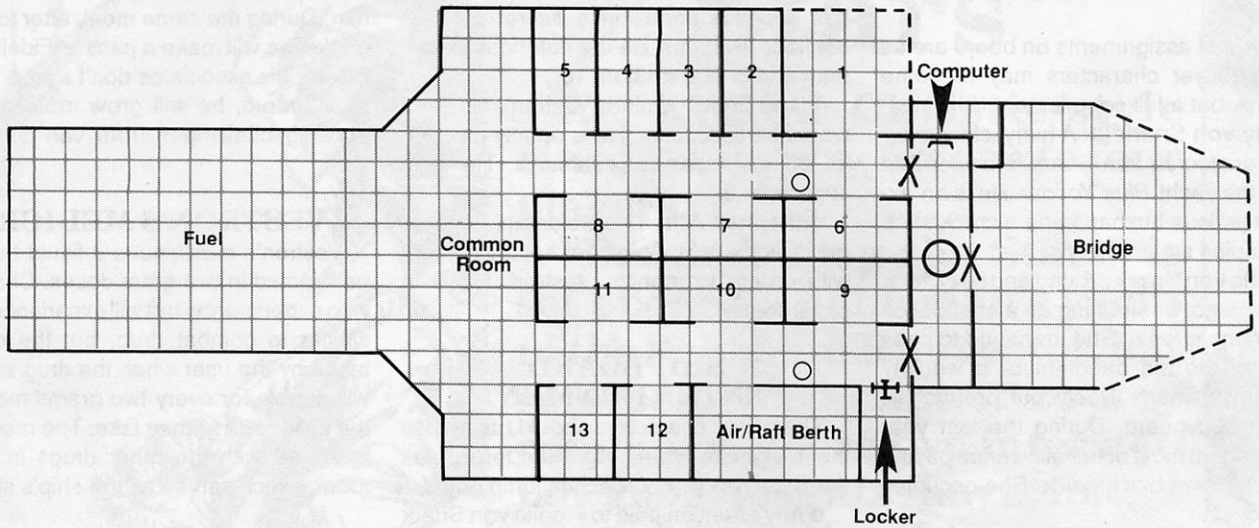
Von Snark: Von Snark will immediately accuse the player character with the lowest Social Standing. After he calms down, he will suggest that the ship be searched for clues and stowaways if the adventurers haven't already thought of it.

Vilni: Vilni will suggest that all weapons not already stored in the ship's locker be surrendered and the locker door locked.

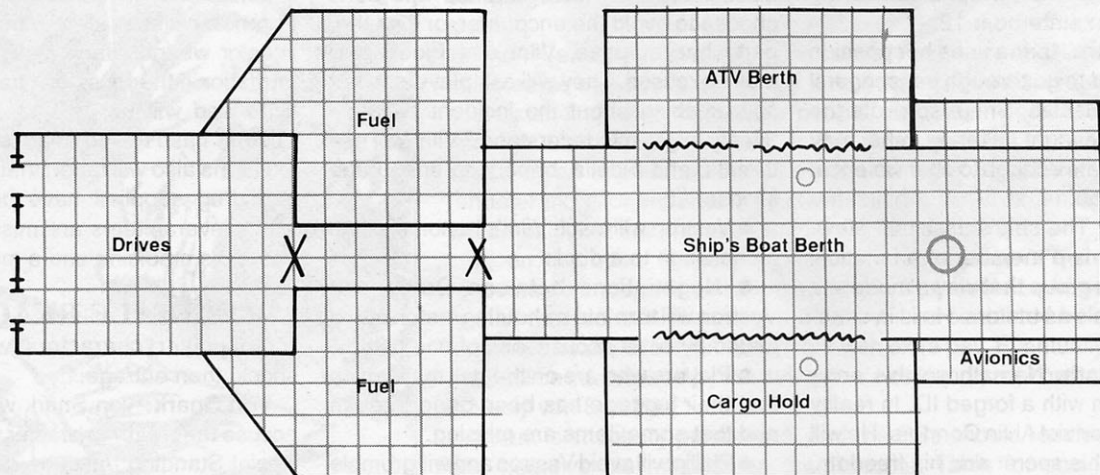
Darby: Darby will suggest that the mur-

Blue Yonder

The *Blue Yonder* is a standard yacht, arranged on a two-deck plan. Access to the unstreamlined vessel is through the ship's boat berth. The hatch directly to the rear of the bridge leads upward to the ship's weaponry and downward into the ship's boat. A triple turret is installed, mounted with a pulse laser, sandcaster and missile rack. Folding doors separate the ATV berth and cargo hold from the small craft compartment. Each stateroom contains a private fresher.



Upper Deck



Lower Deck

derer is a maniac. He will tell how a man on a ship he was stationed on went berserk and attacked other crewmembers.

Namath: Namath will become surly and uncooperative if questioned and will practically camp out in the drive room after the night of the murder. He will hide his revolver among the machinery rather than let it be locked up.

Flan: Flan will become hysterical. She may do something to endanger herself if the others don't keep an eye on her.

Fidelia: Mrs. von Snark will worry aloud that events have put a damper on the ship's festive atmosphere. Then she will go out of her way to be unnecessarily cheerful.

Emiril: Emiril will rave that Vestron's death is an Imperial plot. If someone remembers Phillip's earlier murmuring, Emiril will demand that the steward be seized and locked in his quarters.

Afft: Afft will gravely warn the Imperials of the murder's possible political consequences, but will remain calm. He will try to do some sleuthing around the ship without seeming to do so.

Isgog: Isgog, when he sobers up, will insist on taking charge of the investigation because of his security background, and will confidently assert his ability to find the culprit before the ship docks.

Phillip: Phillip will say he approves of Vestron's murder but will deny that he did it. He may panic if his political affiliations become known, but will insist on his innocence.

Harms: Harms will be almost as nervous, if possible, as Namath because all this excitement could uncover his blackmail scheme. He will take charge of the body, but his emotional turmoil could affect the accuracy of his examination.

Edson: Edson, after she quits screaming, will be offended. This sort of nonsense occurs among the lower classes, not among high-society folk.

TRUTH

The truth is that Vlad Emiril resented Vestron's success. He believed Vestron had used him, then prevented his advancement. Emiril had long plotted the demise of his boss, but the clandestine talks provided a quiet, out of the way location and the opportunity to blame the occurrence on the Imperials. His discovery of Vestron's medical condition by eavesdropping on the argument between the delegate and Harms was a windfall.

Emiril stole an injector and Vestron's medicine from Harms' room when he supposedly went to the restroom during a lull in last night's dinner party. After dinner he watched until the halls were clear, but had to delay his attempt when Flan came to visit Vestron. When Flan angrily ran to her quarters, Emiril slipped in and shot Vestron

with an overdose. Vestron collapsed, striking his head on the stateroom desk. Emiril was attempting to dump Vestron out the air lock in the air/raft berth when he heard Edson coming down the hall. He managed to eject the injector before fleeing.

CLUES

If player characters search the ship as soon as possible after the murder, they may discover the following clues. Otherwise, the rooms' occupants will have time to conceal or destroy the evidence.

- Some of the missing medical supplies and a medical injector (Isgog's own), are in Isgog's lowest dresser drawer. The injector is similar, but not identical, to the one stolen from sick bay—but Harms may not notice the differences immediately. If given time, Isgog will flush his drugs out the fresher and hide the injector beneath packaged stores in the galley.

- Afft wears his SolSec identification beneath his clothes in a harness similar to a money belt. In his trash can is a charred fragment of his orders with the SolSec insignia still discernible. Concealed in his luggage is a lockpick set capable of dealing with most of the ship's security systems. These lockpicks will soon disappear, as Emiril will find the set (see below), which will concern Afft a great deal when he discovers its theft.

- Various personal effects belonging to the other characters are concealed at the bottom of Edson's luggage.

- Phillip's belongings include Solomani propaganda materials containing the announcement of the reward offered by party radicals to Vestron's assassin.

- A search of Harms' hand computer files will show he has been receiving large sums of money while paying out equally large sums. A separate file contains medical records revealing Fidelia's low-caste background. The gamemaster should impose appropriate Computer skill die modifiers on adventurers attempting to discover the files, assuming Harms doesn't interrupt and kick such people out of his room.

- Namath's identification papers can be recognized as forgeries on a roll of 10 or greater (they were prepared by a crook with Forgery-2). Also, there is a chance (roll 9 or greater) that any recent news media brought on board will have a story on Alvin Connors' escape.

- Flan's wastebasket contains the crumpled note from Vestron inviting her to meet him in his room.

- There is a discarded injection capsule beneath Emiril's bed. His diary reflects his animosity toward Vestron.

- Vestron's room shows signs of a struggle, and there are bloodstains on and beside the desk.

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QUESTIONING THE NPCs

If the player characters decide to question the ship's occupants about their whereabouts at the time of the murder, they will receive the following information:

Von Snark: Von Snark will say he spent the late evening on the bridge making preparations for jump and doing follow-up work. The ship's log indicates the *Blue Yonder* went into hyperspace 20 minutes before Edson's screams.

Fidelia: Fidelia will say she was in her room sleeping. She was in her room—with Vilni. Vilni will likewise claim to have been asleep in his quarters, but if the adventurers search the ship they will discover his bed still made.

Harms and Phillip: Harms and Phillip will both say they were gambling in the common area. But Harms left to use the fresher shortly before Edson screamed, so both men were unsupervised at the time of the murder. In addition, Phillip will mention seeing Edson pass through about 30 minutes before the body's discovery.

Edson: Edson will say she was busy with valet duties. She will confirm seeing Phillip and Harms gambling about half an hour before the murder; she stopped to tell Phillip to quit goofing off and get to work. What she won't say is that she saw a figure retreating down the hall just before she came across the body. Her initial fright will keep her from mentioning it at once, and later (when some reflection allows her to identify the figure as Emiril) her greed will take over.

Namath: Namath will say he was thinking in the drive room, but saw no one who could verify this.

Darby, Emiril and Afft: Darby, Emiril and Afft will all claim to have been in their rooms preparing for the next day's talks. Afft, in reality, noticed some things missing after Edson picked up his laundry and went snooping around the ship. He can confirm that Namath was in the engineering section but will be reluctant to do so because it might blow his cover.

Flan: Flan will say she was in her room sleeping. Actually, she met Vestron in his room. A struggle ensued when he became rough and rude, and Flan struck Vestron and fled. She will deny that she met with him, especially if Harms reveals Vestron's odd medical condition.

Isgog: Isgog is the only one of the passengers not to have come running when Edson screamed. Anyone who looks for him

NPCs

Neely von Snark III, Ex-Scout, Junior Administrator

76567C, age 38, 5 terms, Cr120,000.

Navigation-4, Computer-3, Carbine-3, Pilot-2, Gambling-1, Grav Vehicle-1, Equestrian-1, Rifle-1, Brawling-1, Administration-1, SMG-1, ATV-1, Mechanical-1. One scout chip, one carbine.

Fidelia von Snark, Ex-Rogue

677972, age 22, 1 term, Cr10,000.

Bribery-1, Streetwise-1.

Vsial Vilni, Ex-Marine Captain

8A5488, age 34, 4 terms, Cr2000.

Cutlass-3, Revolver-3, Electronics-2, Medical-1, Leader-1, Mechanic-1.

Sir Gabrielle Harms, Ex-Navy Commander

58668B, age 38, 4 terms, Cr20,000.

Medical-3, Electronics-3, Computer-2, Vacc Suit-2, Navigation-1, Forgery-1, Auto Pistol-1, Interrogation-1, Gambling-1, Tracked Vehicle-1.

Two high passages.

Karina Edson, Ex-Merchant Purser

5AB973, age 30, 3 terms, Cr30,000.

Steward-2, Liaison-1, Medical-1, Grav Vehicle-1, Tracked Vehicle-1, Ship's Boat-1, Auto Pistol-1.

One high passage, one autopistol.

Arto Phillip, Ex-Merchant Junior Purser

875C45, age 26, 2 terms, Cr1000.

Gunnery-2, Liaison-2.

Sedrik Namath, Ex-Merchant Drive Hand

476967, age 26, 2 terms, Cr11,000.

Electronics-2, Mechanical-1, Gravitics-1, Engineering-1.

One revolver.

Aristarchus Darby, Ex-Merchant Junior Purser

68A758, age 34, 4 terms, Cr16,000.

Gunnery-3, Brawling-2, Streetwise-1, Blade-1, Broker-1, Communications-1, Administration-1, Ship's Boat-1, Trader-1.

Harmoth Isgog, Ex-Police Inspector

A29997, age 27, 2 terms, Cr10,000.

Handgun-1, Cudgel-1, Gunnery-3, Brawling-1, Shotgun-1, Interrogation-1, Streetwise-1, Liaison-1.

One Chief's Meritorious Conduct Citation, one Commissioner's Medal for Gallantry.

Dame Bander Flan, Ex-Scout

54A66B, age 28, 3 terms, Cr0.

Vacc Suit-2, Pilot-1, Liaison-1, Navigation-1, Wheeled Vehicle-1.

One scout ship, one shotgun.

Earnst Vestron, Ex-Solomani Party Deputy

7816B7, age 42, 5 terms, Cr80,000.

Liaison-3, Leader-1, Instruction-1, Recruiting-1, Trader-1, Grav Vehicle-1, Steward-1.

One Order of Sol, one Solomani Starburst, one body pistol.

Vlad Emiril, Ex-Solomani Party Alternate

77A576, age 38, 5 terms, Cr100,000.

Liaison-3, Leader-2, Administration-2, Auto Pistol-2, Grav Vehicle-1, Instruction-1.

One Solomani Starburst, one autopistol.

Johannes Afft, Ex-SolSec Major

897584, age 34, 4 terms, Cr11,000.

Leader-1, Streetwise-1, Auto Pistol-1, Air/Raft-1, ATV-1, Electronics-1.

One voucher, Cr8000 pension.

when the body is discovered will find him dazed in his room. He will not remember clearly what he did after dinner.

SECOND MURDER

By the next evening meal (earlier if the characters want snacks or valet service), the player characters will notice that Edson is missing. If they search the ship thoroughly, they may find traces of hastily mopped up blood in the ATV berth adjacent to the ship's boat bay. Edson's body is stuffed in the ATV cargo compartment. If the adventurers get von Snark's permission to unseal the ship's locker, they will find that the weapons have been gone through and that one of them (preferably one owned by a player character) is missing. The owner will find it in his room showing signs of recent use. Also in the room will be Afft's lockpick set.

Emiril's suspicions that Edson was hiding something were confirmed when the steward demanded money in return for silence. He agreed to meet Edson in the ATV berth, but confronted her with a weapon pilfered from the ship's locker. (He found Afft's hidden lockpick set during a search of the chief steward's quarters.) After hiding the body, Emiril wiped his handprints off the weapon, hid it and the lockpick set in the weapon's owner's room, and retired to his cabin to clean up. He then joined the other passengers in the common area.

MORE CLUES

The behavior of the NPCs and further questioning may reveal the following:

- A harried Phillip will complain about all his work, saying the only passenger with the decency not to overload him with laundry is Emiril. (Emiril is hiding his bloodstained clothes until he has a chance to dump them out an air lock.)

- A passenger will have seen Emiril headed toward the front section of ship while most everyone else was in the common area.

- Vilni and Fidelia had a rendezvous in the ship's boat. They heard something going on in the adjacent ATV berth but won't willingly admit that they were together. They will claim to have been in their respective rooms. But von Snark was unable to find Vilni during that period, and no one saw his wife leave or enter her room.

- Von Snark was on the bridge doing some checks. He saw activation lights for the ATV and boat berth hatches flash on and sought Vilni to find out who could be there.

- Isgog, groggy from taking a "muscle relaxant," saw "one of those damned Solomani" using a hatch to the lower deck when he stepped outside his room to stretch.

- Namath was moping as usual in the engineering section. He saw Vilni and Fidelia leaving the area.

- Phillip was in the galley section of the

● Phillip was in the galley section of the common area preparing a meal. He was seen there by Harms, Aftt and Darby, who were gambling nearby. Phillip will remember seeing the trio among the people who were in the common area but won't be able to pin down when Emiril joined them. Aftt left the group briefly on a pretext ("to attend to other duties") so he could do some brief snooping, then returned.

● Flan was in her room preparing a report. Her door was open, and she was seen by Aftt.

FINALE

After Edson's death the NPCs will be increasingly at one another's throats. If the player characters uncover incriminating information about anyone, there is a growing chance of a violent reaction. A nervous Emiril may be caught attempting to flush his stained garments out an air lock. Or he may become convinced that Harms' medical knowledge makes the doctor too much of a threat and attempt a third murder.

Namath will be afraid that his identity will be discovered. He may attempt to launch the ship's boat by himself as soon as the yacht comes out of jumpspace. If he is accused of the murders, he will produce his

hidden weapon, grab a hostage, and try to escape in the ship's boat even if the yacht is still in hyperspace.

The adventurers may pick out a suspect to hand over to police when the ship arrives in port, based on their investigations. If accused, each NPC will respond in the following way:

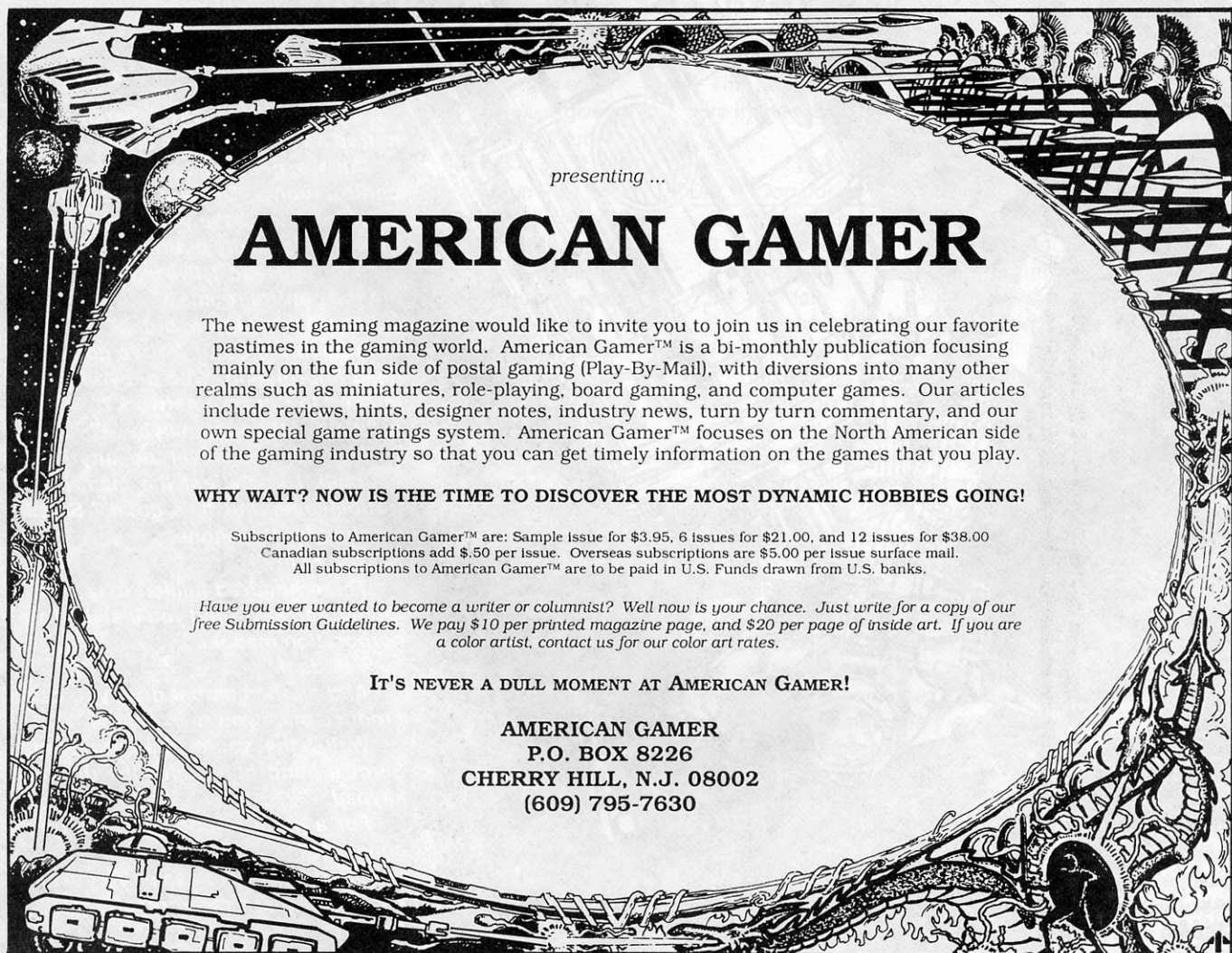
Von Snark will haughtily deny the charges—and he will claim that he's the only one of the crew competent to pilot the ship and will refuse to relinquish command to another character who has Piloting skill. Fidelia will cry and attempt bribery and seduction. Vilni will challenge his accuser to a duel, saying that God will grant victory to the just. Harms, if still alive, will attempt to destroy his blackmail materials. Alternatively, he may denounce Fidelia in front of the rest of the crew. Phillip will panic and fight. Aftt will present evidence the PCs might have missed in an attempt to clear himself and will reveal his agent status only as a last resort. Isgog will attempt to poke holes in the accusers' reasoning and will make his own accusation. Darby will laugh and exhibit an "I dare you to turn me over to the cops" attitude. Flan will faint—in her state she is likely to admit to anything. Emiril will attempt to talk his way out. If this proves unsuccessful, he will smile and try to inject himself with

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a lethal mixture of drugs stolen from Harms' supplies.

Should the player characters be unable to identify the culprit by the time the *Blue Yonder* reaches its destination, the entire crew will be detained for interrogation by Imperial authorities. More than one of the people on the yacht might accuse the adventurers to save his own neck. If prosecuted, player characters probably will be acquitted, but that won't prevent them from being tailed by Solomani agents bent on revenge. To make matters worse, the Solomani radicals who opposed Vestron may arrive to pay off the bounty or offer the adventurers other contracts.

If an NPC the adventurers believe innocent is accused, they might take it upon themselves to get evidence in the accused's favor. If the PCs aren't that gallant, the character or his family may offer to pay them for their trouble. Ω



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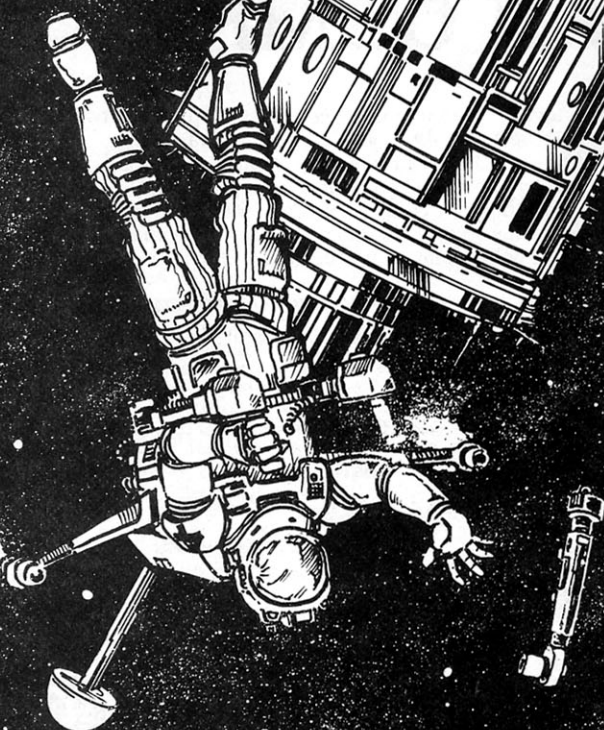
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Orbit City

Robert J. Cosgrave



"Moughas, you say," Sarcil murmured as he stirred his drink.

"All we need is to hold the two control rooms. The rest is ours then, and the oil too," the young man said, offering his neatly bound dossier.

"Ahh, I've read it, I've read it. Where are the control rooms?"

"That I don't know, but...."

"You can find out. You're going to need information. Who did you have in mind to run your network?"

"Well... I thought, maybe...."

"No, no, no. Never do anything yourself. I know just the man. He's troublesome, but he's good." Sarcil reached for the phone.

"You're in?"

"Three hundred million in ransom for me, you say—and you installed as corporation manger."

"Fair deal."

"And all the combat drug you can produce once you're in charge."

"Well," the young man wavered. Sarcil's hand hung over the dialing keypad.

"For a price of course," the boy conceded.

"Of course. Wholesale. Very well, kid, you've just hired yourself Sarcil's Rangers."

Rick Harris
196

The PCs are somewhere in the Regina subsector when they are approached by a Syrtis Corporation employee and offered "challenging and rewarding work" on Moughas. Pay is Cr1000 a month. Should the PCs accept, they will travel aboard the free trader *Miriam* to Orbit City. There they will be assigned jobs in various departments in Orbit City and in City itself. No one will have access to sensitive information, and they will only be briefed on information concerning their work. They will work eight-hour shifts, but are on-call 24 hours a day, in case of emergency.

After 3D6 days the PCs will be approached by Dr. Marcon, apparently a wealthy City resident. He wants them to keep their ear to the ground and provide him with general information about City and Orbit City. He will pay them Cr50 a week each as a retainer, with a Cr100 bonus per important snippet of information. All meetings with him will be prearranged and will take place in cafes in City or Orbit City. Marcon is running 23 "snoops" in the city, including the PCs, so not all the "vital facts" will come through them.

RAID

After about one month as Marcon's agents, the PCs will be asked to stage an attack on a "terrorist hideout" on the 72nd floor of the Epsilon tower. They are told to expect a large quantity of electronic equipment and consoles, supposedly to be used by the terrorists to gain control of City. They are to seize control of or, if necessary, destroy this equipment.

They are not to hesitate to kill Syrtis ship's troops as they are either traitors who are part of the plot or terrorists in disguise. Reinforcements and supporting fire will be provided within 10 minutes of the attack's beginning. The PCs will also be supplied with a large selection of TL14 weapons and offered the use of a large grav limousine, capacity 20 (very cramped).

The players are given contact information concerning the other operatives with whom they must plan the raid. They will not be given enough information to turn the others in or even to identify them—all communication will be over a scrambled phone line.

Marcon will distrust any Psionic PCs, and any Psionic PCs will detect "something" about Marcon. If there are no psionic player characters, the PCs will just feel uneasy about Marcon, but they will be unable to pin down why. The PCs will also notice that he seems to know a lot about their activities, but will probably assume they are under close surveillance.

The referee should encourage the PCs to plan the raid. The 72nd floor (actually the auxiliary control room) will have 30 crewmembers resident there and a 20-man ship's troops cadre. From the lift, it will look like a normal apartment building. Guards and bridge crew live in the apartments around the building, so that from other buildings this looks like an ordinary floor. The personnel do not normally wear uniforms, so they look (to casual passers-by) like normal inhabitants of a tower floor.

Unless firepower is used, the PCs will not get past the lift exit, a policeman will tell them there has been a murder and the floor is sealed off, or a guard will arrest them for unauthorized presence in the residential district. However, with some forethought and planning, this can be gotten around, and the control room can be seized.

After the PCs initiate the assault, army reinforcements will promptly arrive and attack. Within 10 minutes almost 600 troops will be in and around the building. At this point, five pulse laser batteries will open fire on the Syrtis ship's troops on floor 72. They will surrender within two minutes.

ESCAPE

Marcon and 40 well-armed mercenaries will arrive shortly after the surrender. PCs of a military background may recognize the mercenaries as some of Sarcil's Rangers, an elite and very expensive mercenary battalion. They PCs and surviving NPCs will be

relieved of their weapons (supplied by Marcon) and escorted to the central tower.

The PCs may rightfully fear that they have been set up and are about to be shot. Marcon will not telepathically pick up any plans they have to make a break for it, as he will be totally out of psionic strength points at the time. If the PCs fail to realize what awaits them, the NPCs will, and they will draw their concealed weapons (body pistols or daggers) and make a break for it. The mercenaries are tired and low on ammunition, so the PCs and NPCs should be able to get away.

The group is now on the run from Sarcil's Rangers, who are in absolute control of City and Orbit City. Marcon will not rest until they are dead and will hunt them down as soon as his psi strength returns. At worst, Marcon will be able to kill one of them every 13 hours, but will probably spend most of his time guiding mercenary groups in on the PCs or trying to get close enough to them to lessen psionic strength costs. Sarcil will launch punitive search parties with orders to shoot the player characters on sight, but he is actually content to let them starve in the warrens of the disk or die trying to escape to orbit through a blistering array of laser fire. Marcon will be assigned 36 mercenaries to aid him in his search for the PCs on the disk, as well as the full cooperation of mercenaries on other duties.

The PCs should be discouraged from jumping from the disk into the sea. If they do, they will either be killed by the fall (after 500 meters, water is hard) or drown. In all likelihood, the PCs will go to ground in the disk level of City, hiding in the warren of corridors there. The referee can use the following table to generate the corridors in the disk.

RANDOM CORRIDORS

Die	Corridor	Feature
2	Y-junction	Commo junction box
3	Intersection	Sewage station
4	Straight	Computer terminal
5	90° left	Security door
6	Straight	Power junction box
7	Straight	Nothing
8	90° right	Maintenance team with one guard
9	Straight	Power junction box
10	45° left	Antimercenary party
11	Straight	Nothing
12	45° right	Mercenary patrol

The referee should roll once in each column for every 50 meters of corridor. A record should be kept on graph paper in case the PCs decide to double back.

All utilities facilities are small junction boxes or sewage pipe junctions. All computer terminals are linked to the main computer, and their use will be detected. Opening and closing security doors will also be detected, provided the local communications junction box is working. Antimercenary parties will consist of residents, mutinous crewmembers, or escaped Syrtis ship's troops. Such groups will all be poorly armed, except for ship's troops, and the group will rarely contain more than six people. Mercenary patrols will be standard, 12-man combat squads.

The PCs will, after a day in hiding, run into explosive charges attached to power substation and maneuver drive equipment. These charges will be radio controlled and of small explosive power. Their purpose should be obvious, but the PCs are unlikely to find the trigger mechanism (it is actually in Syrtis' apartments,

MEGATRAVELLER™

now occupied by Sarcil) and disable it, although they may be able to disassemble the charge with some tools, time and good task results. They will not be able to locate all the critical charges and disable them before the marines arrive, however. Once one charge is disassembled, the PCs might be able to determine its detonator type, and on an exceptional task success, determine what frequency the detonation signal will be sent on. Thus, if they can find the right equipment, they might be able to jam the detonation signal for these charges.

EXPLOSIVE FINALE

The Imperial Marines will arrive in large numbers after a 3D6-day siege. Shortly before they arrive, Sarcil will evacuate his cadre, taking with him some of the more important (valuable) city residents and articles of plunder, and leaving behind his employer. He will detonate the booby-traps he has set in the disk (the ones the PCs may have discovered), destroying the entire maneuver drive when the marines land. All power substations, the central core, all fuel tanks and all control installations will be destroyed. City will fall into the sea in one combat round, inflicting three points of damage to everyone and everything aboard. This will be sufficient to structurally damage City beyond repair, and to rip down roof struts, open floors, disable lifts and render most buildings on the surface unusable. Fires will also start in residences on the disk surface, and all infrastructure systems will be crippled.

City will sink in 20 minutes, killing about 35,000 people (including the PCs, if they haven't found something which floats or flies). There are auxiliary stairs in the disk and towers for emergency use, which the PCs will undoubtedly need locate and ascend, as lower compartments of the disk will slowly fill with water. Each level will fill in four

minutes. The top of the central tower dips beneath the waves approximately 35 minutes after charge detonation. City will settle on the bottom at a depth of about 800 meters. Anyone alive within an air pocket will be rescued by Imperial Marines in 4D6 hours. Those on the surface will be picked up by marine launches within 10 minutes.

WHAT REALLY HAPPENED

A wealthy young Orbit City broker named Simon Laroche devised a plan to seize control of the Syrtis Corporation. It involved killing Duncan Syrtis and gaining control of the oil rigs with Sarcil's Rangers, under the guise that they were taking the wealthy inhabitants of City hostage and holding them for ransom. Once this was done, he could "liberate" City from the mercenaries (with their compliance, of course) and take the reins of the corporation with wide popular support. He would also see to it that the mercenaries liquidated everyone above him in the ladder of seniority. The plan was simplistic and doomed to failure.

Sarcil knew this and, when approached, devised a counterplan. He would play along with Laroche, for awhile. But once Imperial Marines threatened to attack, Sarcil would leave, taking with him the valuable city residents and shiploads of expensive artwork and jewelry worth several times the original stated ransom demand—leaving Laroche behind, dead.

How did the PCs' attack fit into this? Sarcil hired Dr. Marcon to gather information on the location of the auxiliary control center and to find Sarcil patsies to run the initial attack on it. The were being used to guarantee the takeover of the auxiliary control center and as a distraction to enable the primary control center to be overwhelmed. The police who could be called on as reinforcements for the primary center would be busy repelling a 5th column raid initiated by the PCs on the auxiliary control center when the primary control room was attacked. Thus, Sarcil's Rangers would have an easier time assaulting their primary target, and because the PCs served as a "first wave" in their secondary target, the Rangers would find the auxiliary center only a mopup job.

OTHER ADVENTURE POSSIBILITIES

● Syrtis claims he doesn't produce combat drugs. He actually does supply them to friends in Ileish. Duke Norris would very much like to know this; it would be a good excuse to seize the supply for himself. He would pay good money to anyone who would act as a spy in the Syrtis Corporation.

● A survey team is due back from a seabed survey under the icecap. It is rumored that the team found a city built by the aquatic civilization which once ruled the seas of Moughas. A lot of people would pay very good money for the location of the city or artifacts from it.

● The disk was brought to Moughas by a huge disposable jump drive. If it was recovered and refurbished, it would make an immense fleet tender and would seriously tip the balance of power in the Spinward Marches. It is doubtful that it still exists, but if it can be found and recovered....

Background Information

This adventure takes place on Moughas (CA5A588-B, Regina, Spinward Marches 2406) at any time from 1116 through 1120. Although Moughas is only capable of producing items to TL11, a high volume of imports means that equipment up to TL15 is readily available within legal restrictions. The system has never been the site of major conflict, although the growing Vargr threat is now forcing a stiffening of defenses.

Not one square meter of land protrudes above Moughas' ocean. Miles of gray abyssal plain cover the ocean floor far below the ocean's surface. Below this seabed lies an oil totally unreproducible within the known universe. When properly processed, the oil can produce a powerful

Dr. Jimmiam Marcon, Assassin

7978B5, age 52, 3 terms.

Psi-10, Telekinetics-10, Clairvoyance-9, Telepathy-8, Medical-3, Electronics-3, Linguistics-1.

Middle passage, 4mm gauss pistol, dagger, electronic tool kit, language computer.

Dr. Marcon was psi-tested at age 20 and has used his abilities fully ever since. After 12 years of medical work, he discovered that he could, using his Medical abilities, telekinetically kill people by locating or creating aneurysms in his targets' brains and then bursting them. This type of death would be passed off by most coroners as "natural causes." However, if a coroner is unlikely to see the body, Marcon will, to save time, simply reorganize the forward lobes of the victim's brain or rip out his vital organs telekinetically.

To locate an aneurysm psionically:

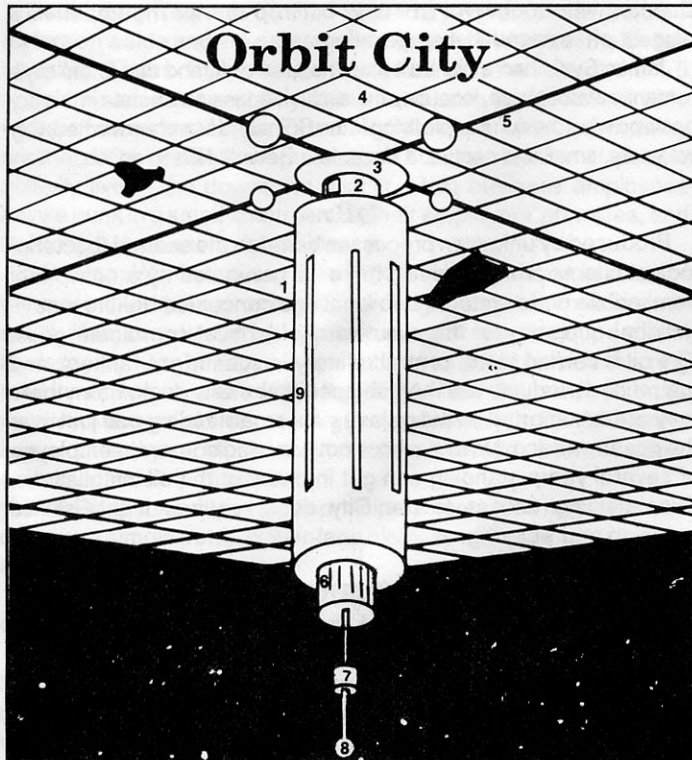
Difficult, Clairvoyance, Medical, 2 seconds (confrontation).

Referee: Before this task must occur, the victim must be in sight of Dr. Marcon or have been located exactly by him. Psi cost is 2+range.

Dr. Marcon has spent the last 20 years as an assassin and agent for hire. He is deeply paranoid (he knows how many people distrust him), and he places a very low value on human life, having become, in essence, an "ice man" over the years. The gauss pistol is primarily a decoration. Marcon does not know how to use it and keeps it unloaded.

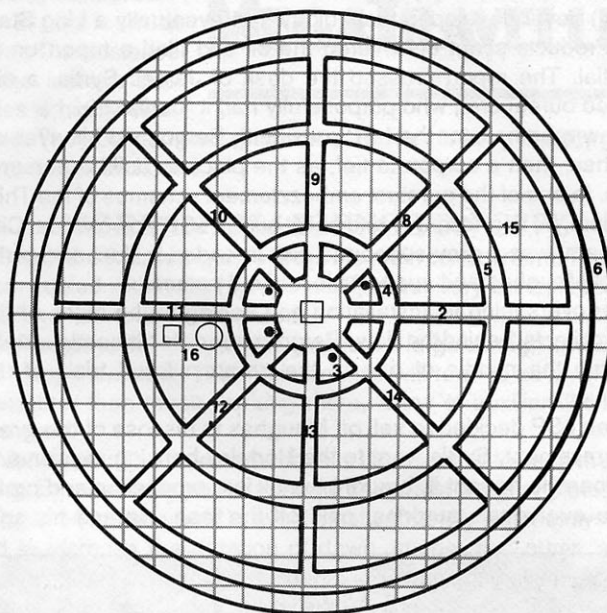
Marcon is a very dangerous man and will kill if he is threatened.

Orbit City



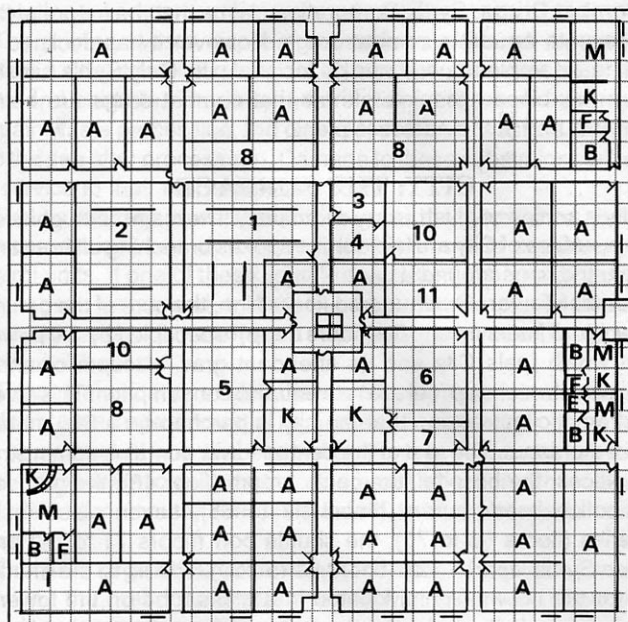
- | | |
|------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. Main Cylinder | 6. Garrison |
| 2. Repair Yards | 7. 50-Ton Missile Bay |
| 3. Cargo Storage | 8. Sensors and Commo Radome |
| 4. Docks | 9. Weapons Batteries |
| 5. Fuel Tanks | |

City: The Surface



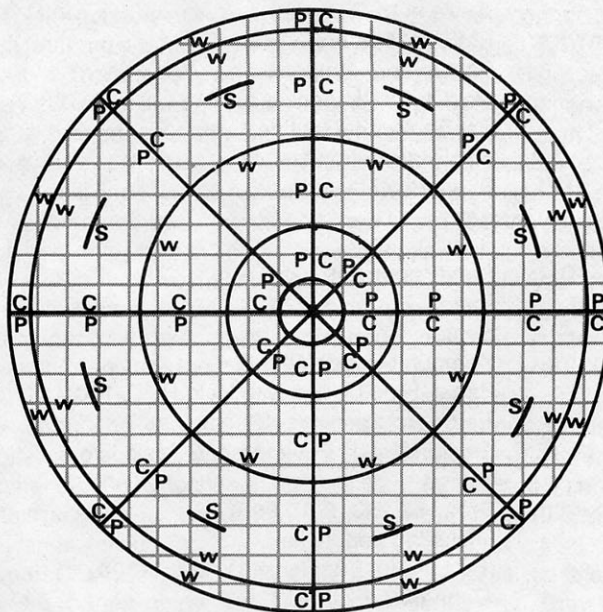
- | | | |
|---------------------|---------------------|----------------------|
| 1. Central Tower | 7. Bergol East St. | 13. South Syrtis St. |
| 2. Main Towers | 8. Cara Bvd. | 14. Ling Ave. |
| 3. Secondary Towers | 9. Syrtis North St. | 15. Golf Course |
| 4. First Ring | 10. Hortalez Ave. | 16. Sports Arena |
| 5. Second Ring | 11. Bergol West St. | |
| 6. Third Ring | 12. Taylor Rd. | |

Epsilon Tower Floor 72



- | | | |
|-----------------|---------------------|--------------------------|
| ~ Heavy Shutter | 1. Control Room A | 8. Stores and Spares |
| = Sliding Door | 2. Control Room B | 9. Gym |
| K Kitchen | 3. Security Control | 10. Games and Recreation |
| F Fresher | 4. 9/bis Computer | 11. Armory |
| M Main Room | 5. Bridge Crew Mess | 12. Balcony |
| B Bedroom | 6. Guards' Mess | |
| A Apartment | 7. Officers' Mess | |

City: The Disk



- | | |
|---|------------------------------------|
| W | Primary Waste Disposal Substations |
| P | Secondary Power Substations |
| C | Communications Substations |
| S | Large Storage Battery Banks |

generic mind-altering substance which can be tailored to perform a multitude of pharmaceutical functions—if processed correctly.

For years no one utilized this substance. The local aquatic civilization (which enjoyed a few thousand years in the eye of history) never developed technology. But eventually a Ling Standard Products scout discovered the oil and filed a report on its potential. The report crossed the desk of James Syrtis, a disgruntled bureaucrat, who purposefully had it "buried."

A few months later the LSP president, Bergol, set his eyes on Moughas, then a corporate fief, as the place to build a personal haven. In one of the greatest embezzlement schemes of the Third Imperium, he financed City and had it built in LSP's own yards. City, his dream, was a grav-supported disk intended to float above the seas of Moughas and support his fortified palace.

After overseeing its installation and seeing to the hiring of the best architects "behind the claw," Bergol returned to his headquarters, right into the middle of one of the greatest fraud trials of the millennium.

When LSP decided to sell off Moughas to dispose of this great embarrassment, Syrtis went to the Hortalez banking division and got a loan. He bought it, brought the oil into production and profit, and, to everyone's surprise, paid off the loan. He and his son,

Duncan, who took over in 1082, built up one of the Imperium's biggest pharmaceutical corporations.

James Syrtis had a city built atop the grav disk, and due to the city's romantic atmosphere, location, and exclusiveness, real estate in this city became what the rich people living in the Spinward Marches wanted. City was safe, small and secure. It became a Beverly Hills in space.

OIL

Produced by unknown processes beneath the seabed (bacteriological effects are surmised), the oil is harvested by a network of semimobile underwater rigs in locations concealed behind a navigational quagmire of three outwardly identical coordinate grids. The oil is carried to the central refinery in subsurface tankers, and the refined products are then shipped to the City dock. From there they are transported to the galaxy via a small landing pad just over the ocean surface. No one who is not a trusted corporate employee of several years standing can get into any of the oil installations. Even gaining access to the City dock requires highly skilled breaking and entering.

PRODUCTS

Psychiatric Drugs: Most of the Syrtis Corporation's known profits come from these drugs. There are a wide variety of rare conditions only Syrtis products can cure, enough to provide 14.8 billion credits of profit to the company for the year 1116. (All of the profits were reinvested. "Money in the bank only gets embezzled" is a policy ironically started by George Bergol, president of Ling Standard Products from 1032-1046.)

Narcotics: Syrtis Corporation officially does not produce narcotics and denies all connection with people in that death-dealing business (honest!). Actually it does produce large quantities of narcotics in its refinery and sells them at a distance. Huge efforts are made to keep these substances out of City, in order to keep it "clean" and, therefore, keep the rent high. However, some always gets through. James Syrtis will sell anything to anyone provided it doesn't fly back in his face.

Combat Drugs: Syrtis Corporation claims that the nature of the oil prevents its use in combat drugs. However it has declined to provide a sample of unrefined oil for analysis. Only Syrtis himself and a few close associates know that combat drugs are being manufactured in the narcotics plant.

CITY: THE SURFACE

City is a chic and plush luxury community. The main thoroughfares on the surface of City are laid out like spokes branching off from and concentric rings around a central hub.

Central Tower: One hundred floors high, the core of the central tower (to 45 floors up and five floors deep) is occupied by the power plant which fuels City and its attendant grav "vacuum cleaner" pump which sucks up fuel at a rate equal to consumption. This gives the dramatic impression that the city is perched on a 500-meter-high waterspout. The rest of the central tower contains administration offices, the hospital, the control room (floor 46), the garrison and police headquarters (floors 47 to 65), seven pulse laser batteries (floors 66 to 70), the shuttle port (floors 71 to 90) and James Syrtis' apartments (floors 91 to 100). The lift to the shuttle port for the hourly flights, located in a glass tube on the tower's exterior, travels the height of the tower nonstop from street level. This lift and the observation platform at the shuttle port afford a good view of the city and its central plaza 80 floors below.

Main Towers: There are eight main towers measuring 73.9 meters a side. Floors 1 to 25 of each tower are shop space (70% of the downtown district in all eight towers), and floors 26 to 80 consist of apartments. In total, 25% of the population lives in the eight main towers. The towers are named after the first eight letters of the Greek alphabet.

City

CraftID:	City, Type ZW, TL=F (High Stellar), MCr117,600
Hull:	66666/166666, Disp=1,000,000, Config=6SL, Armor=40G, Unloaded=4033401, Loaded=4100063
Power:	213/426, Fusion=1800000 Mw, 1hr+.5hr in batteries
Loco:	1333/2666, Manuever=1G, 0/0, Jump=0, Cruise=900 kph (Vacuum), Top=1200 kph
Commo:	RadioComm System-15x3, LaserComm System-15x3
Sensors:	EMS-P-15 Interplanetaryx2, PasObjScan=Impossible, PasObjPin=Impossible, PasEngScan=Routine, PasEngPin=Impossible
Off:	PLasersxx7 Batt. 10 Bear. 5
Def:	Sandcastersxx9 Batt. 5 Bear. 5
Control:	Computer=Model/9fibx3, Panel=Holo Linked with Holo HUDx100, Large HoloDisplaysx12, Environ=Basic Environment, Basic Life Support
Accomm:	Crew=62,250 (6x10,000) (including population), (Bridge=50, Engineer=91, Maint=304, Gunner=2, Flight=19, Ship's Troops=1000, Command=191, Steward=48, Medical=445, Residents=60000, Admin=100), Small Staterooms=219, Bunks=2019, 55 square meters per resident.
Other:	Fuel=952320, 10000 Mw in storage batteries, 5xShuttles, 2xLaunches, 12xGCarriers

Secondary Towers: The 16 secondary towers measure 59.3 meters on a side and are named after the last 16 letters of the Greek alphabet. Floors 1 to 8 in each tower contain the rest of the 1.5 million square meters of City's downtown area and feature a wide variety of shops and banks. Floors 9 to 54 are apartments, containing another 25% of City's population. A sizable number of people actually live in the downtown district. Most business employees have a bunk in a small apartment on their employers' premises, and thus enjoy the benefits of residency.

1st Ring: Within this ring lives 50% of the population in some of the more expensive property. Outside this ring everyone lives in small villas, surrounded by large expanses of very realistic artificial landscaping. City employees are subject to arrest outside this ring (and in residential areas within the ring) unless they are in an outer ring in the course of work or are guests of residents. Punishment is loss of a day's pay. Multiple offenses are, however, frowned upon, and could result in dismissal.

2nd Ring: Like all the other principal streets, this ring is demarcated by a simple a strip of four-lane highway with moving walkways along the sides.

3rd Ring: Beyond this ring of road, property prices are very high due to the view over the edge.

Entertainment Areas: Aside from the entertainment available in the shops of the downtown towers, residents may enjoy the compact but artfully landscaped golf course and the sports arena with its swimming pools, game courts, and 20,000-seat stadium.

CITY: THE DISK

The disk which "floats" above Moughas' surface, and on which the upper city is built, is six floors deep at the center, tapering by one floor as each circular main corridor is crossed. Thus, at the very rim the disk is only two floors deep.

The lowermost floor contains the grav plates supporting the city and all ancillary equipment. Utilities substations exist on all levels, as does a corridor network. The utilities substations of interest consist of primary waste disposal substations, secondary power substations, and communications substations.

The primary waste disposal substations are large rooms (75 meters a side) containing a tangle of large sewage mains, pumping units and controls. The innermost stations are much larger and contain waste processing and disposal systems (waste is dumped into the sea after processing). Damage to these substations will cut off service to their respective sectors.

The secondary power substations are the same size as the sewage stations and contain various transformers and electrical control units. If one of these is put out of action, the energy supply to the grav plates and surface buildings will be routed through adjacent stations. If the adjacent stations are destroyed, the power supply will be lost.

The communications substations are small (five meters to a side) and contain a large amount of high quality communications switching equipment. If one of these substations is destroyed, all "land line" communications in its sector are out of action. This outage includes all computer terminals linked to main computer units elsewhere.

There are large liftshafts banks at all corridor intersections. Areas between the main corridors are laced with a network of smaller corridors for maintenance. Most corridors are clean and well-maintained, although some little-used maintenance corridors may be in poor repair. Teams will usually arrive to repair any damage in 1D6 minutes. Response times can be greatly delayed if major damage exists elsewhere. City residents are generally discouraged from travelling within the disk and will be gently, but firmly, moved topside.

The disk also houses many sections of large storage battery banks. All entrances into these areas are high security, and access

to one is not possible unless the door is opened from the security control center in the central tower. The existence of the storage batteries is highly classified. They contain enough electrical power to keep the city going for over half an hour.

MEGATRAVELLER

MORE INTELLIGENCE ON CITY

Two of the 9/fib computers are in the main control room. The third is concealed within the highly classified auxiliary control room on the 72nd floor of Epsilon tower.

Although not full size, auxiliary control is large enough to keep the city flying indefinitely (but maintenance will tend to be slack). No one, other than those working there, know of auxiliary control's existence.

Maneuver: The maneuver drive is used mainly to keep the disk flying. By increasing power to some sectors of the grav plates, the disk can be maneuvered to avoid most unfriendly weather systems and to increase the duration of dawn, sunset and other "atmospheric" times of day. The residents are not paying sky high rents for rain, long scorching days or cold nights.

Comms: The radio comms are used for most ordinary communications. The laser system is used for company communications and the orbit city uplink only.

Sensors: The sensor systems are poor, but can be compensated for by those in Orbit City, from which data is relayed. Without the Orbit City uplink, City is essentially blind and defenseless beyond visual range.

Weapons: The bulk of City's weapons are located on the rim of the disk. However, seven pulse laser batteries are situated on top of the central tower to supply fire support to City's "ship's troops" in the event of an enemy landing on the disk. The computer handles most of the gunnery activities; the two gunners (in the control room) simply authorize targets to be fired on.

Ship's Troops: City's troops are 1000 strong, with approximately 200 on uniformed police duty. All the ship's troops are fully combat trained, and the only difference between "army" and "police" is that the police wear blue and sometimes smile. The troops are divided into 80 combat teams, each containing 12 men, plus 40 command staff. They have 10 grav carriers at their disposal, which ferry munitions and provide heavy weapons support fire. The small size of the disk makes high mobility effectively useless, so more vehicles are not needed.

If another orbit city is attacked, the troops may commandeer the five shuttles and use them to ship reinforcements. They are armed to TL11.

Medical: The 433 medical crew staff a 2000-bed residents' hospital, and together with at least 1000 resident "doctors" tend to the other 59,000 hypochondriacs. The 12 "crew" medical staff also use this facility. The hospital has two grav carriers at its disposal for ambulance services.

Small Craft: The five shuttles are equipped with inflatable fuel bladders in their cargo bays and passenger cabins. They ferry unrefined fuel up to Orbit City and carry cargo down. Popup benches are available if the shuttles are commandeered for military purposes.

The launches, working in rotation, provide cheap (Cr10) commuter service to Orbit City. They leave and arrive hourly during the day and every second hour at night. They are also on call for air-sea rescue beyond grav carrier range. Most City residents possess some form of transport, ranging from stylish ground cars to orbit-capable grav limousines.

ORBIT CITY

Orbit City circles Moughas directly above City. It serves as Moughas' starport and City's eyes and ears into the system. It also mounts most of City's defenses.

Main Cylinder: Orbit City measures 22.5 square meters for each of its 30,000 residents, although most of this space is taken up by shops and stores. The residents are mostly traders, brokers, and middlemen. Ship's troops rarely venture into this area except to raid drug dens, and almost anything can be obtained here, for a price.

Repair Yards: Orbit City's repair yards have a capacity of 2200 displacement tons and employ 40 people repairing damaged vessels.

Cargo Storage: About 40,000 kiloliters of pressurized storage space is available in Orbit City's cargo storage areas. The stores are always full, but a large percentage of the cargo is stored in vacuum on the docks.

Docks: The docks are built on the reverse face of Orbit City's massive solar panels, making the area doubly "shady." Only three of the panels are used for civilian dock space (Martha's Dock, Gray Dock and Blue Dock). The fourth dock is City Dock, the home port of the three SDBs native to Orbit City, the city's fuel shuttles, and its gigs. This is also where the freighters handling Syrtis Pharmaceuticals come and go. The launch service from city has its terminal in Martha's Dock. Some starfaring vessels are allowed to proceed to City itself, but they must first dock in

orbit, go through customs and immigration, and receive a landing permit for City. Yachts and free traders are the only vessels small enough to avail themselves of this service, usually dropping or collecting VIP passengers or cargoes when they do so (high permit fees prohibit making such landings commonplace). All firing triggers and missile detonators are removed from incoming vessels by gigs while the vessels are outside the 50-diameter limit. They are returned once the vessels recross this line.

Cargo handling is aided by the robot arms and cargo trucks which move cargo around the docks. These are owned by the dock authority and rented to individual brokers and traders. Many vessels moored in the docks supply their own life support, but are incapable of much maneuver beyond casting off. Most illegal activities practiced in Orbit City take place in these. If a raid threatens, they just undock and wait until the threat blows over.

The four solar panels on the reverse face of the docks are each 785 meters to a side, giving a docking area of 2.46 square kilometers. Access to vessels is through hatches on the docks' surface, which lead from the pressurized trading space between the docks and the solar panels.

Fuel Tanks: Each of Orbit City's four main fuel tanks has a capacity of 10,000 kiloliters. They contain unrefined fuel for sale at reasonable rates to visiting ships.

Garrison: The 600 ship's troops of the Syrtis Company which garrison Orbit City are stationed here. City's control room is in the center of the garrison. Access is totally restricted.

50-ton Missile Bay: Access is restricted to this area.

Sensors and Commo Radome: No access is available to this area (except on a limited basis for repair). Orbit City has virtually every sensor money can buy. All sensory data is also relayed to the City control room for weapons targeting and traffic control.

Weapons Batteries: Access to this area is severely restricted.

Small Craft: Two shuttles fly exclusively on the cargo-down/fuel-up run. Orbit City's gigs serve as pilot boats, customs launches, and general runabouts. The SDBs are normally out on patrol, but at least one will be on the City Dock at any one time.

Orbit City

Craft ID: Orbit City, Type SG, TL=F (High Stellar), MCr13940

Hull: 180000/450000, Disp=200,000 tons, Config=0SL, Armor=40G, Unloaded=518222, Loaded=521022

Power: 1646/3292, Solar Panels=2,464,900 square meters solar panels, Endurance=Infinite

Loco: None

Commo: RadioComm System-15x3, LaserComm System-15x3

Sensors: EMS-A-15 Far Orbitx1, EMS-P-15 Interstellarx1, Neutrino (10 kw) Sensor-15x1, HighPen Densit-1.0, Neural Activity Sensor-15 VeryLongx1, ActObjScan=Routine, ActObjPin=Routine, PasObjScan=Routine, PasObjPin=Routine, PasEngScan=Simple, PasEngPin=Simple

Off: Beam Lasersxx9 Missile baysxx9
Batt. 4 Batt. 2
Bear. 3 Bear. 2

Def: Def DM=+7
Sandcastersxx9
Batt. 10
Bear. 7

Control: Computer=Model/9bisx3, HoloLinked Panels with HUDx6, Large Holodisplaysx2, Basic Environment, Sealed Environment, Extended Environment, Grav Plates

Accomm: Crew=31248 (including population) (2000x16) (Bridge=6, Eng=16, Gunners=45, Flt=21, Ship's Troops=600, Command=115, Stewards=28, Med=7, Bureaucracy=120) Population: Medical=250, Dockyard=40, General Pop=30,000, Bunksx600, Small Stateroomx648

Other: Cargo=40000 kliters (33,000 pressurized), Repair Bays (up to 2200 disp tons capacity), Fuel For Sale=40000 kliters, Medium Robot Armsx30, Shuttlex2, Gigx3, SDBx3

ENCOUNTERS IN CITY

Die	City	Orbit City
2	Resident	Trader
3	Resident	Broker
4	Resident	Drug dealer
5	Resident	Maintenance
6	Maintenance	Thief
7	Background	Background
8	Resident	Background
9	Background	Background
10	Legal	Legal
11	Legal	Rumor
12	Legal	Legal
13	Legal	Background
14	Rumor	Rumor
15	Legal	Rumor

Within the City disk, all resident encounters become maintenance crew encounters. If the PCs are actively seeking out information, a +3 DM should be applied to all rolls on this table.

Background encounters consist of information about the city which is not publicized (i.e., most of it), but not actively concealed. Twenty-five percent of overheard background information will be wrong but can be spotted with a successful Routine task roll (construct an appropriate task). Background information is easy to come by.

Rumors should consist of information which is classified. They will be 60% incorrect. An example would be an engineer, having consumed a little too much in an Orbit City bar, bragging that only he is allowed into the backup control room to implement repairs. Again, information like this can also be gained by cultivating "contacts," or perhaps a little computer hacking is in order. Ω



enig·ma^{oo} \i-'nig-məl

1. an obscure speech.
2. something hard to understand
3. a myste

footnotes:

blah blah blah blah

Sec. ref. 117521983.217A

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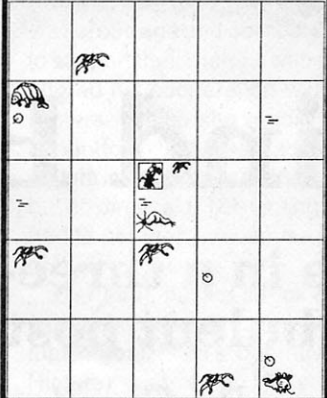


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Behind Blue Eyes

**Part one in a three-part minicampaign
set in the turbulent post-Rebellion Hinterworlds**

By Charles E. Gannon

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Given the system-spanning scope of this adventure, events in "Beyond Blue Eyes" are left undated. The referee may want to use a concrete dating of events to rush the PCs along or use a more flexible dating method to make the PCs feel that they're always just one step behind the action. The sequence of the events is shown in the Background Events Table below.

It is recommended that the group work from one clue to the next. The anti-Nullian League resistance and its allies have taken great pains to leave no loose ends and no definite trails, and it will be extremely difficult for the group to proceed more than one step at a time and without the cooperation of certain key individuals.

In part one, the PCs witness the assassination of a refugee from Riies, a planet recently conquered by the League of Nullia. This precipitates the group's involvement with a Margaret-backed investigation and leads to its insertion into league space. The group follows its clues into the Riies system, adopting the guise of intrastellar merchants. It discovers that the murder may be much more than a random act of violence; it may be the tip of a top-secret iceberg.

ARRIVING ON TIFFANY: THE MORE THINGS CHANGE...

We had just disembarked into the starport mezzanine on Tiffany (0620, Cimeon subsector/Hinterworlds).

As we stepped out and joined the swelling flood of offloading passengers, a man in the crowd ahead of us fell over abruptly. It was too sudden a slump to be natural, and he wasn't trying to break his fall.

Even before I smelled the ozone and the charred flesh, I was moving forward, fast and low because I knew what I had just seen. A very professional assassination, accomplished by an X-ray laser sniper in an overhead position.

As the crowd began to catch on and scatter, I had an unwelcome feeling of déjà vu. We had left the Imperium, left the intelligence racket—but we couldn't seem to leave behind our capacity to be in the wrong place at the right time.

The group has just arrived at Tiffany when it witnesses the assassination of a silver-haired man of approximately 60 years of age. Upon investigation, it is evident that he was killed by a single X-ray laser beam to the head. If anyone immediately looks around for the assassin, he may spot a figure running away through an overhead air vent. The task is formidable, with modifiers for Recon and Hunting.

Moments later, Tiffany Port Authority Security officers swarm onto the scene, taking the group into custody. Their officers' general behavior is brusque, but they are not particularly suspicious. The PCs are not considered likely suspects, although since they remained at the scene—and apparently witnessed the killing—the police are interested in debriefing them at length. This done, the characters are released on the understanding that they are not to leave Tiffany for at least a week.

Soon after they find lodging, they are contacted by one Elam Taangard, Margaret's attaché to Tiffany—and an Imperial Regency of Intelligence and Security undercover agent from the operations branch. (For more on IRIS, see **Challenge 33** and **34**.) He is accompanied by several silent "associates" whose dress and manner suggest they are not native to Tiffany.

Elam takes a seat and studies the group over steeped fingers. The man the characters saw killed was a member of the antileague underground movement, possibly a courier. But whatever information he was carrying was destroyed when he was assassinated—since he was carrying it between his ears. Elam explains that IRIS needs someone reliable to find out what information the courier was carrying.

NULLIAN LEAGUE

The Nullian League (outlined in **Challenge 44**) was formerly a trading cartel with some Imperial ties. In the

wake of the Rebellion, whatever lingering pretense there was to Imperial affiliation was dropped. Beginning in 1100, the league began to undergo a major political transformation, resulting in a more centralized and aggressive government. In addition to economic strength, it has added considerable military might, along with a proven willingness to use both in order to acquire new territories. It refers to this acquisition process as "offering membership" in the league. An offer of membership is an offer that one can't refuse.

As a byproduct of this bellicose campaign of expansion, a large subpopulation of refugees, rebels, and renegades has sprung up throughout the Hinters over the past 15 years. The defeated and disenfranchised are increasing in numbers, and there is word of a growing rebel organization.

The league is now rumored to be turning its greedy eyes spinward, toward what is known as the Riies cluster. This cluster is the astrographic key to controlling almost all the commercial exchange the Hinters has with the Solomani Confederation—which is considerable.

Riies, at the center of Hinters politics for some time now, has a long-standing trading relationship with Tiffany. It had also been a staunch, if largely ineffectual, supporter of Angerhelm during the countless embargoes and trade restrictions Nullia imposed on that planet (preliminary to its invasion in 1120). The Ral Rantan empire generally shared the political sentiments of Riies and often petitioned the Imperium to politically support the Riies cluster in the face of the ever-more-rapacious Nullian League.

Unfortunately, other events interfered. The Ral Rantans' discovery of Imperial tampering with their government followed close on the heels of Strephon's assassination and the ensuing Rebellion. Consequently, the request for help against the league died stillborn, with the Ral Rantans now discouraging Imperial involvement in the Hinters.

By late 1118, Margaret's domain had begun to stabilize and launch campaigns to drive back the Solomani forces in the Old Expanses sector. Concurrent with these activities, Margaret began to initiate research into the Hinters once again, seeing this region as a critical conduit to Hiver trade, as well as a flank to be strengthened against further Solomani adventurism. Her on-site personnel had barely arrived in the Riies cluster when Nullia invaded Riies itself. This surprise attack—aided by a five tech level superiority in equipment—quickly overwhelmed Riies's TL8 defenses.

The other worlds of the cluster—led by Tiffany—responded with verbal outrage and political protests, but did not have the resources to support their rhetoric with military action. Instead, Tiffany covertly offered full cooperation with Margaret's ongoing initiatives in the Hinters—which she readily accepted. Tiffany also made a direct appeal for military assistance to the Ral Rantans. The Ral Rantans—caught in a quagmire of confused internal politics—offered sympathy but no direct aid. The writing between the lines suggested that they had to get their own house in order before coming to the defense of their neighbors.

Margaret, having struck a secret accord with the shadowy and (since the assassination) elusive IRIS, requested that several of that organization's operatives on Venad (0402 Adar subsector/Hinters) control her Hinterworlds initiatives. IRIS Regent Miles Thuringer readily acceded to her request, noting that the league's long-term strategy would have to include the nullification of Ral

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Rantan competition. Therefore, the prime objective of the intelligence initiatives in the Hinters is to find clear evidence that incriminates the league in directly plotting against Ral Ranta. That, reasons Margaret and Thuringer, might shock the Ral Rantan's into self-defensive unity and military action.

The on-site coordinator of Margaret's intelligence operations is Elam Taangard. It is his job to work as a secure liaison between the intelligence services of the participating worlds. This Imperial "networking" not only facilitates a rapid pooling of information but also "compartmentalizes" intelligence sources and operations. At any given time, only Taangard (and his superiors) have full data from all sources. Therefore, the intelligence operations can be compromised from only two sources—a world's own intelligence personnel or the Imperial overseers.

Taangard will bring the PCs up to speed on the astropolitical situation in general, but he won't reveal the secret arrangements between the Riies cluster and Margaret's Imperium. Half of the characters' value lies in the fact that they *are* ignorant of these facts. If caught, they can't reveal what they don't know.

TAANGARD'S PROBLEM

Taangard will tell the PCs what they *do* need to know, which includes the following background.

One of the most promising of Taangard's operations was being mounted by a number of refugees who fled earlier league oppression and had now been seeded into the Riies system. Due to information obtained through contact with the underground resistance there, his primary agent, Caine Sharpic, was optimistic that a major breakthrough might be possible within several months.

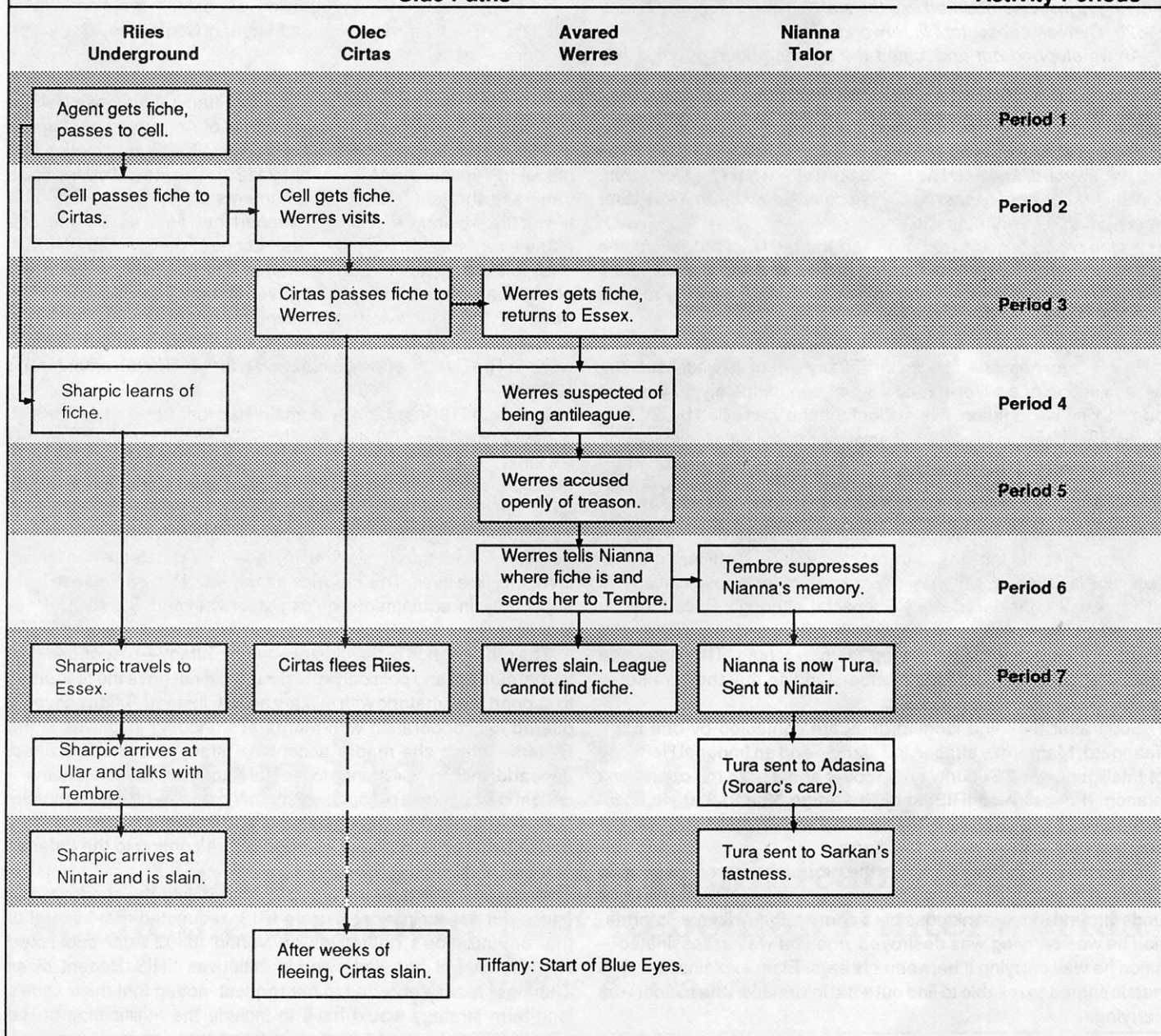
But several weeks ago, just a few weeks after the first anniversary of the invasion of Riies (020-1120), Sharpic's messages ended without warning or explanation. Concurrently, the league restricted inbound traffic to the Riies system to a few dozen designated vessels—most of them owned and operated by crews from the league itself.

Taangard didn't panic. Sharpic's silence did not conclusively indicate that he was dead or incarcerated. An equally plausible explanation would be that he was simply lying low while league

Background Events

Clue Paths

Activity Periods



counterespionage efforts flared up.

But the assassination the characters witnessed has dampened those hopes. The victim—Olec Cirtas—was one of the Riiesans that Sharpic had been trying to recruit as an operative. Cirtas' appearance on Tiffany was completely unexpected—largely because it was so bold and radical a move that it was sure to alert the league intelligence people to Sharpic's work. Therefore, assuming that Sharpic did not urge Cirtas to travel to Tiffany, Taangard wonders what else would have made Cirtas flee his home without spouse or luggage.

All the more disconcerting is the fact that the league was already on Tiffany waiting for Cirtas to arrive. That indicates that Cirtas must already have been suspected by league intelligence. And they must have thought he knew something very important, because they found it necessary to kill him.

Taangard is interested in the party not just because of its abilities, but also because it is unknown here in the Hinters. It is "pristine" insofar as the local intelligence community is concerned. He is willing to pay KCr50 per person up front, plus KCr1 per week while the PCs are on the job. If the group successfully finds the answers he needs, there is an additional KCr50 per person bonus. If it is able to retrieve any highly valuable information that Cirtas knew, the bonus will be *doubled*. Taangard will cover incurred expenses out to KCr50. In addition, he'd also be glad to send a letter commending the PCs' activities and all around worthiness to Margaret—should they want that. And of course, any gains made by the party during the course of the contract are theirs to keep.

MISSION DEBRIEFING

If the group members accept the mission, Taangard will hand them a briefing packet, which includes the following:

- False IDs indicating that the PCs are members of an innocuous trade and market research firm.

- "Legal" computer-forged visas. Hundreds of these visas were created in Riies' traffic control computer months ago by a foresightful Tiffanian agent.

- An overview of the Riies system. (See the separate article in this issue of **Challenge**.) While somewhat general, it is the best Taangard has been able to do, using old data and modifying it in accordance with the data contained in Sharpic's reports.

- Forged special visas for travel to Essex.

- Brief bio on Olec Cirtas. (See the sidebar.)

Since inbound traffic to Riies is restricted, the group will have to be inserted in-system illegally. According to Taangard, the safest place to do that is in the companion system, probably near one of the planetoid belts. The prospectors there have every reason to hate the league, and the Nullians don't maintain much of a presence in the companion system, according to smuggler scuttlebutt.

The exfiltration will be a little more risky. Since Taangard has no way of knowing where the group will be when it completes its mission, he has selected a spot close to the "center of things." The rendezvous site is one million kilometers beyond the orbit of the furthest moon/world of the Large Gas Giant Commonwealth (the most distant moon is Essex). The pickup vessel—a 200-ton far trader with all of its cargo space converted to extra fuel tankage—will emerge out of jumpspace in the prearranged spot once every 14 days. It will wait for one hour, and if it has not been contacted to confirm pickup (or to alter the plan), it will immediately jump back out.

WHAT HAPPENED ON RIIES: THE SKULLDUGGERY BEGINS

While not a true member of the underground, Cirtas was sympathetic to the movement and had provided some minor assistance to a few of its members (food, a safe place to hide, etc.). However, during the height of a league attempt to expunge the resistance,

one of the two underground groups (or "cells") that Olec had contact with passed a microfiche to him. The group did not say what was on the fiche, merely that

it was very hot and that the league was closing in. The cell was gunned down two days later. Another fact that its members neglected to tell Olec was that the microfiche was from a dying agent from Tiffany, who had been mortally wounded while escaping with it. This agent was one of Sharpic's, but he died before he could make contact with his commander or tell the rebels whom to go to.

Essex Factor: Three months prior to all this, the league approached the Trading Council of Riies' primitive sister-world—Essex—and offered to show it what "Essex's farms could become," given the new methods supplied by the league and a few expensive supplements that the league was willing to provide on credit. (Nothing altruistic—the league simply wanted to increase Essex's indebtedness and thereby secure stronger control over it.) All the lords who received the offer accepted. The league announced that it was going to take them and their immediate families to the neighboring moon/world of Riies, a rich and well-developed planet with extraordinarily productive farms. However, despite attempts to smash the resistance prior to the visit, Riies' bitter underground rebellion against league control became obvious to some of the lords, who began to doubt the selfless beneficence of their league hosts.

By far the strongest doubter (both in the degree of his doubt and his power as a lord) was Avared Werres. Former Essexan Olec Cirtas, was the older brother of Avared's wife. Cirtas, a former soldier, was well-known to Avared and well-liked. Avared and the other Essexans arrived just at the end of a league "pacification campaign" in which dozens of Riiesan underground fighters were discovered and slain. Very few had allowed themselves to be taken alive. Avared arrived less than five days after Olec got the microfiche, and spent much of his time with his sister-in-law, Andreesa, and Cirtas. One night, two of Sharpic's local "recruiters" stopped by. Avared was impressed by their zeal and integrity—and was deeply disturbed by their portrayal of the league. In the two weeks that passed, Avared grew to realize how ruthless the league was and how it was using Essex strictly for its own purposes. Cirtas, fearing that league intelligence would be all over him as soon as his brother-in-law left, told Avared of the microfiche and convinced him to take it to Essex. Cirtas was sure that as soon as things blew over, antileague operatives would contact him to try to recover the fiche. Cirtas would then guide them to Avared Werres on Essex.

The League Makes a Connection: Actually, league intelligence had completely lost track of the microfiche. Not having captured any of the rebel cell that had held it (all fought to the death), intelligence had no way to trace it. Ironically, it was back on Essex that the league acquired its first serious suspicions of Olec.

After Werres returned from his tour of Riies, a guard in his retinue, Darshak (who felt wronged by being passed over for a promotion), disclosed to High Lord Sarkan's agents that Werres had spoken highly of "freedom speakers" he had met while on Riies. This fact, almost casually passed on to the league explorers, shifted their attention to the Olec-Avared connection and possible involvement in underground activities. Olec largely confirmed these suspicions by buying an "open ticket" for medium passage to Calmere (0622 Nullia/Hinterworlds).

When the league did finally move against Werres, Cirtas got wind of it and realized that he was next. He left Riies on the first available starship.

Sharpic and the Fiche: Meanwhile, some weeks before Werres

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visit to Riies, Taangard's intelligence chief on Riies—Caine Sharpic—made a major breakthrough in his attempts to access some of the inner sanctum operations of the league intelligence network. He discovered that there existed a microfiched list of the league's sleeper agents and "moles" at work in both the Riies Cluster and in Ral Rantan space. He furthermore learned that a copy of this list had been (according to the league) stolen by a Tiffanian agent who had been shot and later found dead—but without the microfiche. The league—which had already been planning to mount a "pacification campaign" on Riies—tripled its efforts in light of this security leak. Through this counter-resistance crackdown, the league hoped to tidy house prior to the arrival of the Essexan delegates and was optimistic that either the fiche would be reclaimed or the current holders killed—either of which would sweep the loss of the fiche under the rug.

However, as Sharpic tried to follow the developing situation through informers, it became evident that the league was less than sure that the list had been found. A sudden shift of explorer security personnel to Essex accompanied renewed concern for the fiche. Simultaneously, league agents began to shadow Olec Cirtas, who Sharpic had been unable to gain as an active recruit. Sharpic suspected that there was indeed a connection between these events, particularly since one of the Essexan delegates was related to Cirtas by marriage.

Sharpic Goes to Essex: Sharpic was unable to communicate his suspicions back to Taangard. The league crackdown had forced his couriers to go underground or leave Riies. Besides, if one of his operatives was captured, the league would be aware that Sharpic was getting close to the truth and would spare no effort in ferreting him out. So when Cirtas disappeared from Riies mere hours after news of violence on Essex hit the airwaves (the Werreskeep massacre), Sharpic played the hunch that the fiche was on Essex

and that Cirtas knew where it was (or at least where the trail began). He couldn't follow Cirtas without trying to learn about what travel arrangements he had made, and he couldn't do that without attracting attention to himself since Cirtas was being closely watched. Therefore, along with two Riiesan underground agents, Sharpic booked passage to Essex to hunt for the microfiche himself.

ARRIVING AT REVERE

When the characters arrive in the Riies system, they will emerge from jumpspace just sunward of the Revere belt. In addition to the ubiquitous *Harov*-class modular barges that the locals use for prospecting ships, a single-hulled 200-ton STL TL8 trader is on station and an armed TL13 ship's boat is on one of the spaceport's pads. Upon offloading, two Nullian security personnel whose service patches identify them as being with the Nullian Colonial Navy (not in the main league forces), will tell the PCs that there is a ban on outbound traffic currently in effect on Revere. The characters are given the opportunity to return to their vessel (which they obviously cannot do, since it doesn't have the papers to continue in-system and must jump back out). After being processed through spaceport customs (which is comprised of these two naval ratings and a single friendly local official), the characters will have an opportunity to look around Revere.

Investigating Revere: Revere colony is built on a single lozenge-shaped rock measuring about five kilometers on its longest axis. The asteroid revolves slowly about its mean center of mass. This motion was induced by massdrivers more than a century ago to provide FringeTown (the main community that lies at one end of the longest axis) with the equivalent of about 0.85G. The spaceport sits atop the mean center of mass, making it necessary for inbound ships to match spin and vector before docking. Many ships consequently opt for a "tether berth" and handle their exchanges with the colony via cars and freight capsules that run the length of the tether mast.

Besides the pads and refueling facilities, the rest of the spaceport is subterranean—and, being at the center of the rock, is a zero-gravity environment. A maglev tube system carries commuters to and from the spaceport vicinity, although climbways exist as well.

The Natives are Restless: Once in FringeTown, the characters will find that the approximately 900 inhabitants of Revere are infuriated at the travel ban and haven't a single kind word for the league or its allies. The signs of economic depression—caused by industrial slowdowns on Riies (and therefore, reduced demand for raw materials) are plentiful.

At first, the characters may get a cool reception. It will take awhile for the Reverians to realize that the group is not from the league. After a day or so, the locals will start warming up to the PCs, speaking willingly about themselves and current events.

Unusual Visitor: Revere's 20 or so prospecting ships are owned either in whole or in part by families. Local governance is conducted by family "voting shares" (the more of a "hull" you own, the more shares you get). But since the war, the real power is the league. That power had been a distant nuisance until three weeks ago. At that time, the 200-ton STL merchantman *Price of Glory* put into port with a standard cargo of agricultural products and a very unusual passenger—a Stalker, or Outcast of the Whispering Skies. Although it claimed to be conducting an exploratory trading survey, this alien was more interested in the local attitudes toward the league rather than products and prices.

Four days after Glistens-to-the-Lightless (its name) arrived, the league ship's boat came tearing into port, announcing the travel restrictions and landing a search team. Glistens-to-the-Lightless went into hiding and narrowly avoided the three league marines who did their best to turn the colony upside down. When these rude investigators attempted to pump the locals for information, they received stony silence. Since then, the tension between the six

OLEC CIRTAS

Born: 349-1058

Place of Birth: Essex, Riies system

Place of Residence: Riies

Olec Cirtas is a citizen of Riies, but was born on the quarantined world of Essex. He emigrated by stowing away on a smuggler ship, the crew of which discovered him while offloading cargo at Riies.

His first—and only—employer was General Cliven Radmor, a well-placed general in Riies' ground forces. Olec began as a close-combat guard, given his familiarity with swords, his strength, and his hand-to-hand combat abilities. As the years went by, he became more of an aide-de-camp and confidante, although his nature as such was never officially recorded. He was simply listed as Radmor's guard captain.

When Riies was invaded by the league in 1119, Cirtas had been semiretired for almost a year. Radmor had, by that time, risen to second in command of Riies' ground forces and was killed in combat while personally leading one of the last major counterattacks. Shortly thereafter, Olec was questioned by league intelligence personnel, but it was decided that he was essentially harmless, due to his age and the fact that he had been out of circulation for almost a year.

However, Olec is a very popular and trusted man, and after Radmor's death, many of the resistance captains are known to have contacted him. Agent Sharpic is unsure of the degree of his involvement in the ongoing resistance because information on postwar Riies has always been extremely sketchy. Riies has the most bitter and vicious antileague resistance movement of any of the league-conquered worlds.

league personnel on station (a junior lieutenant, a pilot, a gunner, and the three marines) and the populace of Revere has been mounting. Glistens-to-the-Lightless has successfully remained in hiding, but the pilot of *Price of Glory* (Glistens' human friend, Dal Girresh) is under arrest, and a full platoon with SDB is expected to arrive in another three to four days. Evidently, the league does not want to wait for Glistens-to-the-Lightless to just turn up; it wants him now.

League Entanglements: Everybody on Revere can expect to be interrogated and scrutinized in full. For the group, that means a high likelihood of being discovered as something other than market researchers (the task will be a Routine Interrogation task for the incoming league intelligence officer).

The group members have a limited number of choices at this point. They could try to steal a ship and run for it, but they wouldn't get very far unless they managed to steal the naval TL13 ship's boat. That would involve a shoot out and an immediate chase by SDB wings from Forge and Colonia (the second large gas giant in system). Somehow, the group would have to find a safe haven, hide the boat and wait (and hope) for the league search teams to give up. If they do so, they'd also better be smart enough to check for (and disable) the boat's hidden backup transponder, which can be remote-activated by the searching units. If the referee is feeling kind, he might want to position the planets in such a way that they could pilot the boat to one of the less developed in-system areas before any of the other league vessels can intercept. But that should be a very long shot indeed.

A less foolhardy (yet no more promising) option is to try to hide out in the ductwork and warrens of Revere's maintenance accessways until the league forces decide to wrap up their interrogations and go home. This will not work, since the league is expecting Glistens-to-the-Lightless to try to remain hidden and is therefore bringing TL13 neural activity sensor scanners and other sophisticated sensors. The fact that the characters opted to hide from the league authorities will indicate to those authorities that the characters have something to conceal. In this event, the league troops will go so far as using truth serum in order to find out what it is that the characters are trying to conceal.

Workable Option: The one plan that just might work is to try to find Glistens-to-the-Lightless and gain his trust. Glistens wants to get off Revere as badly or worse than the PCs do. There is a great deal of friction between the Outcasts of the Whispering Sky and the Nullian League. The league's recent upsurge in militarism has concerned the nearby Outcasts (or Stalkers). The Nullian assault on Angerhelm—only two parsecs away from the nearest Outcast planet—has alarmed the Stalkers to such a degree that they sent out a number of human-contact experts to search for potential allies among the league's human neighbors. Given the Outcasts' extreme xenophobia, this is indeed a desperate measure.

Glistens-to-the-Lightless has always been intrigued by humans and was selected because his level of xenophobia was so low. In his travels through the Riies cluster and the Riies system, he was pleased to find that most of the humans he has spoken to evince a distrust of the league, with many displaying outright hostility toward it. His superiors will be heartened to hear this and, in the long run, might begin to supply aid to the Riies cluster against the league (which in turn might lead to more open relations between humans and Outcasts).

However, he and his human co-agent (Dal Girresh) left a trail that league intelligence picked up and followed. With Dal incarcerated, Glistens can only hide himself and hope for a miracle.

The player characters could fill the bill of miracle workers if they are daring and inventive enough. If they can find Glistens in time (the referee should work up a number of tasks that the PCs must carry out to reconstruct his last whereabouts and get a good idea of where he might be hiding), they might be able to convince him to

join forces. Glistens would only be too happy to provide the group with transportation off Revere prior to the arrival of the league intelligence officers, if he had it to offer.

The group members should realize that they have to carry out whatever plan they concoct before the league platoon arrives. If they wait until then, they'll be outnumbered and carefully watched. One plan that has a chance of working is for the PCs to take Glistens-to-the-Lightless as their "prisoner" and deliver him to the league personnel on Revere. This would get them into close proximity to the league personnel and earn the PCs a measure of their trust—possibly enough to overwhelm them by surprise in close combat. Although the characters surrendered any firearms at the spaceport extrality zone, they can locate two body pistols for sale by Revere locals.

Since all six of the league personnel won't obligingly bunch up in one place at one time, the group will have to neutralize them quickly and quietly. Otherwise, the Nullians will realize that something is wrong and send a general alert to the main base at Forge.

LEAVING REVERE

If the PCs pull this off, they'll be able to cover their tracks by changing the entries in the local traffic databank to erase any trace of their arrival. They can also free Dal Girresh, who will be glad to honor Glistens' promise of a ride in-system—immediately. The locals will be willing to mislead the incoming league platoon as to the events leading up to the "escape" of Dal and Glistens. They'll report that Glistens helped Dal escape, and the two of them took the Nullian naval personnel as prisoners and hijacked the ship's boat. They'll also report that the *Price of Glory* moved off at the same time, heading into the densest part of the Revere belt—perhaps another crewmember was hidden on board?

The PCs can set the ship's boat (with the Nullians bound and locked in the cargo section) on a high-speed vector heading out of the system. It will take days for the followup league forces to chase it down. And it will take at least that long for other league forces to give up on the false search for *Price of Glory*. By that time, the group members and their two new friends will be well in-system and running under a new transponder signal.

ARRIVING AT RIIES

When the group arrives, Riies is very quiet. The underground movement is in a regrowth stage, although the league feels certain that it has been destroyed. At least that's what local newscasts claim.

Information regarding Olec's last days is sketchy. The only thing of note is the visit he had from his brother-in-law, a noble from Essex, just after the extermination campaign. Cirtas' house is put up for state auction five days after the group arrives. Neighbors saw police arrive one afternoon and take his wife as soon as he was missed, but there is no record of her arrest. This is because the "police" were actually Explorer security personnel in disguise. The speed of Cirtas' movement made his wife useless to the league as a hostage (as Olec had planned), but instead of freeing her, the Explorers killed her upon confirmation of Cirtas' assassination.

A precise check into the day and time Olec departed Riies corresponds to the first independent (nonleague) reports of league violence on Essex. If the group backtracks Olec's ticketed travel, they can identify the ship he departed on as having left only three hours after the first general reports of this news. The league had not been aware that an independent reporter was on hand to break the news of the massacre on Essex, which

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it had intended to keep silent until it took Cirtas into custody. By the time the league was able to respond to the news leak, Cirtas had already boarded the outbound starship. By the time it traced his movements to the starport, he was in jumpspace.

Other Cell: If the group pokes around long enough to learn about Cirtas's last days on Riies, they will be contacted by the other cell that Cirtas had contact with. This cell had gone underground prior to the league extermination campaign and is very cautious. Its contact method will not be gentle or in any way compromise the cell members. The contact personnel will first try for some local code words (which the characters are completely ignorant of) and will then ask (bluntly) for some explanations. They're already fairly sure that the group is nonleague (they're stumbling around too obviously), but the cell is still very cautious. They will use truth drug on one member of the group and a polygraph test on all.

If everything confirms that the group is antileague, then the cell will talk.

Assuming, however, that the cell's cooperation is secured, the cell members will be glad to help, and equally glad for any news or assistance the PCs can give them—the cell needs everything from ammunition to radios.

The cell can shed a little more light on what was going on at the time of Avared Werres' visit. It can give Werres' name and reveal that it's pretty sure the other cell that knew Cirtas had been forced to pass him something important just before the delegation from Essex arrived.

That cell was wiped out soon thereafter. Last, this cell will give the group a mysterious, sealed packet left behind by Caine Sharpic for "any followup teams." Upon opening it, the characters will find documents relating to Essex. The PCs should be able to reconstruct the reasons for Sharpic's departure—and his destination—from these documents. If they're having trouble, the cell members could offer a few helpful insights.

Why Did Cirtas Leave?: Two motives for Olec Cirtas' flight should now present themselves to the group. First, from his point of view, league violence on Essex most likely meant that the Explorers had centered their suspicion on his brother-in-law, Lord Avared Werres, and had acted on it. Therefore, Cirtas would be suspected as the conduit through which the fiche reached Essex. Consequently, Cirtas could expect the league to show up at any time, and he had to leave immediately.

Secondly, while he might have tried to remain on Riies and go underground, that would mean that knowledge of the fiche's existence—let alone its location—might never get to the other planets of the Riies cluster which might be able to use it against the league.

Therefore, Cirtas had to leave Riies and try to stay ahead of league operatives long enough to get to a planet where his story would be heard and acted upon. As it was, he nearly succeeded.

Attracting Too Much Attention: If the group pokes around too much, or does so with disregard for attracting attention to itself, it may attract the attention of the local police, Explorer security, or the military intelligence division of the occupation force, most of which is drawn from Nullian services. If open questions about Olec's past service or his alleged connection with the underground are asked, one (or more) of these organizations will begin to shadow the group. The surviving cell is likely to notice these "shadows," making it even more suspicious of the PCs and careful about making contact.

The PCs should realize that their only possible trail leads to Essex. They can find a number of shuttles and smaller craft that are willing to make that run for the regular fee plus a nominal surcharge. There is no regular service to this world/moon, however.

Rather than respond to any of the questions the PCs may have about Essex, the referee should point out that there's only one way to find the answers—going there.

For more information, don't miss the second part of "Blue Eyes," which will appear in **Challenge 49**.

Sharpic's Packet

The contents of Sharpic's packet should have piqued the group's curiosity.

FOR DISTRIBUTION TO INTELLIGENCE CPS ONLY RIIES SYSTEM CURRENT: 018-1120 Updates: RE: Riies/Riies

League extermination campaign directed against underground/ resistance fighters completed. League officials believe operation to have been a complete or near-complete success. Reliable sources suggest that 20-30% of underground cells escaped detection and elimination. Populace is more responsive to occupation authorities, but also more resentful.

Official Authority: Commissariat of Alfredia (nation which collaborated secretly with league invaders).

Actual Authority: Explorer Security/Intelligence Division.

Occupying Forces: 100% Nullian.

RE: Riies/Essex

League reinforcement of feudal lords increasingly successful. Freeman movement is being systematically eliminated by special householding troops known as "Compactors." Freeman renegades rumored to be fleeing from main continent (Essexar). TL2 trade/possession restrictions must be observed by all offworlders. Grain yield up 23% from last year this time.

Primary Authority: High Lord Sarkan Urdor.

Supporting Forces: League Explorer Intelligence teams and one security platoon (TL9/10 training unit from Sigam).

Occupying Forces: Indigenous, with addition of one company of starport security troops from Meadow. Substandard unit.

NULLIAN LEAGUE EXPLORERS TRAVELER INFORMATION SERVICE A COURTESY OF THE EXPLORER INTELLIGENCE DIVISION HANDOUT: HINTERS/0524/EMPYRIAD-DELTA-H

ESSEX

Essex (Hinters/Nullia D687734 2) is a full-status member of the Nullian League. A dependable agricultural producer, it was contacted on 023-1119. As a consequence of joining the league, the natives have been supplied with superior farming techniques, fertilizers, offworld contact, trading monopolies with offworld buyers, and extended credit.

In place of the loose and largely ineffectual parliament that existed prior to contact, a high lord now chairs the progressive Essexan Trading Council (appointed by general consensus on 063-1119). High Lord Sarkan Urdor is renowned for his intelligence and efficiency, and is perhaps one of the most enlightened Essexans, particularly in regard to his planet's future in the interstellar community. Given his firm hand and the profit that now derives from cooperation between the lords (instead of the bickering that predominated in earlier times), the feudal power centers of Essex now act in concert, making them of far more service and mutual benefit to their populations.

Unfortunately, in the more distant lands, a rebel group known ironically as the Freeman carry on a campaign of relentless terrorism from their bandit forts (known to them as "freeholdings"). The local lords now operate in concert to hunt down the last of these dangerous insurgents. Contact with Freeman should be avoided at all costs. They are well-armed, hostile and treacherous, and view offworlders as prime targets for assassination.

In order to protect the Essexan culture from technoshock and/or exploitation, the League Explorers have imposed a trade and travel

restriction upon Essex. Only TL2 goods or possessions are permitted to be carried beyond the starport's extrality zone. This restriction focuses upon the technology of operations, rather than manufacture. For instance, plastic combs are permitted, while blow dryers are not. In addition to stringently enforcing these restrictions, the League Explorers maintain a constant watch to protect the native culture.

There are two uninhabited continents (Kudor and Savon) where firearms and TL2+ is permitted, but this requires a special application and clearance process. Travellers are advised that this process usually takes from three to four months. However, recent rumors indicate that the Freeman rebels may be fleeing to other continents, and this special exclusion to the tech level restrictions may soon be terminated. Restrictions regarding these continents would then only be lifted once the Freeman menace is finally pacified.

The actual tech level of Essex is most accurately 1.5. Gunpowder is still extremely rare, and the high lord reserves its possession and use to himself. Printing presses have only become common in the past five years. High Lord Sarkan is also receiving league help in his effort to construct Essex's first hot-air balloon.

Essexan natives have legends which refer to their technological past. However, the planet has been isolated for so many years that this has become mythology rather than dimly remembered fact. During the Long Night, Essex's population and technology were devastated and then sunk into deeper decay. Recontact was first made by far-ranging free traders sometime circa 600. This limited interstellar contact was interrupted by the Imperial Rim War, which caused commercial interests to concentrate in the Old Expanses.

However, Essex was contacted by Riies' TL7 vessels in 712, and after several years of assessment, Riies' nations agreed upon the infamous Quarantine Accord of 721, in which they vowed to prevent Essex from receiving any outside contact, thereby usurping the planet's sovereign right to self-determination. However, enterprising merchants were often able to slip past the Riiesan patrols and make contact with the people of Essex. Full contact was made possible by the intervention of league forces in 1119, whose alliance with the Riiesan nation of Alfretria made it possible for Essexans to once again pursue their own destiny in the interstellar community. Although Essexan contact with offworlders has been rather limited, they are not in awe of "starmen" (as they call offworld visitors), although the Essexans do accord them considerable respect.

The weather of Essex is essentially mild, except for the fierce southerly equatorial gale corridor. This weather region has been likened to a wind tunnel and is largely responsible for the desert belt that cuts across Savon, Kudor, Hedestor, and Essexar (the four continents of Essex). Fierce ocean squalls are associated with this gale corridor and have prevented significant exploration/colonization of the Rinvular Archipelago by the noble houses of Essexar.

The population of Essex is approximated at 43 million.

ABOUT THE CAPITOL

Polistar Down is located one kilometer east of the starport. Formerly named Dasfora, this city was already a major seaport at the time of league contact. The recent offworld demand for the agricultural products of Essex has caused Polistar Down to enter a prosperous new growth phase. Shipping and overland trade has increased by more than 300% since open trade was established by the league.

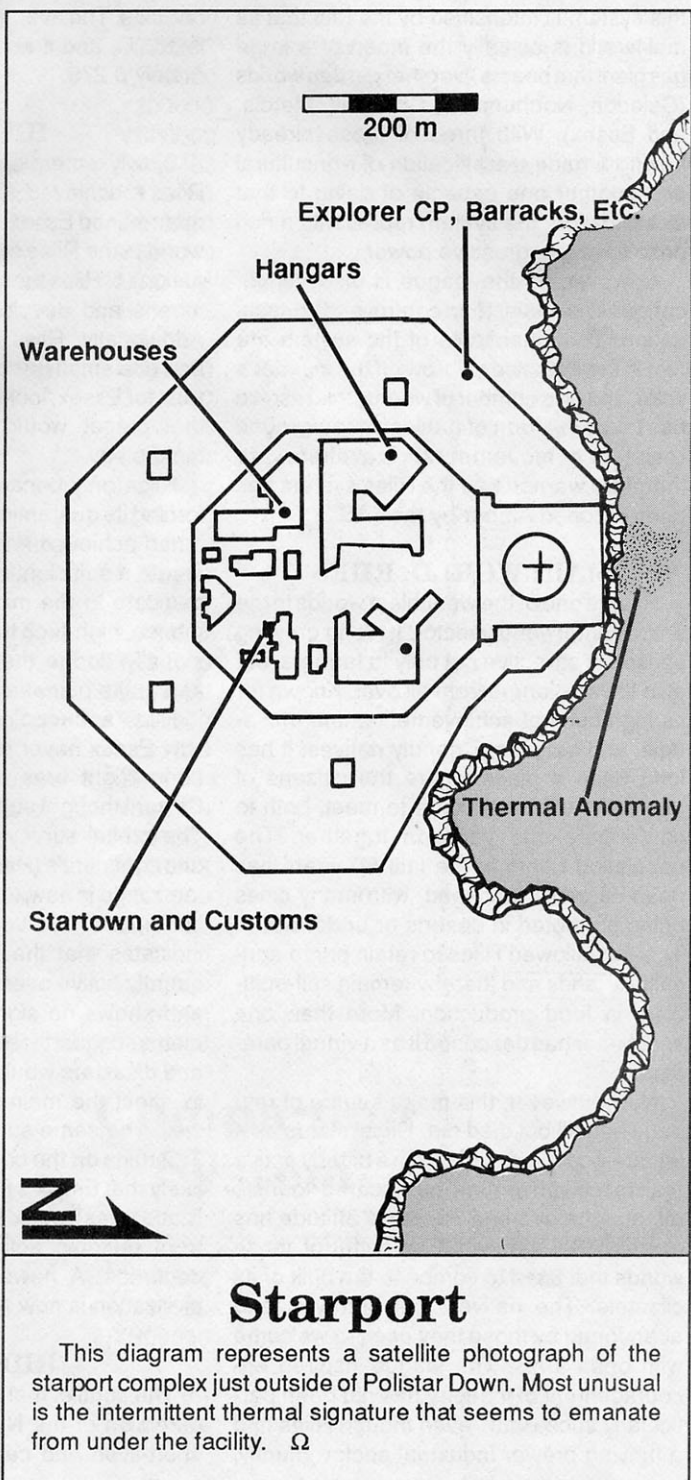
Polistar Down is under the direct dominion of High Lord Sarkan Urdor, whose personal householding forces account for as much as 20% of all liveried soldiery on Essex. This city is therefore one of the safest places for travellers to visit. In addition, offworld currency is usually accepted there with little or no difficulty.

TRAVELLING IN THE COUNTRYSIDE

The natives of Essex are friendly people who enjoy a simple

existence on their garden world. However, for the traveller accustomed to sophisticated amenities or concerned with ready access to advanced medical facilities, it is advised that travel be avoided beyond the Polistar Down area. Since communication technology is restricted, those individuals travelling beyond the capitol have no way of signalling for assistance. Finally, a number of hostile species on Essex will readily attack and kill humans. Areas near cities are usually avoided by such creatures, but they roam the less populated areas with impunity.

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An Overview of the Riies System

By Charles E. Gannon

The unexpected and almost effortless occupation of Riies by the Nullian League has centered attention on this high-population world that sits astride the main commercial routes linking the Old Expanses with the Hinterworlds. The strategic importance of this system is intensified by the fact that its mainworld is actually the moon of a large gas giant that boasts five other garden worlds (Caledon, Northumbria, Cornwall, Mercia, and Essex). With three of these already having a trade classification of Agricultural and another one capable of rising to that classification, the system represents a rich prize to any aggressive power.

However, as the league is discovering, conquest is easier than control and consolidation. The inhabitants of the system are firm in their resolve to throw off the invader's yoke, and on a number of worlds, this resolve has taken the form of ruthless underground resistance movements. Travellers are therefore warned that the Riies system has been recoded Amber by the TAS.

MAIN WORLD: RIIES

Riies is one of the wealthiest worlds in the entire Hinterworlds sector. Its long growing season is attractive not only to farmers, but also to vacationers from all over. Known for its high cultural achievements, fine museums, and genuinely friendly natives, it has long been a place where the citizens of many planets have come to meet, both to conference and vacation together. The population boom in the last 50 years has been carefully managed, with many cities being promoted in deserts or under water. This has allowed Riies to retain prime agricultural lands and thereby remain self-sufficient in food production. More than one vacationer has described it as a virtual paradise.

Now, however, this major source of revenue has all but died out. Riies' status as a league-occupied planet with a bitterly active resistance movement has scared tourists off, and the average Riiesan's attitude has come to be somewhat resentful of those worlds that used to comprise the bulk of its clientele. The natives feel betrayed and abandoned by those they used to welcome with open arms. The league-inspired encouragement of industry has not been particularly successful, even though Riies had a thriving prewar industrial sector. Bluntly,

people are failing to show up for work and/or meet quotas. Strong-arm tactics only galvanize antileague sentiment, and incentives meet with disdain and bitter scorn. In short, the league has been unable to revitalize old—or initiate new—revenue sectors on Riies. The average temperature on Riies is 15° C, and it has an albedo of approximately 0.275.

HISTORY

Slowly emerging from the Long Night, Riies reached TL7 spaceflight in 712. It quarantined Essex, the only other inhabited world in the Riies system (at that time). The nations of Riies then settled the other, nearer moons and developed the outer system. Additionally, Riies put one planetoid belt and one small gas giant (and its system) in trust for Essex, looking toward the day when that planet would reacquire spaceflight technology.

Riies only became truly capable of enforcing its quarantine of Essex in 937, when it had achieved enough TL8 production to create a sufficient number of patrol craft to dedicate to the mission. Still, high-performance, high-tech trade ships can still occasionally dodge the cordon around Essex and make planetfall.

Riies' anthropologists have puzzled over why Essex never redeveloped in the post-Long Night eras as much as Riies did. Current thought suggests a twofold answer. The orbital surveys indicate that much of one continent's (Hedestor's) primary mountain range is new, the result of tectonic plate collision. Active volcanism along this line indicates that the process has been frequently active over the past 20 centuries—and shows no signs of slacking off. Estimates suggest that the resulting earthquakes and disasters would often be large enough to affect the main continent (Essexar) as well. The same surveys indicated very old TL2 ruins on the continent of Hedestor. It is likely that Essex's first post-Long Night civilization was leveled by the disasters resulting from tectonic activity in the intervening centuries. A newer, slightly more stable civilization is now maturing on Essexar.

RIIES WAR

The conflict that brought Riies under the dominion of the Nullian League was both short-lived and carefully planned. Hugus,

one of the league's major assistants in this venture, had reason to help the league, living as it did in the shadow of the economic powerhouse that was Riies.

One factor which precipitated the conflict was that Riies had just begun a movement up to TL9. However, one of its nations (Alfredia), whose spaceport had been passed over during the international competition for the upgrade to Starport C status, held a grudge against the other nations. Alfredia indulged this grudge by offering limited aid to the league against the other nations of Riies in exchange for a share of the benefits. It had no idea what the league was already considering, figuring that the sum total of its own involvement would be assisting a little clandestine commerce raiding. When the assault ships fell out of Riies' cerulean sky on 020-1119, none landed in Alfredia. Several hundred TL13 interceptors did throw up a protective defensive corridor around the shamed nation, leaving the other countries of Riies no doubt as to who had aided their invaders in realizing their conquest.

The Commissariat of Alfredia is now the official governing power of Riies, but is in fact a puppet of the league occupiers. Alfredians feel a great sense of guilt regarding their role as league collaborators and are now generally despised by the other nations of Riies.

The Riies-league conflict was so one-sided that very little damage was done to major population centers, industry, or transport nexuses. Military casualties were moderate, but only because Riies' forces were so completely overwhelmed and dominated that the combat lasted less than a week. Combat lasted that long only because so many military formations were plunged into a communication blackout on the first day. During the first 12 hours of their assault, the league forces gained complete orbital control and seized or destroyed every major governmental communication facility. All other broadcast communications were jammed by the league, whose infinitely superior band-jumping technologies enabled them to still communicate "in between" their own jamming.

SIRLAWRENSA

Albedo: 0.2

Average Temperature: 113° C/272° F

Many natives spell their planet's name *Sir Lawrence A.* No one is sure what this means—it apparently had some special significance to the original Solomani settlers. The planet is a desert, a tremendously hostile environment that can only be ventured into during the night (when temperatures can actually be withstood with minimal protective gear). Most settlers mine various exposed crystal formations. The planet's only life forms are small, crustacean-like silicon creatures with a small, very closed ecochain. They rarely grow large enough to be dangerous.

MAD DOG

Albedo: 0.175

Average Temperature: 67° C/152° F

Another planet whose name has obscure Solomani meanings, Mad Dog is marginally habitable without protective gear. Once again, most natives are nocturnal, polar dwellers. However, some flora are developing in constantly shadowed rock formations. Some suitable xenospecies have been introduced. Some mining and crafts account for most native income. Mad Dog is somewhat territorial and warlike. The league has had continual problems here.

ANGLIA

Albedo: 0.145

Average Temperature: 14° C/58° F

Anglia is remarkable for its delicate environmental balance; most worlds of its characteristics are usually icecapped or steam-wreathed. However, Anglia finds itself in a perfect balance point between the two extremes and actually supports a microbic-insect ecosystem, particularly strong in the equatorial zones where atmospheric pressure is particularly high. In one or two valleys, the atmosphere is actually 3, rather than 1, and can be ventured into with compressors alone. Several research centers are involved in studies centered on this peculiar phenomenon. The war has had very little effect upon the inhabitants, and while they are certainly not pleased by the league's occupation, they remain insulated and only disgruntled instead of outraged. Their work is of primary concern to them. Several small manufacturing concerns (needing a low psi environment without vacuum) round out the population.

CALEDON

Albedo: 0.2206

Average Temperature: 15° C/60° F

Caledon is a very pleasant world, populated mostly by farmers, livestock raisers, and small manufacturers. Native wildlife is abundant and generally not only safe, but friendly toward humans. While there has been little violent resistance on Caledon, the antileague sentiment and resentment

here is just as strong as on planets that have displayed more energy in resistance.

NORTHUMBRIA

Albedo: 0.3006

Average Temperature: -3° C/28° F

A somewhat chilly planet, Northumbria's populace is concentrated primarily in its

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Riies System

Orbits	Name	UPP	
Primary	Empyriad	G3 V (Yellow Main Sequence)	
0	Leeds	Y110000	0
10	Scrum	HS00000	0
1	Sirlawrensa	Y350265	7 Desert, NI, P
4	Hastings	YS00000	0
12	Dunkirk	Y200000	0
20	Yorktown	YS00000	0
2	Mad Dog	G750463	7 Desert, NI, P
6	Livingston	Y610000	0
7	Lloyd's Loss	Y400000	0
13	Khartoum	H300000	0
3	Commonwealth	LGG	
35	Anglia	H411365	8 NI, Rsch
45	Caledon	G466363	7 NI
55	Northumbria	H686563	7 A, NI, Colony
65	Cornwall	G757764	7 A, Colony
75	Mercia	F462663	7 R, NI, Colony
100	Riies	C888975	8 Hi
300	Essex	D687734	2 A
4	Colonia	LGG	
8	Picadilly Ring	YR00000	0
9	New Wales	Y775000	0
10	Brittany	Y100000	0
15	Ulster	G6A5366	8 NI, Rsch
20	Hebridia	Y530000	0
25	Bitter Spain	Y200000	0
30	Waterloo	Y100000	0
35	Nelson	Y300000	0
40	Wellington	GS00264	7
45	Churchill	Y600263	7 NI
50	Cromwell	Y200000	0
55	Cold Skye	Y653363	7 NI, P
5	New Hyde	Y000000	0
10	Rebel	M1 D Companion Star	
12	Regalia	SGG	
7	Elizabeth	Y100000	0
20	Victoria	Y524000	0
13	Botany Bay	Y000000	0

Companion System

Orbits	Name	UPP	
Companion	Rebel	M1D Dwarf Star	
1	Forge	G644263	8 NI, Rsch
5	Doodle	YS00000	0
20	Dandy	YS00000	0
2	—Empty Orbit—		
3	Revere	H000263	7 NI, Belt
4	Dawes	H000165	7 NI, Belt

equatorial zones, where the weather is cool but quite comfortable. Another colony of Riies, Northumbria grows a variety of crops, but one variety is unusual enough to draw special mention—the spongegut tree. More properly a tree-like weed, the spongegut grows remarkably fast. Its pith is a high-protein, tasty, faintly sweet, spongelike substance, while the bark has a large number of industrial/pharmaceutical uses. The war interrupted a development program which was attempting to create a hybrid variety that could survive in warmer, year-round growing conditions. League efforts to get this project reinstituted have come to naught; locating the participating specialists has been difficult to impossible. It is suspected that most left the system, and those that couldn't are rumored to still be hiding in the Near Outback amongst some of the fringe farming families.

CORNWALL

Albedo: 0.1851

Average Temperature: 14° C/58° F

Another virtual garden planet, Cornwall is Riies' oldest colony and a strong agricultural producer. As in the case of Riies, the league took considerable care to avoid doing any permanent damage to the planet or any significant damage to its inhabitants. However, Cornwall's cooperation has been unwilling, sparse, and slow in coming. Resentment is perhaps a bit less here than on Riies itself, but not much less. The prewar spaceport (class F) was badly wrecked, resulting in the new G-class spaceport. Several incidents of sabotage have prevented the league from completing the full upgrade.

MERCIA

Albedo: 0.1597

Average Temperature: 37° C/98° F

With a virtually global year-round growing season, Mercia is (in those areas where it rains frequently and/or ground water is not scarce) a lush, pleasant planet. It lacks sufficient water for heavy agricultural development, but a variety of warm-weather fruits are grown here in considerable bulk. It is also quite popular as a tourist attraction, having the famed Big Pool Belt just below the subpolar zone.

This area is a series of large, interconnected lakes with excellent shores. Mild weather and abundant sun, coupled with carefully controlled development, have made it a favorite getaway spot ever since its original colonization by Riies. However, in the past year, over 30,000 league colonists have been settled in new communities and given preferential treatment by the occupation authorities. The general opinion is that the league means to eventually supplant the native populace.

Predictably, resistance is quite alive and vicious on Mercia. Many rebels are thought to be hiding in the Hotveldt, a low grass/scrub forest equatorial area where water is scarce and the heat is oppressive.

ESSEX

Albedo: 0.2825

Average Temperature: 16° C/62° F

The outermost of the moons of Commonwealth, Essex is a close second to Riies regarding its habitability and beauty. However, under the Quarantine Accord of 721, Essex has—until recently—been completely off-limits to visitors of any type. This quarantine was enacted in order to spare its more technologically simple people (TL1-2) the often debilitating aftereffects of technoshock and to protect it from exploitation by aggressive, starfaring powers. However, the Nullian League removed the quarantine and has succeeded in getting Essex to join the league willingly. It is unknown how much the natives understand of what the league is or what it stands for.

NEW WALES

Albedo: 0.1963

Average Temperature: -33° C/-31° F

New Wales was one of the Riies system's key military locations. The majority of the long-term SDB activity was to be based out of Colonia (the second largest gas giant). In the event of an invasion, Riies' planners anticipated a determined excisement of SDB presence at Commonwealth, given the fact that it was the controlling locus for the habitable or "green worlds." It was reasoned that a prolonged campaign against less immediate targets, such as New Wales, was less likely. In the past year, however, all the Riies SDBs have been accounted for by league naval sweeps. New Wales was a key resupply/cache point, providing supplies, munitions, and even cold sleep replacements for casualties. It is unknown whether all these hidden caches have been unearthed/destroyed by the league, but it is known that Nullian battle cruisers obliterated the main (and only active) base/cache with a 520-megaton salvo, making the north pole inapproachable for unprotected personnel.

ULSTER

Albedo: 0.3827

Average Temperature: -7° C/20° F

Ulster boasts a still-operative research center dedicated to unraveling the many mysteries of its wildlife and vegetation, as well as the peculiarities of its neon-rich atmosphere. Unlike terran-type planets, most of Ulster's liquid is not water but other compounds, many of which interact with considerable exothermic violence. However, most unusual for this planetary type, Ulster

also has a fair amount of water. During periods of vaporization, intense atmoelectric activity is not uncommon. Given the high neon content of the atmosphere, the effect is nothing less than awe-inspiring; it is not uncommon for the entire sky to blaze with electric rainbow brilliance given a particularly powerful bolt of lightning. The war has not affected the research much, although funding has been cut back. Those people not involved in the research station are primarily involved with refining and pressure-tanking various native gasses for export.

WELLINGTON

Environment: Full Vacuum

Wellington is a small, largely unremarkable planetoid, used mostly by prospectors as a central base of operations and a place for their families (those few that have families). The league presence here is small but clearly unwelcome.

CHURCHHILL

Environment: Full Vacuum

Churchhill is, like Wellington, a base for prospectors. However, the prospectors here are somewhat less legitimate, long having been rumored to engage in limited privateerism when prospecting was bad. They aided the league with information prior to the attack in 1119 and consequently are treated quite well by the new landlords. However, while they are not really antileague, there are rumors that some of them don't like the new order. In their words, "It's too [expletive deleted] orderly."

COLD SKYE

Albedo: 0.1561

Average Temperature: -34° C/-29° F

Cold Skye quite obviously lives up to its name. It is home to a particularly vicious resistance, given its small population and narrow existence. Equatorial hunters by nature, the Cold Skyeans have steely nerves, a wide independent streak, and a deep, cold fire of hatred for the league. The cold-weather creatures that they hunt were brought by Solomani sportsmen before the Long Night and are generally large and ferocious, and not stopped with one bullet. It is rumored that several badly battered Riiesan warships tried to make it to Cold Skye during the war, but there has been no word of survivors. Cold Skye resistance usually consists of long-range assassination on the snow field or in the mountains. Consequently, league personnel are not frequently encountered outside their safe, heated shelters. The cold Skyeans have petitioned to rebuild their spaceport (which was casually and somewhat capriciously destroyed during the war—along with some 400 civilians), but they have been told that their request is still

pending. Meanwhile, their patience wanes and their anger mounts.

FORGE

Albedo: 0.1736

Average Temperature: -97° C/-142° F

Forge—already frigid—would even be colder were it not for the fact that the primary star distorts its orbit, elongating it with a bias towards the center of the system. Forge is nonetheless a lifeless, icy ball with little to commend it save a remarkable opportunity for specialists to observe a dwarf star at extremely close ranges. Forge's highly eccentric orbit brings it extremely close to the companion star (Rebel), allowing scientists an excellent chance to study the star's quirky workings. However, funding has been cut back severely, and research has atrophied. Given the infrequency of contact, more and more effort is being dedicated to survival and—in some cases—embarkation for greener pastures. Unfortunately, transit costs are high, and research salaries (now minimal) were always low.

REVERE

Environment: Full Vacuum

The richest prospecting belt in the system, Revere continues to operate, albeit at decreased volume—sales are down. Industry slowdowns on Riies have resulted in a backlog surplus of raw materials—raw

materials which are Revere's livelihood. There is considerable resentment toward the league because of the destruction of Revere's G-class spaceport back in 1119 during the league's first preinvasion reconnaissance mission.

DAWES

Environment: Full Vacuum

Dawes, like its sister-belt Revere, was a prospecting locus. It had its spaceport annihilated in the 1119 Outsystem Skirmish that marked the beginning of the Riies-league hostilities. However, unlike Revere, most of Dawes' inhabitants were killed in the attack. Dawes and Revere help each other out as much as they can, but with spare parts diminishing and decreased contact with the in-system worlds, already crippled Dawes is struggling for survival.

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OTHERS

New Hyde (Belt), Regalia (Small Gas Giant), Elizabeth (Moon), Victoria (Moon), Botany Bay (Belt): These are held for development by the people of Essex pursuant to the Quarantine Accord (721). It is a felony to land on or tamper with them unless necessitated by life-threatening emergency conditions. Ω

For an adventure involving the Riies system, look for "Behind Blue Eyes" in this issue of Challenge.

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"We're Going Where?":

Naval Reservists in 2300

By Richard S. McEnroe

"Anything yet?"

"Still scanning, sir." Roderick leaned into his terminal as though trying to physically drag information out of the Harry Lee's antique sensor suite. Roderick was an old starchaser even by regular ASF standards; he'd been a chief scan-tech since the days when "passive search" meant sticking your ear up against the hull. Experience, that's what he had—but too much of that recent experience had been in weekend groundside simulator sessions where failure meant nothing worse than an embarrassing after-action review, not vaporized ships and dead refugees who'd trusted us to defend them.

Some defense—the Harry Lee was still the best ship in her class, but that class was dismissed a long time ago—at least as front-line combatants. For a bunch of overage and undertrained reservists in a low-threat backwater system, though, she'd still been good enough—up to now, when no system in the French Arm was low-threat.

"Captain I've got—something...." Roderick trailed off lamely and rattled a fresh string of instructions into his keyboard. "Undifferentiated neutrino source, no hard ID—Contact! Contact! Contact! Three point neutrino sources, IR scan confirms missile-type drives."

"Active scan, standby," I ordered. "Comm, tight beam feed to convoy commodore...."

"Active scan! Confirm X-band targeting radars, locked on and tracking. Captain, we have three missiles inbound!"

Too fast. Damn it, it was all happening too fast. "Helm, put us on a reciprocal bearing." Give those missiles the thinnest possible target. "Active scan! Pin that bogey down! Launch a Fourteen up the incoming track." The Harry Lee lurched as the big Hyde Dynamics shipkiller boosted out of the ventral bolt-on pack. Give whatever was out there some problems of its own. "Advise the convoy we are engaging unidentified hostiles and instruct them to make best speed to the .0001G gradient. Commodore's discretion on scattering." Behind me I heard Potito on helm mutter something about this being a hell of a way to pick up next semester's tuition. I didn't blame him. This wasn't something you got used to hauling ore from King.

This was shaping up to be a lousy weekend.

The development of American military reserve components in the 23rd century was an outgrowth of the traditional American distrust of a large standing military (only exacerbated by the tensions between military and civilian governments following the Twilight War). Additionally, the relatively homogeneous American Arm required a less extensive military presence than the polyglot French Arm with its welter of competing interests. The American space forces have evolved into a relatively small—especially for the volume of space they guard—and extremely professional body of regular forces. These forces are considered sufficient for peacetime commitments and are expected to be adequate for the opening stages of any general conflict.

For any prolonged prosecution of hostilities, ASF doctrine calls for the regular forces to be expanded and supported by a general call-up of mobilized reservists. Reserve components are regarded as a cost-effective way of keeping expensively trained, skilled personnel available on a fairly immediate basis—certainly on a faster basis than training up green crews from scratch in an emergency.

RESERVE ORGANIZATION

American reserve components are divided between planetary and deep space forces. With the exception of the American Marine Reserves and selected naval construction units, all reserve forces with mission capabilities within orbital space (ground- and planet-based interface) generally fall within the jurisdiction of the army, either as reserve or national guard formations, or as part of one of the colonial constabularies (and thus outside the scope of this article).

ASF reservists are generally assigned to a planetary reserve formation subordinate to one of the ASF reserve district headquarters established on King, Earth and Ellis. Although each HQ(R) merits a rear admiral as senior officer present, only the reserve districts headquartered on King and Ellis are regarded as independent commands. Reserve district HQ on Earth is directly subordinate to the regular ASF command structure.

SPACE BILLETS

Most reserve component space billets are aboard the older classes of American warship maintained in mothball orbit around the American space military facility at Earth's L-4 point. The majority of these ships are one generation or more behind the current state of the art in naval architecture, a fact glossed over by ASF publicists with their emphasis on the state-of-the-art warships of the regulars.

Two good examples of this would be the assignment of the remaining *Hancock*-class close escorts (*Wayne*, *Morgan*, and *Harry Lee*) to reserve duty, where they retain a definite combat mission in addition to their training role. Another would be the assignment of the three remaining *Providence*-class cruisers as the flagships of the three reserve districts (*Bangor* at Ellis, *Scranton* at King, and *Reno* at Earth). The first purpose-built American starships designed to show the flag on extended deployments outside the American Arm, the *Providence* class was down-rated from cruiser (CG) to light cruiser class (CLG) in 2293 to gloss over the class's de facto obsolescence, while providing reservists with a low-cost opportunity for capital-ship experience.

Although these ships are no longer meant for first-line service, ASF planners are well aware that even an old ship can carry a new missile, and these classes are undoubtedly being factored into ASF planning for the expanding Kafer War.

Other reserve billets will undoubtedly be found aboard the 120 mothballed merchant ships of the American reserve defense fleet in close orbit around Luna. "Old men for older ships" as some cynics have put it—but necessary men and necessary ships to support any major fleet deployments.

ENTERING RESERVES

Characters in AD 2300 can find themselves in the reserves by one of two routes—either through direct enlistment or as a follow-on to regular ASF service.

Direct Enlistment: Direct enlistment reserve characters are initially generated as normal space military career characters and provide the normal initial training skills as listed in the *Adventurer's Guide*, plus one level of one primary skill. This reflects the fact that direct enlistment reservists receive the same training (generally at the same facilities) as ASF regulars.

Once they complete their initial training, however, it becomes more difficult for direct enlistment reservists to increase their space military skills. This is a reflection of the fact that they only train for limited periods each year (most often a weekend groundside or orbital training once a month, coupled with a two- to four-week space deployment annually). Simulate this effect by imposing a 50% penalty in experience point costs on increasing skill levels.

For example, if it would normally cost four points to raise a primary skill from skill 3 to skill 4, then for a reservist character, it would cost six points. Double the point cost for increasing a related skill in the example above. Where it would usually cost a character eight points to increase a skill 3 to a skill 4, for a reservist, it costs 16 points. The unrelated skill cost is draconian enough; leave it alone.

The only exception to the above rule occurs when a primary or related skill also occurs in a reservist character's civilian life. For example, a civilian orbital construction worker who also served with a reservist naval construction battalion could improve P-suit skill at the normal rates, ignoring the penalties, while an accounting clerk who held a reserve remote operator's specialty could only increase his remote operator's skill at the reservist penalty rate.

A reservist character makes two rolls at each career turning point, one for his civilian career and one for his reservist career. Failure to make a reservist turning point roll indicates that the character has either left the reserves or is frozen at his current reservist skill level (perhaps reflecting a conflict with his civilian career: "You can play spaceman or you can work here—take your pick!"). The referee may also apply a -1 penalty to a reservist character's civilian turning point rolls to reflect a conflict between civilian and naval careers. One important note: a character leaving the reserves is most often transferred to the inactive reserve—which has no training obligations (and provides no reservist pay or benefits) but which still subjects the character to call-up in the event of an emergency.

Since inactive reservists do not train, their reservist skills deteriorate over time from lack of practice. Inactive reservists lose one level of their reservist skills for each year away from training, the exception being those skills shared in their civilian career. No reservist skill will deteriorate below skill 1.

In roleplaying terms, direct enlistment reserve service makes the most sense for a character otherwise fairly young and inexperienced.

Follow-On Reservists: Reservist careers may also be generated as a follow-on to regular ASF service. This represents either a normal condition of enlistment, in which the character is committed to a period of reserve duty following his active service, or the consequences of a career-wrecking incident in a character's active service. This latter is usually something not quite bad enough to warrant a general court martial and dishonorable discharge, but serious enough to spell an end to any hope of career advancement. This might include loss of a ship or personnel, for example, under

2300AD

less than clear circumstances, or getting on the hit list of a senior officer.

A follow-on reservist character must make at least two turning-point rolls in his active military career before entering the reserves and civilian life. Follow-on reservist characters generally reach higher rank and have far more skills and renown than direct-enlistment characters can normally generate. This reflects their more extensive active service. Against this, apply a negative penalty to a follow-on reservist's civilian turning point rolls equal to the number of turning point rolls he made in his active space military career. Such a modifier reflects the difficulty a character faces in adjusting to the chaos of civilian life after his structured military existence (and just what does a gunnery chief do back on the block, anyway?).

The exception to this rule is if the reservist character seeks a civilian career compatible with his service specialty. In that case, apply the skill level of the relevant skill as a positive DM against the turning point penalty. With high enough levels of skill, this could even result in a turning point bonus, which is fine—this reflects the equivalent of a commercial airline hiring experienced military fliers as its pilots. A vet with Computer or Electronics: 5 or 6 would be a real asset to a corporation's design team eager to take advantage of the character's experience with state-of-the-art military computers and systems ("You were chief engineer on the *Kennedy*? Yes, we think MidTech of Omaha could find a place for you.").

Follow-on service reservist characters are best suited to players who've generated active space military characters but want to play outside a plain-vanilla military setting, or who like the melodramatic roleplaying possibilities of being the spacer out to atone for a former wrong, to prove himself falsely condemned in the past, or to avenge himself on that brown-nosing, career-busting staff officer or squadron commander who ruined him with that lethal fitness report.

RESERVIST/REGULAR RELATIONS

For public consumption, reservists and regulars see themselves as equal partners in America's defense. In practice, that is not always the case, to say the least. Many regulars look down on reservists, whom they regard as unfit, untrained and undisciplined weekend warriors. For that matter, many mobilized reservists chafe at the reimposition of "black-shoe spit 'n' polish" and the hidebound ways of many regulars, especially when they perceive these qualities as a cover for mediocrity and ineptitude. As one reservist described one regular officer, "It's hard to be impressed by a guy

who needs a letter from the president to get a day job."

The reality of the situation, of course, lies somewhere in the middle. Many reservists, especially, but not solely, prior-service ex-regulars, can match the best regular ASF can offer for competence and panache. And experience has shown the after an initial period of reacclimatization for the reservists, there is little or no observable difference in performance between reservists and regulars.

To simulate this in game terms, no mobilized reservist crew or unit starts the game at a

crew quality greater than 0 if a combat or combat-support unit, or -1 if assigned to the merchant ships of the ARDF. But this crew quality increases by one following four interstellar passages or one successful engagement (both conditions assume a substantial working up period previous to deployment). After that, crew quality increases or decreases normally.

Reservist crews will be a mixture of 25% ex-regular service (Regular, Veteran and Elite) and 70% direct-enlistment personnel (Green and Experienced), with the mix established at the referee's discretion. Once mobilized, reservists accumulate experience and skill points at the normal 2300 AD rates.

GAMING IN THE RESERVE

Reservists offer numerous gaming opportunities unavailable to straight civilian or military characters. Individual reservists may be called up because of specialized civilian skills they possess (no one is going to take an experienced troubleshooter and make him a deckhand) for special (or at least unusual) missions. They may be called upon to put a mothballed warship or merchant ship back into service for duty in support of the fleet or for rear-area security in the absence of first-line units.

With more ASF regular ships deploying up the French Arm and in defense of Earth itself, these reservists could find themselves facing an upsurge of piracy and terrorist activity along the American Arm as INAP, AmeriCo and Provolution, among others, decide to play while the cat's away. They may find themselves being roped into some of the more exotic missions thought up by various spy or intelligence organizations that the regulars are too busy or too smart to get involved with.

Nonmobilized reservists may find themselves in demand for civilian employment because of their military skills (but why *does* that "merchant ship" need trained gunners?) or suddenly winding up mobilized at very awkward moments (they may be the only American merchant ship available to run that rush contingent of drones and missiles to the American forces at Arcturus—but the passengers aren't going to like it). In a game where shoot 'em up action is somewhat handicapped by the generally restrictive legal limits on the possession and transport of weapons via interstellar traffic, reservists both on active duty and in civilian life are a valuable option for the referee who wants to put his characters in a spaceborne combat or action setting.

I'd rolled the Harry Lee so our remaining TTA could keep track of the action as the three big destroyers of the Ukrainian squadron swept by at full speed in hot pursuit of the Kafer Beta whose signal was breaking up at the edge of scan range. They wouldn't have much trouble finding him; he was trailing atmosphere and wreckage damn near as far as his stutterwarp trace. We had sure given him something to worry about.

And he'd left us plenty to remember him by. The Harry Lee was holding about as much atmosphere as a screen door on an air lock. We still had power, somehow, and drives, if we weren't in a hurry, but there was no commo with engineering—none, not even on the intersuit channels. The EVA team's vid pickups were showing me nothing but jagged holes and ruined fittings, and the nine still forms already bagged and laid out in the hold warned me what to expect when they finally picked their way back aft.

Dear God, I wondered, what will I tell their families?

The convoy was gone, scattered across the .0001G gradient, except for one gutsy Mammoth captain curving back to stand by while we nursed the Harry Lee into orbit. Her last orbit. There will be no patch-ups for the old girl this time; there wasn't enough left for a refit.

The flickering, scratchy display lit up with the signatures of half a dozen missiles as the Ukrainians closed on the Beta. I turned from the scene and jacked my suit-com into the chair pickup.

"Log entry for Monday...." Ω

BASHCON '91
March
8th, 9th, & 10th
at the
University of
Toledo's Student
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For More
Information Write:
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c/o UT-BASH
Univ. of Toledo
Toledo, Ohio
43606-9987

CHALLENGE Conventions

CANCON '91, January 26-28 at the University of Canberra, ACT, Australia. Hailed as Australia's biggest convention, the event will feature special guest Jean Rabe. Scheduled are miniatures, boardgames, roleplaying games (including several RPGA events), and a costume parade. Write CANCON, GPO Box 1016, Canberra City, ACT, 2601, AUSTRALIA.

PRAIRIE CON 13, February 8-10 in Brandon MB, Canada. Brandon's 13th annual game convention will feature *AD&D* second edition, *Champions*, *GURPS* *Supers*, *Cyberpunk*, *Magic and Space*, *Shadowrun*, *Squad Leader*, *Star Fleet Battles*, *Warhammer 40,000*, and more. Write to Prairie Con, PO Box 1731, Brandon MB, R7A 6J3, CANADA.

GENGHIS CON XII, February 15-17 at the Sheraton Hotel of Lakewood, sponsored by the Denver Gamers Association. Scheduled are boardgaming, roleplaying, and computer and miniatures events, plus auctions, art and figure-painting contests, seminars, and demonstrations. Events include *Victory in the Pacific*, *Civilization*, *Kingmaker*, *Advanced Squad Leader*, and *Battletech*, plus RPGA *Paranoia*, *D&D*, *AD&D*, and others. Also, the nationally acclaimed Puffing Billy Tournament for railroad gamers. Guests are Darwin Bromley of Mayfair Games, Jean Rabe, and Richard Berg of SDI. Contact the Denver Gamers Association, PO Box 440058, Aurora, CO 80044.

CONNECT-A-CON, February 15-17 at the Sheraton Westgate in Toledo, OH. Events include gaming, a writers' workshop, short story contest, costume contest, masquerade ball, murder mystery contest, dealers' room, 24-hour movie room, art show, art auction, gaming auction, filking, and the Northwest Ohio Gaming Leadership Conference. Guests of honor are artist Rob Prior, and authors Jean Lorrah (several *Star Trek* novels) and Dennis McKiernan (*Iron Tower* trilogy and *Silver Call* duology). Write to Connect-A-Con, PO Box 4674, Toledo, OH 43620.

ORCCON 14, February 15-18 at the Los Angeles Airport Hilton Hotel. The convention will feature family, strategy, and adventure boardgames, roleplaying games, miniatures, and computer games. Plus flea markets, auctions, an exhibitor area, seminars, demonstrations, and special guests. Contact Strategicon, PO Box 8399, Long Beach, CA 90808.

DUN DRA CON XV, February 15-18 at the Oakland Airport Hyatt, 455 Hegenberger Road, Oakland, CA. Featured are more than 120 sponsored roleplaying games, plus seminars, boardgames, tournaments, min-

iatures battles, SCA demonstrations, flea market, figure-painting contest, dealers' room, and open gaming. Contact Dun Dra Con, 386 Alcatraz Ave., Oakland, CA 94618.

TOTAL CONFUSION V, February 22-24 at the Sheraton Worcester Hotel and Conference Center, 500 Lincoln St., Worcester, MA. More than 120 games are scheduled, with *AD&D*, *GURPS*, *Battletech*, *Diplomacy*, *Assault*, *Call of Cthulhu*, *Car Wars*, *DC Heroes*, and *Axis & Allies*. A costume competition and miniatures-painting contest are also planned. Contact Total Confusion Convention, PO Box 1463, Worcester, MA 01607.

EGYPTIAN CAMPAIGN '91, March 1-3 at the Student Center of Southern Illinois University at Carbondale. The convention offers a variety of events, including an RPGA *AD&D* tournament, miniatures judging, and a game auction. Contact S.I.U. Strategic Games Society, Office of Student Development, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, IL 62901-4425.

GUILD FEST '91, March 2-3 at the State University of New York at Binghamton. Events include *Cyberpunk 2020*, *AD&D*, *GURPS*, *Runequest*, and others. A dealers' room will be added this year. Contact Gamers' Guild, Box 2000, c/o SUNY-Binghamton, Binghamton, NY 13901.

BASHCON '91, March 8-10 at the University of Toledo's Main Campus Student Union Auditorium, sponsored by the University of Toledo's *Benevolent Adventurers' Strategic Headquarters*. The convention will feature more than 150 games (roleplaying games, boardgames, strategic simulations, and miniatures gaming), plus auctions, a miniatures-painting contest, an exhibitors' area, and more. Contact UT-Bash, c/o Student Activities Office, University of Toledo, Toledo, OH 43606-9987.

GOTHCON XV, March 29-31 on Munkebäcksgymnasiet, Ernst Torulfsgatan 1, Gothenburg, Sweden, organized by the Bifrost, ChaosApes, Skymning, and Ygdrasil gaming organizations. Tournaments include *AD&D*, *Call of Cthulhu*, *MegaTraveller*, *Paranoia*, *Rolemaster/MERP*, *RuneQuest III*, *Advanced Squadleader*, *Car Wars*, *Diplomacy*, and *Illuminati*, plus independent events (including an LARP chess game). Also scheduled are a dealers' room, FRP artists, and an auction. Write to Gothcon XV, c/o Bertil Jonell, PO Box 154, S-43900 Onsala, SWEDEN.

CONNCON '91, April 6-7 at the Danbury Hilton Inn in Danbury, CT. Many first-run RPGA events will be held, including a masters and grandmasters *AD&D* event, plus roleplaying games, miniatures battles,

wargames, banquet, awards ceremony, and more. Jean Rabe, RPGA Coordinator, will be guest of honor. Write to ConnCon, PO Box 444, Sherman, CT 06784.

LAGACON-10, April 20 at Kasper's Arc (five miles north of Lebanon, PA on Route 72). Events include *AD&D* and *Battletech* tournaments, plus *ASL*, *Axis & Allies*, *Shadowrun*, and more. Contact Lebanon Area Gamers, 806 Cumberland St., Lebanon, PA 17042.

GAMEX '91, May 24-27 at the Los Angeles Airport Hilton Hotel. The convention will feature family, strategy, and adventure boardgames, roleplaying games, miniatures, and computer games. Plus flea markets, auctions, an exhibitor area, seminars, demonstrations, and special guests. Contact Strategicon, PO Box 8399, Long Beach, CA 90808.

LITTLE WARS 1991, April 26-28 at the Zion Leisure Center in Zion, IL, sponsored by the Historical Miniatures Gaming Society. This is a miniatures-oriented convention. Contact Robert Bigelow, c/o Friends' Hobby Shop, 1411 Washington St., Waukegan, IL 60085.

CAMPAIGN '91, May 11-12 at Woughton Campus, Milton Keynes, UK. Features include trade stands, demonstration games, participation games, re-enactments, the southern playoffs for the world championship, playoffs for the national *Battletech* championship, the UK fantasy/sci-fi championships, and a new Napoleonic competition, *Micro-Naps*. Contact the Milton Keynes Wargames Society, 117 St. Johns Road, Bletchley, Milton Keynes, UNITED KINGDOM MK3 5DZ.

CONTEST VIII, March 22-24 at the Holiday Inn Holiday in Tulsa, OK, sponsored by the Tactical Simulation Society. Events will include *AD&D*, *Axis & Allies*, and other roleplaying, boardgaming, miniatures, and computer gaming events, plus a large dealers' room and auction. Contact TSS, PO Box 4726, Tulsa, OK 74104.

SO DA CON II, May 25-26 at the Howard Johnson Convention Center in Rapid City, SD. Games include *AD&D*, *Twilight: 2000*, and *Champions*. Plus a figure-painting contest, boardgames, and open gaming. Contact Black Hills Society of Gamers, 2416 Cameron Drive, Rapid City, SD 57702.

Announcements must be sent in a minimum of four months before a convention takes place. Challenge is not responsible for errors in convention announcements. Write to Challenge Conventions, PO Box 1646, Bloomington, IL 61702-1646 USA.

Zombies of the Bayou

By Frank Chadwick

The following bestiary encounter information may be used as background to generate **Dark Conspiracy** adventure ideas. **Dark Conspiracy**, the new roleplaying game of modern horror, releases next month from GDW.

Louisiana State Office
Federal Bureau of Investigation
Federal Building
Baton Rouge, LA

To: Director, Southeast Regional Office
Federal Bureau of Investigation
Federal Building
Atlanta, GA

From: Special Agent In Charge, Louisiana State Office
Federal Bureau of Investigation
Federal Building
Baton Rouge, LA

Re: Autopsy Report, Special Agent Demarko

Enclosed please find a variety of documents relating to the autopsy of Special Agent Rita Demarko. I am sending copies of X-rays and photographic negatives under separate cover.

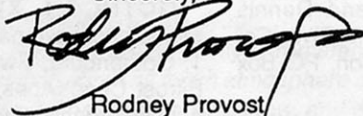
After reviewing the autopsy results, as well as those notes of Special Agent Demarko's investigation which we were able to recover, it is my considered opinion that substantial additional resources should be devoted to this case. As this office has neither the human resources nor the budgetary authority I believe necessary to adequately and expeditiously pursue all the leads, I am requesting that the regional office provide the additional personnel and fiscal resources. This may mean a fairly dramatic shift of priorities, but I believe that the evidence fully warrants this course of action.

Furthermore, I would request that the Justice Department explore the legal ramifications of our involvement in this case. Although Special Agent Demarko's death certainly provides us with an opening for our investigation, it is my suspicion that our inquiry will soon lead us far beyond the death of one agent. Even after all those responsible for Demarko's death have been found, I cannot help but think we will wish to continue our investigation. Now is the time to begin assembling a legal brief justifying it.

Question for the justice department: Do the dead have a right to remain dead? Can we argue that involuntary reanimation is a violation of their civil rights? We may be able to put together a 14th Amendment brief.

I am sure that this will receive your immediate attention, and I look forward to your reply and any further instructions you may have for this office.

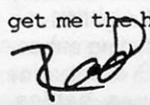
Sincerely,


Rodney Provost
Special Agent In Charge

Sid,

I want about 150 machines down here or I want **out**, and I mean **right now**! I read the autopsy report half a dozen times, and I still don't know what the hell's going on. But I do know that I popped two more of these things prowling around my quarters last night. I had to reload the Python **twice** before the last one went down. It took 11 shots. Eleven wadcutters from a .357 Magnum, Sid! No stinking pension is worth this.

You get me some help, Sid, or you get me the hell out of here.



Bayou Zombies

# Appearing	Attack	Move	Init	STR	AGL	Skill	Damage	Hits
1D6+2	100%	10/20	3	8	4	4	1D6	20/40

Bayou zombies are reanimated corpses taken over by a parasitic animal which is able to cause limited movement in the host body. The typical life span of such a parasite is two to three weeks, at the end of which time the parent organism expires, and hundreds of larvae migrate out of the host and become semidormant in the ground. The larvae will invade the corpses of dead animals, but they have a fairly brief life span in lower animals and seldom reach sufficient size to reproduce. Only parasites which mature in animals with considerable brain mass, such as humans, can reproduce.

This particular parasite is native to the Caribbean Basin, particularly the western half of the island of Hispaniola.

While animating a body, the organism will make every effort to kill additional humans and drag off the bodies to serve as hosts for its offspring. Attack is by means of clumsy blows and attempts to choke. Individual zombies are relatively easy to evade, and they are usually dangerous only in considerable numbers (or when their attack is totally unexpected).

Only head hits have any effect on bayou zombies.

DARK CONSPIRACY™

Office of the Coroner, East Baton Rouge Parish

Page 27 of 28

CONCLUSIONS

Although considerable postmortem decomposition had taken place by the time of the examination, the presence of massive subcutaneous hematoma accompanied by fractured tracheal cartilage and a shattered hyoid apparatus indicate death by strangulation, although whether this was accomplished manually or with a ligature cannot be determined. Time of death calculations are complicated by a number of factors (including the presence of a parasitic biota unknown in any of this office's literature), but the extent of putrefactive decay indicates death to have occurred approximately eight to 10 days prior to the examination.

Of considerable interest was the presence of a parasitic organism, also deceased, in the corpus of the deceased. This organism expired due to massive trauma resulting from the passage of four or more 00 buckshot pellets through the cranial region of the host. As the most differentiated and specialized tissues present in the parasite were concentrated in the host's cranial region, this examiner has concluded that that is the center of the organism's nervous system.

The organism seems to secrete a substance that slows the onset of putrefactive decay in the large muscle tissues of the host, although how long the muscle cells can continue to function without nourishment is a matter for speculation. Two specialized tendrils replacing the optic tracts indicates that the organism can evidently make use of the host's optic tissues until decay destroys them (something which had not yet occurred in the body under examination). It is unknown whether the parasite is able to use the otic organs in a similar fashion.

Gunshot damage to the host cranium was too extensive to permit any conclusions regarding how the parasite gained entry to the body.

By way of general summary of the autopsy results pertaining to the parasite, it appears to have extended tendrils throughout the host's body, all linked to a central tissue cluster in the host's cranial region. These tendrils have largely supplanted nerve tissue in the host. The near total absence of nerve tissue in the host leads to the speculation that the parasite subsists off such tissue, and the possible conclusion that once the nerve tissue in a host is exhausted the parasite will either expire or move to another host. This researcher is inclined to believe the former for several reasons:

1. The delicate nature of the organism and its profound intermingling with the host makes it difficult to imagine a situation in which it could remove itself from the host without suffering massive damage.

2. The organism does not appear to have any means of locomotion independent of the host. It appears to generate electrical charges with which it stimulates muscle action in the host and thus causes movement. Without the muscles of the host to stimulate, however, it would be immobile.

3. Its placement in the host strongly suggests that it has grown in place, gradually consuming and supplanting nerve tissue. Speculation as to a complete life cycle suggests some sort of out-migration of larvae, spores, or similar offspring once the organism reaches maturity. Dissection was unable to isolate any tissues identifiable as reproductive, but the personnel involved were understandably reluctant to remain in contact with the body for any length of time, and examination was necessarily hurried.

The organism sustained considerable additional trauma as a result of gunshot wounds to the arms and torso, but none of these were, in the opinion of the examiner, fatal. In the case of the host's left arm, the damage was sufficient that the organism almost certainly lost the ability to provide muscular stimulation and thus cause movement. Thus, although damage to the extremities may be sufficient to deprive the organism of mobility, it is likely that only a direct hit to the skull will kill the parasite.

Frozen tissue sections were sent via courier to the Centers for Disease Control, Harvard Medical School, and the World Health Organization Parasitology Section in Geneva. By order of the coroner, the body was then cremated.



James D. Tibideau
Chief Medical Examiner,
East Baton Rouge Parish



Time Voyager

By James L. Cambias

My friend has vanished, and the police think I killed him! He was showing me his latest invention—he called it a fourth-dimensional velocipede—when he disappeared! Please, help me.



T

he PCs are contacted by a young journalist named George Wells. Mr. Wells is greatly agitated because the police suspect him of having murdered his good friend, Averell Merritt. According to Wells, Merritt was demonstrating the use of his latest invention and mysteriously disappeared! The police have a more prosaic explanation: Wells killed Merritt (the two of them had recently quarrelled over money) and has hidden the body someplace. Wells begs the player characters to investigate and help to clear his name before he is put on trial for murder.

MERRITT'S HOUSE

Merritt's house is a large brick structure in the London suburb of Woking. The place is comfortably furnished, as Merritt had an income from some property in London. Merritt conducted his research in a small workshop behind the main house. The workshop is a one-room brick structure filled with complex scientific apparatus and tools. In the center of the room is a strange machine of metal and crystal, with some parts that shimmer as if partially unreal.

According to Wells, Merritt claimed that his newest invention was a fourth-dimensional velocipede that could move about as easily in the fourth dimension as an ether flyer moves about in three. On the day Merritt disappeared, Merritt mounted the machine with Wells present. Merritt and the machine then vanished into thin air. A second later the machine reappeared, minus Merritt. Wells very sensibly did not touch the device, and the police have left all the "evidence" undisturbed.

Merritt's Notes: On a workbench in the workshop is a notebook full of Merritt's research data. It requires an Easy Physics task to read the book at all. Most of it deals with some rather arcane consequences of current ether theories, involving "dimensional stability" and the "principle of extra-chronic existence." The notes seem to point toward the design of a machine intended to move through time, rather than space. A Formidable Physics task roll will indicate that Merritt had actually constructed such a device and that some preliminary tests had verified Merritt's theories.

If a player character now or subsequently wants to try inventing a time machine, he should be informed that the feat requires an ether knowledge of 44, with a reliability modifier of 5. A time machine can travel many years into the past or future equal to 10 to the power of its reliability—reliability 2 gives a range of 100 years; reliability 4 permits travel of 10,000 years, and so on. The cost of a time machine is £15,000.

TIME MACHINE

Merritt's machine is a large device shaped vaguely like a sleigh, with odd crystal tubes running along the sides, and a peculiar assemblage of gyroscopes at the front and back. The device has room for four people (five in a pinch) and has a set of controls in front of the pilot's seat.

Controls: The controls are simple: two levers, a button, a row of switches, and four dials. Unfortunately, none of them are labeled, and Wells doesn't remember which ones Merritt touched before disappearing. Study of the controls along with Merritt's notes may help, but it takes a Difficult Physics task to decipher the controls even with the notes.

The switches control the time machine's power supply (a collection of powerful batteries beneath the chassis); the levers move the machine forward and backward in time; and the button returns the machine to its time of origin. The dials register: local time, time from origin, remaining power, and speed through the time stream (in years per second).

The time-from-origin dial has not reset itself to zero, so it is still indicating the time Merritt had reached when the button was pressed, returning it to the present. According to the dial, Merritt is lost in March AD 802889.

BACK TO THE FUTURE

Obviously, the player characters must use the machine to pursue Merritt. The referee should allow them the opportunity to gather equipment and weapons if they like. However, the police are keeping Merritt's house under observation, and a party of heavily armed adventurers is certain to attract attention.

With its batteries charged, the machine quickly reaches a time speed of 10,000 years per second—obviously, it is very difficult to control. The pilot must roll an Impossible Agility feat to hit the proper time. The party arrives a number of months late equal to one plus the amount by which the pilot missed his roll.



George Wells (Green NPC)

Herbert George Wells is a young journalist and writer of fiction who is especially interested in the marvels of science that are so changing the world. He looks forward to a day when the clumsy social systems of the present will be replaced by more rational behaviors. He is very friendly and can be quite charming, but he has a journalist's curiosity and inquisitiveness.

Motives: Friendly, Knowledge.

Attributes	Skills
Str: 1	Close Combat 1 (bashing weapon)
Agil: 2	Stealth 1
End: 3	Wilderness Travel 3 (mapping), Swimming 1
Int: 6	Observation 6, Engineering 2 (naval architecture), Science 6 (physics)
Chr: 5	Eloquence 5, Theatrics 2, Linguistics 2 (French, German)
Soc: 4	Riding 3 (horse), Leadership 2

Averell Merritt (Trained NPC)

Averell is an extremely brilliant young scientist whose work is known throughout Europe. He is a very private man, however, and detests publicity of any sort because he is utterly without personal charm. Consequently, his most recent researches have been conducted in near-total secrecy. Merritt, like many fine scientists, is driven by the search for knowledge, and his time machine has opened up vast new frontiers to the human mind.

Merritt has on his person a pair of binoculars, a jackknife, a box of matches, some torn and tattered exploring clothes, and his watch. He did not bring along any weapons.

Motives: Knowledge, Frugal.

Attributes	Skills
Str: 2	Fisticuffs 1, Throwing 1, Close Combat 2 (edged weapon)
Agil: 3	Stealth 2, Mechanics 5 (electricity)
End: 5	Wilderness Travel 4 (mountaineering), Swimming 2
Int: 6	Observation 6, Engineering 3 (naval architecture), Science 6 (physics)
Chr: 1	Linguistics 2 (German, French)
Soc: 4	Riding 3 (horse)

Worker Ants (Trained NPCs)

All worker ants have effectively the same attributes and skills. They are just under six feet tall, walk on their two hind legs, and use their four arms for manipulation. Though ants have vestigial stingers and powerful mandibles, they will use ordinary weapons in combat. All ants are fanatically loyal to their queen and will cheerfully sacrifice their lives to save her. In most other respects they are cautious and nonaggressive, fighting only for self-defense.

Ants will usually be armed with a spear when away from the village.

Motives: Loyal, Cautious.

Attributes	Skills
Str: 4	Fisticuffs 3, Throwing 2, Close Combat 2 (pole arm)
Agl: 5	Stealth 4
End: 6	Wilderness Travel 7 (foraging), Fieldcraft 6, Tracking 4, Swimming 3
Int: 3	Observation 2, Engineering 1 (earthworks)
Chr: 1	
Soc: 2	Riding 2 (ostrich)

Queen Ant (Green NPC)

The queen ant has a nearly atrophied upper body and a huge, distended abdomen. She is completely immobile and depends on the workers to keep her alive. She and the males rule the village. The queen ant wants human aid against the plants, but fears expending any of her subjects/children in some risky venture. The queen somehow behaves in a manner very reminiscent of Queen Victoria.

Motives: Leader, Cautious.

Attributes	Skills
Str: 2	Close Combat 1 (pole arm)
Agl: 1	
End: 3	Wilderness Travel 2 (mapping)
Int: 5	Observation 6, Engineering 4 (earthworks)
Chr: 4	Eloquence 5, Linguistics 4 (High Human, Plant, Squid, Machine), Bargaining 3
Soc: 6	Leadership 4

Male Ants (Green NPCs)

The males are smaller and frailer than the workers, but are much more intelligent. Their heads are larger, and they are more talkative.

They are the experts of the community and rule the village along with the queen. There is competition among the males for prestige and authority, but no amount of personal ambition can come before their loyalty to the queen.

Males always carry a dagger and wear beautifully adorned robes to further distinguish themselves from the workers.

Motives: Loyal, Proud.

Attributes	Skills
Str: 1	Close Combat 1 (edged weapon)
Agl: 3	Stealth 2
End: 2	Wilderness Travel 1 (mapping), Fieldcraft 2, Swimming 1
Int: 6	Observation 5, Engineering 5 (earthworks)
Chr: 4	Eloquence 4, Linguistics 3 (Plant, Machine, High Human)
Soc: 5	Riding 4 (ostrich), Leadership 2, Medicine 4

AD 802889: The machine materializes upon a grassy plain. The air is cool. Nearby stand a couple of extremely bizarre creatures—they are about the size of an elephant, with eight legs ending in dainty hooves. The creatures have huge udders between their rear pairs of legs, and their heads are recognizably those of cattle. A Formidable task of Biology will allow the characters to determine that the creatures are cattle, but bred and mutated scientifically into a much more productive form. Like cows, the creatures are placid and harmless.

A few miles to the south the PCs can see a river, and on the horizon, some 20 miles away, looms a vast building. To be visible from such a distance, the structure must be miles tall. A half mile to the north is a small village of strange mud houses. No people are about.

ANTS

No matter which way the PCs decide to travel, they will soon come across a pair of natives. The natives are human-sized insects, obviously descended from ants. They walk upright and carry tools in their multiple hands. Upon observing the PCs, the ants will begin making excited chittering noises and gesturing animatedly. They will make no violent moves unless the player characters do so, and even then they will only fight to escape. The ants are armed with spears, and have mandibles and stingers.

A PC accomplishing a Moderate Linguistics task will be able to understand that the ants wish the player characters to accompany them, though their intentions are unknown. If the PCs decline to go with the ants, the ants will follow the party for a time, chittering and gesturing, and eventually give up and go home. But if the PCs do follow the ants, the two natives will lead the party north, to the village of mud huts.

Ant Village: The village is home to 50 ants—one queen, five males, 10 warriors, and 34 workers. They live in domed huts made of mud and have some larger mud structures filled with grain and dried beef. A corral outside the village holds 20 birds resembling ostriches, which are used as beasts of burden. The arrival of the adventurers will spark great interest in the community, and a crowd of ants will emerge from the huts and gather about the party. The player characters will notice that the ants are careful to maintain a respectful distance from them. The crowd will urge the PCs along toward the largest hut, located in the center of the village.

Queen: Within the large hut sits a huge ant, her body bloated and far too large for her spindly limbs to move. This is the queen of the colony. Around her are the five males. They are smaller than the workers but have bigger heads. A pair of warriors flank the queen; they will cross their spears to prevent anyone from approaching the queen too closely.

As soon as the players have entered, a male will stand and begin speaking in a language quite unlike the chittering noises of the other ants. A Formidable task of Linguistics will identify the tongue as vaguely related to Chinese, but with distinct influences drawn from Russian, English, Spanish, and Parhooni. It is utterly unintelligible to the PCs.

When the ants realize that the player characters cannot understand them, the males and the queen will confer together. Then one of the males will produce a small glass box from a recess in the wall, take from it a little yellow pill, and offer the pill to the PCs.

The pill is a perfect sphere, with tiny writing on it in no known alphabet. If the player characters decline to take the pill, the ants will give them food and water, and a hut to sleep in, and will allow them to stay in the village as long as they like. But they will be unable to communicate anything significant.

If a PC takes the pill, he will feel very confused for a moment, as if he has lost the power of speech. Then, with a shock, he will realize that he can now understand the mysterious language the ants are speaking. The PC can now speak and understand a strange tongue

from the far future, in addition to his other languages. An Easy Intelligence task will allow the player character to realize that the language seems better suited to a human mouth and vocal chords than it is to the ants.

Now equipped with a common language, the PCs can communicate with the ants. The male repeats his speech of welcome to the party.

"Welcome, great High Humans. It has been many long years since last your folk have graced this humble colony with your presence. Yet as you can see, we ants have faithfully continued in our duties: the herds grow fat and ever more numerous. What is the reason for this visit, High Ones?"

The players probably will want to ask many questions, so appropriate information on the history and culture of the far future is given below. If the player characters ask about Merritt, the males will tell them that two workers encountered a High Human three weeks ago, near where the adventurers were found. The workers attempted to speak with him, but he threw stones at them and fled. They examined his vehicle, but it suddenly disappeared. According to the workers, the High Human ran off toward the city.

HISTORY AND CULTURE

During the time of the Great Ice, the High Humans built the great city buildings and created four races to serve them and maintain the Earth: the ants to tend the herds and rule the plains; the walking plants to control the forests and grow the crops; the squids to dominate the oceans; and the machines to mine and make things underground. But in recent centuries, the Great Ice has retreated, and as the weather changed, the plants and the ants have gone to war often. The plants desire to expand their forests now that there is more rain, but the ants prefer to keep the plains and forests as they are. In the old times the High Humans would have given orders to settle such disputes, but they have not come out of their cities in hundreds of years. Attempts by the ants and plants to reach the High Humans have all failed; the cities will only open their doors to High Humans.

The ants have a map of the area. It looks like England, except that the oceans have receded so that Great Britain and the continent are joined. Most of the land is open plains, but the river valleys are covered by forest. From the map it is apparent that the huge city to the south is built on the site of London. The forest begins just beyond the city.

The ants will help the player characters as much as they can by providing food, water, blankets, and ostriches for them to ride. But the ants absolutely will not follow the adventurers into the city or into the domain of the plants or squids. If the PCs request it, the queen will send a pair of warriors to escort the party as far as the city.

CITY OF THE HIGH HUMANS

The city is a vast pyramidal structure about five miles square, towering two miles high. The surface appears to be glass but is completely unbreakable. At ground level are huge doors every 100 yards along the base of the structure. The doors open automatically when any human approaches within 10 yards.

The city is a bewildering maze of softly lit passages and huge domed chambers. Offices, workshops, laboratories, commercial establishments and

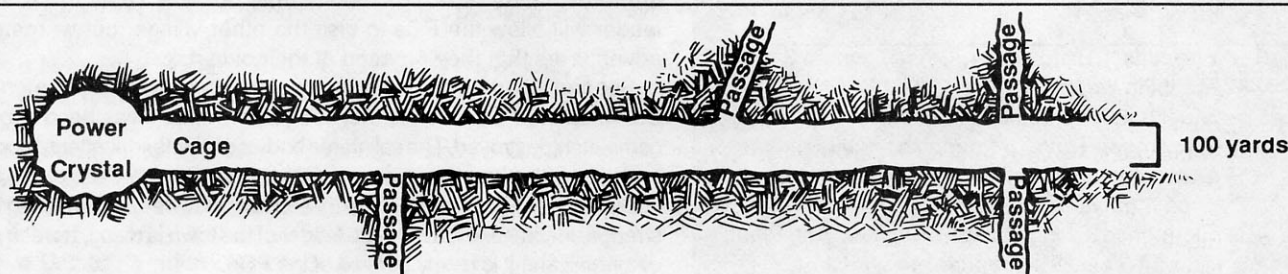
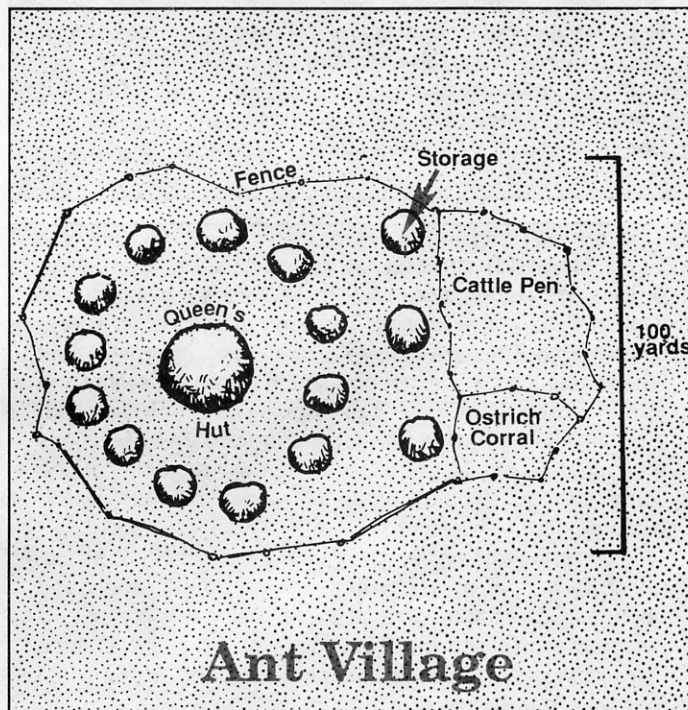
living quarters open off the corridors. They vary almost infinitely, so the details are left to the referee's imagination. The entire city is spotlessly clean and perfectly maintained. Personal items are still neatly placed in the living quarters; the libraries are filled with books (unfortunately, the language pill does not bestow reading ability); and the large gardens are carefully kept up.

The PCs will never see any of the clever machinery that maintains the city; the devices only operate when no human is around. The utter silence and emptiness of the city will be unnerving to the adventurers, and the referee should continually emphasize how alone the player characters are.

Message From Merritt: After some hours spent wandering in the city, the PCs will find a chamber that apparently served as an artist's studio. The room contains numerous abstract sculptures in a variety of materials (some unknown) and some soothing paintings. But one large canvas has been scrawled on in white paint:

"Is anyone left alive here? I am Averell Merritt. I was here—the last human on Earth. If you can read this, for God's sake, come to the observatory. I am all alone on Earth."

Observatory: The observatory is on the very highest point of the



Cavern of the Machines

city. It consists of a large, pyramidal room underneath a huge reflecting telescope. A simple control panel aims and focuses the telescope, and the images from it are displayed on a wall screen. Merritt was using it to search for signs of human life. But though his small travelling bag and canteen are still by the control panel, Merritt is nowhere about.

Alert characters will notice an odd scattering of peculiar feathers on the floor near a door. The door is unlocked and opens onto a small terrace, where there are more of the strange feathers. An

Easy Biology task will reveal that the feathers are not feathers at all, but leaves from a plant that almost perfectly mimic the structure of bird feathers. There are no plants anywhere nearby. Only a flying creature could have reached the terrace. The logical conclusion is that Merritt was carried off by some sort of flying plant—possibly one of the sentient plants mentioned by the ants in the village. (If the PCs do not realize this themselves, the referee may wish to allow one character to make the deduction following a successful Intelligence quick roll.)

Plants (Trained NPCs)

The plants are large bushes equipped with tendrils for manipulation and four trunks for locomotion. While they subsist partially by photosynthesis, the plants must also eat food to remain active. They live in the deep forests, which they tend and maintain. The plants have gradually begun to expand the forests and systematically exclude animal life that preys on the vegetation. The plants all look forward to the day when all the land on Earth is a vast forest under their control. Older plants take root in one spot and are effectively immobile.

Plants are usually armed with a spear.

Motives: Ambitious, Greedy.

Attributes	Skills
Str: 4	Fisticuffs 2, Throwing 2, Close Combat 2 (pole arm)
Agl: 2	Stealth 5
End: 6	Wilderness Travel 4 (foraging), Fieldcraft 4, Tracking 4, Swimming 3
Int: 5	Observation 4
Chr: 1	Linguistics 2 (Ant, High Human)
Soc: 3	

High Humans (Experienced NPCs)

The High Humans of the distant future are all small and slender, with little or no hair. They only wear clothes in very cold weather. They are a peaceful race, devoting most of their time to science and philosophy. But they can act swiftly and with great determination once a problem has been identified. They are light-hearted and enjoy music and dance. Decisions are generally made with the unanimous consent of the community, but since everyone thinks logically, there is little disagreement.

Though they generally go naked, the High Humans frequently will wear a vest or belt with pockets for tools and apparatus. The nature of most of their devices is completely incomprehensible to the PCs. None of the High Humans carries a weapon unless absolutely necessary—and most of their weapons simply stun the target.

Attributes	Skills
Str: 3	Fisticuffs 1, Throwing 1, Close Combat 3 (bashing weapon)
Agl: 5	Stealth 4, Mechanics 2 (electricity)
End: 5	Wilderness Travel 5 (mapping) Swimming 2
Int: 6	Observation 6, Engineering 2 (structural), Science 4 (physics)
Chr: 4	Eloquence 3, Linguistics 6 (Machine, Ant, Plant, Squid, Venusian, Lunarian)
Soc: 4	Riding 3 (ostrich), Piloting 1 (ether flyer), Medicine 2

FOREST

The adventurers will have little difficulty travelling to the edge of the forest to search for the sentient plants and Merritt. The nearest forest is about five miles from the city, and the dividing line between plain and forest is very distinct. The forest is guarded by a wall of sharp thorn bushes, which keep away the ants and their animals. To hack a passage into the forest is a Difficult feat of Strength.

Beyond the thorns, the forest is not a dense tangle of underbrush, but is surprisingly tidy. The great canopy of trees blocks out nearly all the sunlight, and the ground is covered by a thick layer of moss. Vines link all the trees, and there are bushes scattered about the forest floor. One strange thing that the adventurers may notice is the complete absence of animal life other than worms. The forest is utterly silent and utterly still—the only sound is the faint rustling of leaves in the wind.

Sentient Plants: After travelling about a mile into the forest, the PCs will be startled when one bush moves to block their way. The bush is a sentient plant. The plant walks on four jointed trunks and has five tentacle-like tendrils, one of which holds a spear. It sees with numerous eyes and communicates by rubbing its branches together to approximate speech. The PCs will be able to understand its speech due to the pill the ants gave them.

The plant is arrogant and threatening—totally unlike the subservient ants. It will demand to know what the player characters are doing in the forest and will order them to follow it to see the leaders. Any opposition will be met by violence, and 1D6 additional plants will arrive as reinforcements in the event of a fight.

The plant community is a clearing about an acre in size. The plants have no fires and do not have shelters, but they do store their weapons and tools under roofs. In the center of the community stands the plant leader—a very old plant, immobile now and much taller than the others. Gathered around the leader are 10 plants armed with spears.

The plant leader will address the player characters.

"Peace, High Humans. It has been long since any of your kind have entered the green lands. We plants rule here now, and no animals are welcome—even yourselves. Out of respect for your wisdom and power, we will give you safe conduct out of the green lands, but this place is ours now, not yours. Go in peace."

If the player characters ask about Merritt, it will require a Difficult task of Eloquence to get an answer out of the plants. A successful task roll will get the plant leader to admit that one community further into the forest has been advocating more aggressive expansion of the forest lands. That community may possibly know more. The leader will allow the PCs to visit the other village, but warns the adventurers that they proceed at their own risk.

Second Village: The other village is six miles away through the forest. But when the PCs reach it, they will discover that it has been almost completely destroyed. The splintered bodies of plants lie scattered about, and huge holes have been gouged in the earth. Several dead plants are still smoldering—including some that appear to have wings sporting the strange, feather-like leaves. The leader of the town is dying, but can still communicate. It is utterly terrified of the PCs.

"Forgive us, terrible High Humans! We did not mean harm to the lone High Human! We only wished to help him! Do not send your war machines against the green lands!"

The PCs can get little from the dying plant except frantic pleas for mercy. Apparently the village did send a flying plant to the city to bring Merritt back. But the plants were subsequently attacked by huge machines from underground that carried Merritt off.

CAPTIVES

While the adventurers are trying to get some information from the dying plant, a faint rumbling sound will come from underfoot. Suddenly, four huge, three-legged machines will rear up from under the ground and fire nets at the PCs. To avoid being tangled in the nets requires success at an Impossible Agility task. If the PCs can reach their weapons, they will soon discover that neither gunfire nor bare hands can do anything against the machines. (If a player character has dynamite and can avoid blowing up the party while using it, then six sticks used together can cripple a single machine.)

The machines will gather up the player characters trapped in nets and burrow back underground. They will travel downward through roughly dug tunnels for awhile, then enter a complex of electrically lit passages, which extend for miles in all directions. The machines take the adventurers to a huge chamber and deposit them in a metal cage, then depart.

Chamber: The chamber is a 100 yards across, 50 yards high, and nearly a mile long. At one end it widens to a large sphere 200 yards across, in the center of which is a brightly glowing blue crystal. Huge conduits or cables lead from the crystal to the walls of the sphere. The walls of the main room are lined with about 50,000 crystal coffins, each containing a human being who is either dead or asleep. The humans are all very small and slender, almost entirely hairless. Scandalously, they are all naked. A successful Difficult Observation task roll will allow the characters to notice that one of the nearer coffins contains an ordinary-looking Englishman of the 1890s.

Cage: The cage is at the junction of the main room and the spherical section. It was built to hold humans less physically strong than 19th-century Englishmen. To bend the bars requires a Formidable Strength task, but up to four players may combine their Strengths in the attempt. The machines are not monitoring the cage, so an escape will not be discovered until somebody moves a control or a machine passes through the room after six to 12 minutes (roll randomly).

Freeing the Humans: The coffins can be opened one by one;

this requires a Formidable Strength roll (PCs can combine their Strengths). Opening a coffin immediately summons a machine to investigate. The coffins can also be opened by destroying the crystal at the far end of the room. It will take five points of damage to destroy the crystal. Once it is destroyed, all the coffins will open spontaneously, and the captives will emerge.

Escape: If the PCs have destroyed the crystal, all the machines in the area will be inactive. It will take an hour for repair machines to restore it, and the player characters can reach the surface in that time.

If the player characters have only released Merritt, then the machines will pursue the PCs. Machines are invulnerable to firearms and can only be harmed by explosives, as described above. They move as fast as a running human and can keep up the pace indefinitely. The machines will attempt to recapture the player characters and put them back into the cage while sleep coffins are prepared for them. After one escape, any recaptured PCs will be guarded by a single machine that will do its best to prevent them from escaping.

HIGH HUMANS

If the PCs have freed the captive humans from the caverns, they will be fantastically grateful. According to the High Humans, the machines took them prisoner to protect them from harm. Once freed, the High Humans plan to return to the city and there readjust the controlling orders of the machines to prevent the same problem from happening again.

The High Humans will reward the PCs, but will not allow them to take anything back in time aboard the time machine. They fear the effects on history if ancient humans like the adventurers gain access to any of the advanced technology of the High Humans.

RETURNING HOME

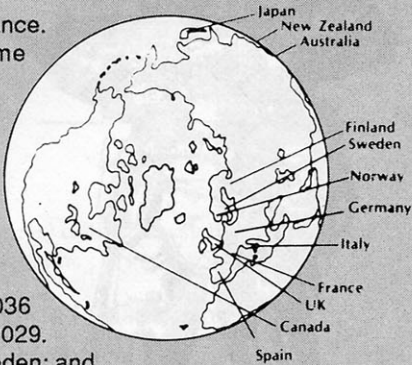
After a suitable period of celebration with the High Humans, the PCs can return back to the year 1889 with Merritt and thereby keep young Wells out of prison. Wells will find their account of the adventure highly interesting. After some months, he will write a story based on the event and will offer to share the proceeds with the player characters. Ω



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- **Australia:** Imported and distributed by *Jedko Games*, 134 Cochranes Rd., Moorabbin, Vic, 3198, Australia.
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PSIONICS, a 128-page sourcebook developed by the editors of *RoleAids*, releases this month from Mayfair Games. *Psionics* details the world of mind control, including more than 100 new spells, new magic items, and five types of psionics. Also available are *Lizardmen* (a 128-page sourcebook which releases in March from Mayfair) and *The Chill Accessory Pack* (includes a *Chill* referee's screen and full-color map of the world of *SAVE*, plus a 32-page scenario, "Isle of the Dead," set in a deserted amusement park).

BANGKOK, a 104-page *Twilight: 2000* sourcebook, releases this month from GDW. In 2000, Bangkok has become a free city, like Krakow in Poland or Mombasa in Africa. Villainous scum of half of Asia gather here to wheel, deal, and entertain themselves. Whatever you want, whatever you need—somebody has it in Bangkok. GDW: 2006. \$12.

THE GOD NET supplement and *The Cyberpapacy* sourcebook are new West End Games releases, both supporting the *Torg* product line. Other *Torg* releases in-

clude: *Queenswrath*, *The Aysle Sourcebook*, *The Nightmare Dream*, and *The Cassandra Files*. *Star Wars* products include: *Graveyard of Alderaan* adventure, *Death in the Undercity*, *Galaxy Guide 6: Tramp Freighters* supplement, *Zero-G Assault Troopers* miniatures, *Domain of Evil* adventure, and *The Rebel Alliance Sourcebook*.

ROGUE MISTRESS releases in January from Chaosium Inc., the first of four *Stormbringer* supplements scheduled for 1991. Other recent releases include *Curse of Cthulhu* (three independent scenarios, plus a full-length campaign), *Blood Brothers* (13 *Cthulhu* adventures as seen in the horror films), *Fatal Experiments* (three *Call of Cthulhu* adventures, plus maps, plans, handouts, and new weapons), and *Knights Adventurous* (a *Pendragon* supplement, with expanded information on knighthood, knights, and the world in which they live). Also available from Chaosium are five horrifying posters featuring *Mansions of Madness*, *Great Old Ones*, *Arkham Unveiled*, *Cthulhu Classics*, and *Masks of Nyarlathotep*.

REPUBLIC OF ROME, a boardgame of political intrigue with military overtones, is now available from The Avalon Hill Game Company. A deck of 192 illustrated cards sets the scene for the panoramic spectacle that was the Roman Republic. Wars, revolts, droughts, epidemics, and a host of other random events flash before this paper time machine as fortunes rise and fall. Also available from Avalon Hill are *New World* (a new game commemorating America's 500th anniversary) and *Napoleon's Battles Expansion Module* (with more information on scenario design, option rules, and nine battle scenarios).

THE UNIVERSAL BROTHERHOOD, a *Shadowrun* sourcebook and adventure, is available from FASA. Now someone has been on the inside of the Brotherhood. The objectives and purpose of the Brotherhood have been exposed. Some of the questions are answered. But the truth is ever more chilling! Unlock the potentials of your mind and body. Turn your back on the shallow and mundane—join the Universal Brotherhood!

GURPS SUPERS and *GURPS International Super Teams* release in January from Steve Jackson Games. Other new products include *GURPS Uplift*, *GURPS Time Travel*, *Roleplayer 23*, *Autoduel Quarterly 8/4*, *Car Wars Tanks*, *Awful Green Things from Outer Space*, and *GURPS Magic Items*.

ICE'S JANUARY RELEASES include *The Olympians*, *Dart fighter*, *Talcon fighter*, *Lance Electra fighter*, *Sentry fighter*, *Star Ravengunboat*, *Betafortressgunboat*, *Dark Space*, *Black Troll's Vengeance*, *Black Guard*, *Bladestorm*, *Adventurers Club 17*, *IQ 11*, *Organized Crime* color flyer, and a winter catalog.

WHITE WOLF PUBLISHING and Lion Rampant have announced their merger into a new company called White Wolf. Stewart Wieck, owner of White Wolf Publishing, and Mark Rein-Hagen, owner of Lion Rampant, will be full partners in the new enterprise. All present Lion Rampant and White Wolf Publishing products will continue to be available through the new White Wolf. The entire design, editorial, production, and sales staffs of both companies will become part of the new White Wolf staff, working on *White Wolf* magazine, *Ars Magica* products, and other endeavors. The administrative office will be located at the present White Wolf Publishing address.

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PARANOIA, a comic book based on the gaming system from West End Games, is available this spring from Adventure Comics. The comic book is set in Alpha Complex, where the omnipotent (and not very benevolent) Computer is in control. As a Red-level clone citizen, your personal duty is to uncover traitors, members of secret societies, mutants, or anyone else who questions the Computer in any way. What the Computer doesn't realize is that you're a mutant, you belong to a secret society, and you question the Computer's judgment in every way. Good luck!

DESERT SHIELD, the new strategy game that lets you recreate the day-to-day Gulf Strike crisis, includes a rules booklet and 200 new counters. Victory Games recently donated 200 *Gulf Strike* games containing the *Desert Shield* module to US troops stationed in the desert. Also available from Victory Games is *Carrier*, the solitaire game of World War II naval air battles in the southwest Pacific. For more information, contact Victory Games, 4517 Harford Road, Baltimore, MD 21214.

BLADESTORM from ICE is a new fantasy miniatures game in a dark chaotic world. Other new releases include *Organized Crime* (a family boardgame), *Death Game 2090* (a cyberventure for the *Cyberspace* RPG), *Space Master Companion I* (sourcebook), *Demons Rule* (*Champions* adventure), *Champions in 3-D* (sourcebook for running extra-dimensional *Champions* adventures), *Overkill: The Ptolemean Wars* (a grand campaign expansion set for the *Silent Death Metal Express* game), and *Characters of Middle-Earth* (featuring art by Angus McBride).

MASTER'S SCRIBE and *Intrigues in Antietum* (a database for use with *Master's Scribe*) are available from Rogue Software. Three more adventure modules are in production for release in 1991. For more infor-

mation, contact Rogue Software, PO Box 920, Freeport, IL 61032.

BLACK GOLD (TEXAS TEA) is the third in a series of alternative-history ziplocks from XTR Corp. *Black Gold* is a companion game to the *Tiger of Ethiopia*, published in issue 6 of *Command*. Includes one full hex map, 300 counters, and a 16-page rules and alternative history pamphlet. It uses the same system as *Tiger* and includes rules to play them together (with interchangeable reinforcements) as a two-, three-, or four-player mega-game, *Sublime Peace*. Write to XTR Corp., PO Box 4017B, San Luis Obispo, CA 93403.

CARDINAL OF THE KREMLIN from Capstone Software is a computer simulation based on Tom Clancy's bestseller. Available for IBM PC and compatible computers, the game challenges you to develop America's laser antimissile defenses. Other Capstone software includes *Bill & Ted's Excellent Adventure*, *Trump Castle: The Ultimate Casino Gambling Simulation*, *Search for the Titanic*, *Superman*, and *Miami Vice*. Contact Intracorp Inc., 14160 SW 139th Court, Miami, FL 33186.

CAR-PGa, the Committee for the Advancement of Role-Playing Games, always welcomes new members. For additional


information, you can contact CAR-PGa International, 8032 Locust Ave., Miller, IN 46403.

BUCK ROGERS: COUNTDOWN TO DOOMSDAY and *Renegade Legion: Interceptor* are new computer games from Strategic Simulations. They are based on the TSR *Buck Rogers* line and FASA *Battle-Tech* line, respectively. Also available is a cluebook to *Countdown to Doomsday*. For more information, contact Strategic Simulations, Inc., 675 Almanor Ave., Sunnyvale, CA 94086-2901.

QUIRXEL GAMES presents *Gladius Et Pilum*, a PBM game for wargamers on the rise and fall of the Roman Empire. Former Roman provinces vie with barbaric dynasties for survival and supremacy across the ancient world of AD 200. Includes rules on economy, politics, and battles. Write for a free brochure: Quirxel Games GbR, Juergen & U. Kasperzak & T. Drissen, Postfach 1564, D-4170 Geldern, WEST GERMANY.

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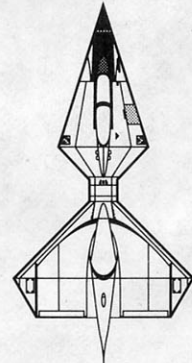
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In the Name of FINLAND

By Mark Galeotti

I never wanted to speak Finnish, you know. I had no great interest in a language with more k's than Renraku's petty cash account. Problem was, no one wanted to speak Finnish, but Coxcomb reckoned it'd be professional, and I had the megapulses to spare, so here I am, skull full of declensions and past participles.

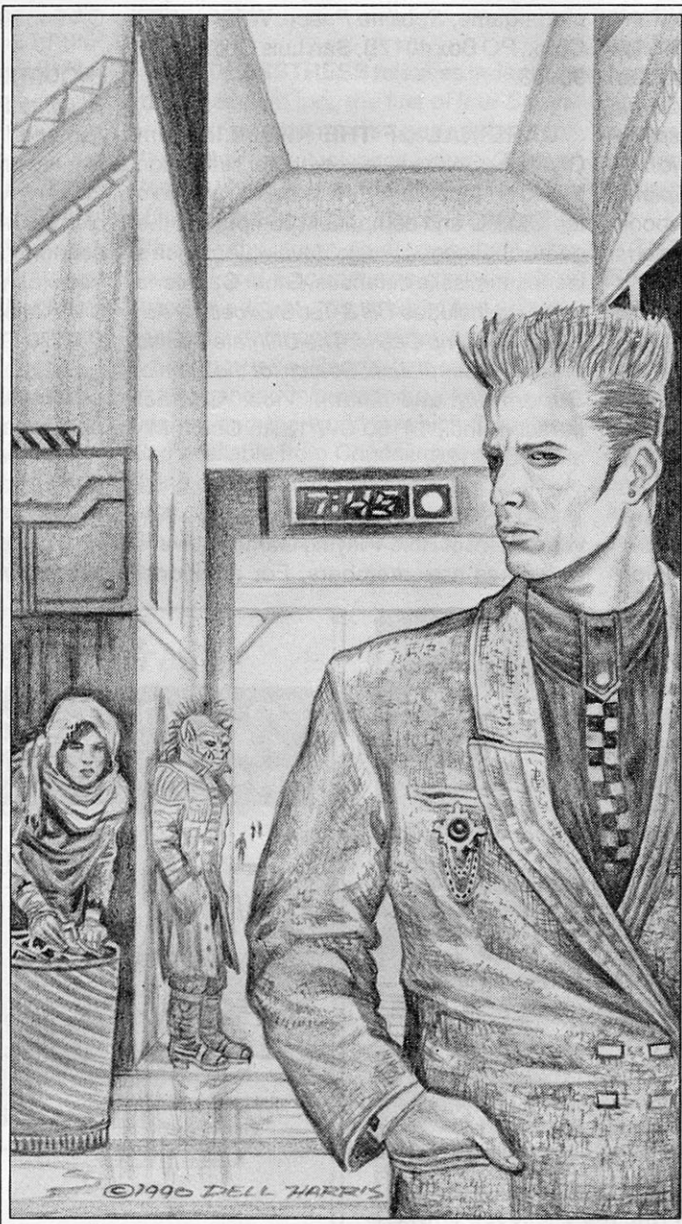
Nor had I ever expected to be hired by any prof, let alone a professor of Finnish and Lapp linguistics. (Want to know what that is in Finnish? Course not, but that's the problem with skillsofts—once you plug the can into your head, it too easily becomes will.) Nature of the biz, really. You don't exactly put want ads out, but once people see you can run the shadows, they find their way to you, and you just play it the way the nuyen say.

We checked him down, and his credstick was sweet, so here we are, picking our way between puddles of drying cleaning fluid one gray, gloomy morning as the vidboard checks off the minutes before the 7:47 maglev from SanFran arrived. Me, I'm the charm man, so I had my best duds on—a microchip pinkie ring and even a Beretta slimline, not to mess with the hang of my suit. Cat names me dandy, but we can't all live in Kevlar.

Speaking of Cat, she was over in the corner, doing her impression of a bag lady. Damn good one, too, though if you know any bag ladies with Uzi smartguns under their coats, steer me away from your neighborhood, deal?

I couldn't see NoGo. He should be getting the wheels prepped. But I was reassured to see Maximillian in place, looking as inconspicuous as six-six of ork could be. I tried catching his eye, suddenly noticed the tension in his stance as he scanned hall and made a pretext of checking the clock. Casually, I turned to the vendomat and jacked my credstick as I tried to work out what he'd seen.

Nothing. I dragged out selecting my order as long as possible, but



fragged if I could see what was bothering him. A couple of kids saying a protracted goodbye before one of them levved back south. The Kleen Team crew lumbering their washing machines onto the concourse. Three tribal bizmen, all ceremonial furs and plaschrome briefcases.

Nothing—that was the point! Where was security? Ten minutes ago, three triggerboys on duty. Now? Just as the klaxon announced the bullet's arrival, my adrenaline-jazzed brain suddenly noticed something else: The concourse was still wet from the real cleaners.

As the hit men began to pull out their ironmongery, I heard the first cough from Max's Fichetti. This is gonna geek my suit, I just know it. Wizard.

The characters are hired to guard and assist a Finnish mage in retrieving a sacred stone removed to Seattle by an unscrupulous corporation. While being given the chance to observe advanced spellcasting, the shadowrunners will also get an insight into a style of magic rather different from those usually encountered.

The Grimoire details initiation, adepts and astral quests, but it is not necessary for play. *Sprawl/Sites* and *Seattle Sourcebook* are required for this adventure.

CONTACT

The first contact will be from a rather unlikely quarter, Urho Koikkalainen, professor of Finnish and Lapp linguistics at Seattle University. A brilliant academic, Koikkalainen is hardly the stuff Mr. Johnsons are made of, and he knows it. Somehow he heard about the shadowrunners (be inventive—a young cousin who's one of his students? A housekeeper whose sister hired them for a job some months back?), and he wants to meet.

In essence, what he wants is fairly simple. He says that a corporation has stolen a valuable cultural artifact from Finland, that

someone is coming over to retrieve it, and that all the shadowrunners must do is watch after him (he's not used to 'plexlife), protect him if necessary during the retrieval, and get him on a ship heading back to Finland. Koikkalainen stresses that the actual retrieval will not be "um, a fraught situation." The characters, "shall we say, shouldn't face any real, um, problems at that stage."

Of course, the adventurers will have more questions, and he'll try to answer them. Until they agree to take the job, he won't divulge the name of the corp or the "arrival," though. The artifact is, he will say, of great cultural and archaeological importance, but fortunately the man from Finland has a way to get it back with minimal complications. Well, there is one complication. Um, Koikkalainen is not very good at this. What was he saying? Oh yes, complications. The trouble is that, well, the corporation may have some, small, infinitesimal inkling that something's up. Probably not important but, well, you never know.

The professor will offer to pay 10,000¥ for five days of work, and it won't take much to push him up to 15,000¥. Easy bucks? Of course not—you get the trouble you're paid for. But surely worth plugging in to.

Once the shadowrunners have agreed to the job, Koikkalainen will reveal that magic is involved. The artifact is a *sejda*, a sacred stone that over the mundane years accumulated a charge of inert energy that can now be tapped with the return of magic.

To date it has been attracting willing fish into the nets of the Pietasaar fishing fleet. A minor use for such a powerful item? Not at all, sir, we are talking tradition! The Stone of Pietasaar has stood there for almost two millennia, and it is the duty of every true patriot to see it return.

And Arvo Kivistö is such a patriot. He will be arriving on the maglev from San Francisco and has arranged to be shipped back, with the stone, on a Finnish government ship docked at Seattle. The characters must meet him, shelter and protect him while he gets his bearings, then guard him while he uses magic to retrieve the stone. The characters will need to have a light truck ready to get the stone to the good ship *Mauno Koivisto*.

Kivistö arrives in two days time, and the ship sails four days later, having collected some exhibits from the Finnish Pavilion at the Seattle International Art and Culture Fest '50. What could be easier?

The target? The despoilers of Finnish national tradition, sir? Ingersoll Aquaculture, those purblind fools who would misuse the stone's powers, ignoring the natural balance of predator and supply to use it for plundering the seas.

PROPER PRIOR PREPARATION

Should the PCs decide to do some homework beforehand, they may discover all or some of the following facts. Use relevant skills (Corp Etiquette for biz contacts, Street Etiquette for the whisper in the gutter, Intelligence for checking corp directories and business papers), with one nugget of data per success against a target number of 6. Extra information is given in parentheses where the rumor could be investigated at greater depth. Business sources will also note that Ingersoll is a 77%-owned subsidiary of NorthWest Nutrition and has a handsome tower in Downtown (map reference G12 on pages 166-167 of the *Seattle Sourcebook*).

Rumors/Information

1. Ingersoll is in trouble. Its archaic methods just aren't producing in sufficient bulk, and now it's even planning on going out and fishing!

2. Wow, no wonder Ingersoll is in trouble. Hear the latest? It opened a subsid in *Finland* of all places, then geeked it a month later! Dreckwits!

3. Watch out for the Asp—she's Ingersoll's chief torpedo, and fast as ice.

4. If Ingersoll goes down, its parent company, NorthWest Nutrition, spirals down the plug with it.

(NWN is essentially a holding company, largely working with franchise holders. Ingersoll and Ingersoll & Berkeley Soy Processing are the only two subsids owned outright. NorthWest's offices are in Tacoma's lower-class Fife neighborhood—map reference G22 on page 171 of the *Seattle Sourcebook*—security rating C.)

5. Ingersoll certainly is in trouble. Only last week it had to let go of its chief wagemage.

6. Didn't I see Ingersoll veep Val Sassinian over at Brother Anatole's in the Snohomish? Of course, she didn't need to be hiring muscle. She might just like the industrial-strength homebrew. (Brother Anatole's—page 114 in the *Seattle Sourcebook*—is a low dive, big on human supremacy and cheap muscle, low on morals and decor.)

7. Ingersoll's splendid tower in Downtown is going to be sold off soon to try to stave off the group's financial collapse.

8. There was some sort of crash drill at Ingersoll's the other night. All the securigrunts were out on the double, and a panel truck zoomed out and off without lights. Wonder what's up? (Find an Ingersoll gateman or the like to bribe, and the characters may discover it was a NorthWest Nutritions van.)

9. Anne St. Paul—they call her the Asp—isn't just an ugly face. Either she's got the lowest profile wetware I've ever seen, or that's magic jazzing her reflexes.

10. Ingersoll's Val Sassinian and Ingersoll & Berkeley's Gonley Vanderson are both getting edgy: Each knows one or the other will soon be pushed.



PROFESSOR URHO KOIKKALAINEN

"I am Professor of Finnish Linguistics, but am not just academic. You may think it surprising, but within this little body beats big heart of my people. Sir, I am a Finn!"

Quotes

"I'm sorry, what was I saying?"

"Geek? Frag? I am sorry, sir, what are you talking about?"

"Would this be enough? I suppose I could go as high as half as much again, if it's not."

Commentary

It would be easy to see the little professor as a figure of fun, from his thick glasses (hasn't he heard of corrective surgery?) to his irritating tendency to forget what he's saying every other sentence. But this would be a mistake. Though hardly street-smart, he's intelligent, sophisticated, and not without courage (what do you think, coming to meet as disreputable a bunch as the shadowrunners?). Besides, his credstick speaks as fluently and persuasively as any.

Attributes:

Body: 2
Quickness: 2
Charisma: 3
Intelligence: 7
Willpower: 4
Essence: 6
Reaction: 4

Skills:

English: 5
Etiquette (Academic): 5
Lapp: 6
Linguistics: 7
Forget What He Was Saying: 5

WARM WELCOME

An ambush will be in place for Kivistö's arrival: Four hit men are masquerading as a cleaning crew. Security has been bribed beforehand ("coincidentally, we all needed to go to the sec-office restroom at the same time"), and the razorguys are briefed on how to recognize their target. (Anyway, there are very few passengers that time of the morning.) Treat the assassins as Mercs (page 40 of *Shadowrun*), wearing armor clothing under their plastic coveralls and armed with three silenced Ingram smartguns and a short-barreled Defiance T-250. See the Maglev Station Concourse Map.

The characters may make the assassins in advance or may have to react to circumstances. Play the fight well, but make sure the gunsels don't do too well. Although slow to anger, Kivistö can be handy in a fight, and you can always throw in some fellow passengers who don't fancy getting caught in crossfire to even the odds. Access to and from the platforms is through turnstiles under the arrival/departure display board, and at the first sign of trouble (shooting, etc.), the turnstiles lock shut. (Anyone would think the maglev station is used to this sort of thing.) Since Kivistö is one of the first passengers out, this "lockout" minimizes the number of

crossfire victims around.

Bystanders fall roughly into two types. The typical U²C (upright, uptight citizen) will scream, run or lie down on the floor, hands over his head (Pedestrian NPC archetype on page 116 of *Sprawl Sites*). Streetwise "ownbizminders" may have a light weapon and will retreat to some safe position (or get out by a convenient exit) but will return fire if shot at.

Of course, if the PCs are having it too easy, throw in a corporate fail-safe (a Bounty Hunter from page 163 of *Shadowrun*, armed with a Black Skorpion smartgun and two Flash-Paks), an independently operating assassin (that nun cowering in the corner? the "cop" who "happens" onto the scene?) ready to finish the job should it be necessary.

Of course, you could even throw in a car chase, if you like that sort of thing—screeching corners, crash checks, people leaning out of windows with big guns, cars crashing through street vendors' stalls and going the wrong way down one-way streets. All in all, just everyday, high-speed bad citizenship.

GOING TO GROUND

Unless the shadowrunners are stupid or unlucky, they will get away and must safehouse Kivistö. Once at a safe location, Kivistö will outline his plans in precise, over-formal English.

He has prepared a very specialized spell, one attuned precisely to the stone. In fact, he just finished it with the help of a colleague in San Francisco, and that's where the security leak probably came from. All he has to do is perform an astral quest to discover the true name of the stone's *haltija*, its inner spirit. Then he must get quite close to where the stone is being kept (apparently the Ingersoll complex), cast his spell, which will draw the stone to him in a mondo blast of telekinesis, load it onto a truck, and get it to the *Mauno Koivisto*. Simple, *ei?*

All the characters have to do to earn their nugeld is watch him while he's questing (when his body will be in coma), drive him to the Ingersoll site, guard him while he does his stuff, and finally get him and the stone through to the docks.

KIVISTÖ'S QUEST

When the characters are sure they are secure, Kivistö will prepare for his quest. He explains that he will be comatose for up to the best part of a day. He may appear to be hurt, or in trouble, but the characters should ignore that. There is nothing they can do. Nor can he be woken, so the PCs should just pray for him, *kyllä?*

He will remove an elk's skin from his suitcase, place it on the ground, anoint his kantele with some pungent herbal concoction, then take a deep breath. After one quick slug of vodka from his hip flask, he'll begin a repetitive, guttural chant of the *runot*, picking out on the kantele a tune that begins simple and becomes increasingly complex. Characters listening will probably be caught up, carried along on the flow of his voice, and almost see the sparkle of winter sun on ice or hear the chiming of ice crystals on pine trees. Kivistö's voice and the tune rise in pitch and hang for a moment suspended on a high note, then both sounds end suddenly as he slumps in an astral coma.

This is a quest with a rating of 3 and will thus take 3D6 hours of real time. Just to make this a bit interesting for the characters, every third hour or so, roll on the Quest Table.

AFTER THE HORSE HAS BOLTED

Still confident? Almost over now, isn't it? Hose those hopes, chummers—it ain't over till the gutlady warbles.

Ingersoll's aquaculture operation is based in sparsely populated Snohomish (page 116-118 in the *Seattle Sourcebook*, map reference 6M on page 165), along the Snohomish River. It consists of two complexes of fish pens, a refrigerated warehouse and processing plant, and the office center. The surrounding land is largely scrub-

ARVO KIVISTÖ

"I feel a long way from home. Your help, my friends, will be invaluable to me and to Finland. *Kiitos*. All of Pietasaar will toast your souls, and there will always be a spare fish for you."

Quotes

"Problems? No matter, I am a Finn."

"As a *tjetajat*, to hunt the *sejda's hatlija* will be no problem. Agreed?"

"Stuffers? Have you any fish?"

Commentary

Kivistö is an impressive man, tall and strong, a vigorous 45-year-old dressed in conservative good taste. Again, to look down on him for his alien unsophistication would be a mistake. He is dedicated and is a level 1 Initiate magician (*tjetajat*, in Finnish). He is also proud, conscious both of his personal dignity and his responsibility to restore the honor of his little part of his beloved Finland.

He carries just one suitcase and wears an armored coat. He has a small Valmet P-93 autopistol under his jacket (a light pistol comparable to the Ceska vz/120). He labors under one geas: He may only cast magic while centering (see Finnish Magic).

Attributes:

Body: 4
Quickness: 3
Strength: 4
Charisma: 6
Willpower: 6
Essence: 6
Magic: 7
Reaction: 4

Skills:

Boats: 4
Conjuring: 6
Finnish History: 7
Firearms: 3
Leadership: 2
Magical Theory: 6
Play *Kantele*: 4
Sing *Runot*: 4
Sorcery: 6

Magic:

Detect Object: 4
Clout: 6
Heal Light Wounds: 6
"Special Spell": 6
Stabilize: 3
Falcon Form: 6
Heal Medium Wounds: 5

land, dotted with rusted auto shell, fly-tipped heaps of rubbish and a few leaking barrels of chemical waste. See the Ingersoll Aquaculture Map.

From scouting the place out, the PCs can discover that security is adequate, but hardly extensive: The operation is guarded by razorwire fencing strung with capacitance wires, some buried motion sensors inside the perimeter, and guards at fixed stations and in two open-topped lectrojeps on random patrol. One GMC Beachcraft Patroller with an assault cannon is parked over the island-based guard station. More importantly, Kivistö—or any character using astral perception—will notice that since losing its wagemage, Ingersoll's magic security has been assigned to some very bush-league deputies. With satisfaction, Kivistö says he will be able to cast his spell from well outside the perimeter—up to 100 meters from the office block.

Still, there may be some trouble if the characters just wander onto the scene. For example, some chipped-out meathead who thinks he's Robin Hood (a Pedestrian—see page 116 of *Sprawl Sites*—with Projectile Weapons: 2 and a Ranger X Compound Bow) or a Wiz Kid Mage (NPC archetype on page 121 of *Sprawl Sites*) out on the jazz. Nothing nasty, just incidents which are hardly worth mentioning—except that shooting or causing a commotion might arouse the interest of the Ingersoll guards. (These are Corporate Security Guards from page 165 of *Shadowrun*, with Fichetti 500s and one FN HAR between the three of them; they arrive on ground by jeep or hovercraft.)

But the shadowrunners are too bright to fall into such an obvious trap, neh? No problem. The wheels are readied; everyone's safety is uncached; and Kivistö gets down to his wizwork.

Suddenly, problem. Halfway through his routine, Kivistö dries up. "Ei! Missa on *sejda*! It's not there. The stone isn't there!"

SHELL GAME

It's time to bug out and have a think. The truth of the matter is that once tipped off about Kivistö's mission, Ingersoll's veep handed the problem over to her bosses at NorthWest Nutritions, who promptly commandeered the *sejda* (the midnight truck, if the characters got to hear about it). It's now sitting pretty in NorthWest's wagemage's office, while he tries to work out how to tap it (he should try singing).

Exactly what they do next is up to the characters, their strengths and sources. Here are a few options with possible outcomes.

Corp Connections: Does a suit owe a PC a favor? Have the characters met a Mr. Johnson who could almost be human? Someone with his finger on the pulse or the right numbers in his datafax could tip the characters off to Ingersoll's link with NorthWest and the fact that Ingersoll may be being run down by its parent prior to some make-or-break venture. Unless you want to be merciful, either bury this information in random and useless data on fish through-yields and leverage stock buyouts being torpedoed by poison pills, or check to see if the aforementioned contact has the info: The contact finds the information on a Target Number 6 Corp Etiquette or Intelligence test, with one roll allowed per hour's active searching.

Local Scum: No place in Seattle is empty. Even in this god forsaken corner of Snohomish there are drunken and drugged down-and-outs sheltering in the rusty auto shells and streetwise SINless people scavenging for spare parts and recyclable metal. Maybe someone saw that truck leave that night. Ask him right, and he might even tell you. Ask him real nice, and he might have seen whose truck it was.

Insider: Ingersoll has kept this under a security blanket, but the rumor mill is ever triumphant. There are guards who covered the loading of the stone, gatekeepers who let the truck in and out, warehousemen warned off "that crate from Finland" and so on. Maybe one feels like earning a few extra nuyen, just in case Ingersoll goes down.

Ingersoll & Berkeley Tower: This beautiful tower in Downtown Seattle (map reference G12 on pages 166-167 of *Seattle Sourcebook*) is part of Val Sas-



sinnian's empire but would be the first thing to be sold off in the attempt to shore up NorthWest's slipping share price. At the moment, it's crawling with real estate assessors and prospective buyers. It would be a simple matter to slip in with such a group. Once inside the wards, either Kivistö or anyone with astral perception can tell that the *sejda* isn't there. Any doorman or office flunky will also freely pass on the fact that Sassinian hasn't been at the tower for weeks, but seems to be living in the NorthWest offices.

Ingersoll & Berkeley Soy Processing: The other NorthWest subsid in the area may seem an obvious option, but as financial collapse threatens, the two companies' respective vice presidents are engaged in furious corporate in-fighting. I & B's Gonley Vanderson knows Sassinian is up to something and has sold the idea to the head office. He doesn't know what is up, but makes no secret of his impotent fury. Any I & B insider will pass this on, and Vanderson might even be roped in as support if the characters have the time, wits and contacts.

Deckrunning: At last, a real opportunity for some up close and personal matrix work. As noted elsewhere, NorthWest has been quietly stripping Ingersoll in case it folds. Not only is physical security lax, but in the matrix Ingersoll's net seems uncannily dim and empty. Nevertheless, the information is here to be found, and

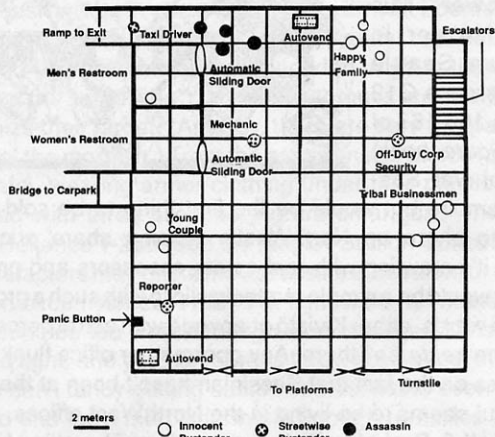
FINNISH MAGIC

Even if the mathematicians can boil it all down to the same theorems and concepts, local idioms and practices mean the actual forms magic takes in different parts of the world can be very different. After all, belief is itself an important influence on matters arcane.

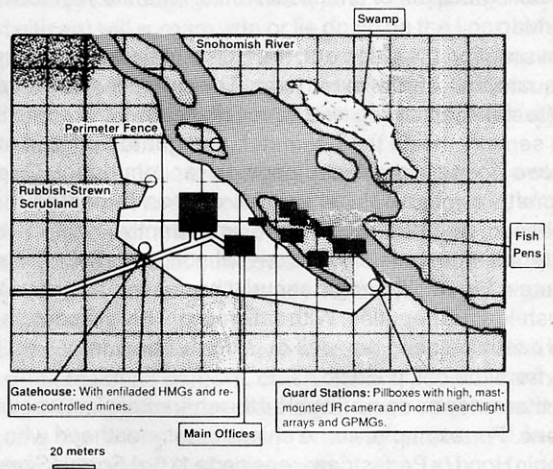
The Finnish-cycle *tjetajat* is a namer of names. In his world, everything and everyone has its own spirit, its *haltija*, and power is about knowing and manipulating the names and identities of the *haltija*. In most circumstances this is not of critical relevance: If, say, the mage doesn't know the name of the razorgoon about to deliver some 9mm perforation, he'll have been taught various symbolic formulae and provisionally tag the target with some working name like "soldier" or "footpad." For the relatively crude manipulations of most street magic, this is enough, and just means that the drain check is one harder. If the mage knows a name—or has spoken to, touched or otherwise interacted with the target—there is no drain check penalty. If, on the other hand, the mage knows the target well or is acquainted with its genealogy, the drain tests are one easier and the spell is one harder to resist.

But the nature of this magic system does mean that the most sophisticated magics require a knowledge of names and family trees. In the case of the most powerful magics, this knowledge also involves the true name, which takes an astral quest to discover.

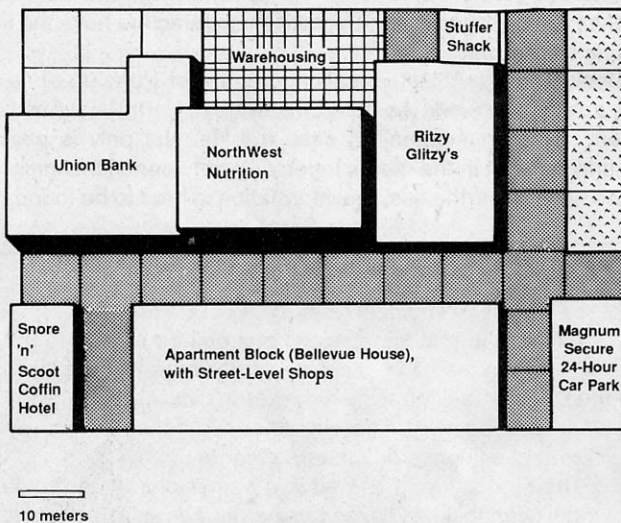
Finnish magic is also both oral and musical, and usually involves either speaking the *runots* (runes) or playing on a traditional musical instrument—usually either the *quodbas* (drums) or *kantele* (harp). Initiates who are centering will do so by using one of these methods.



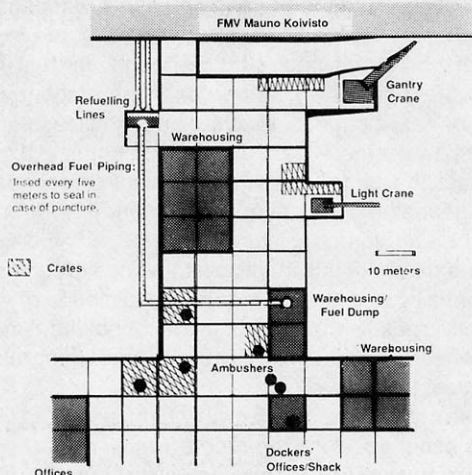
Maglev Station Concourse



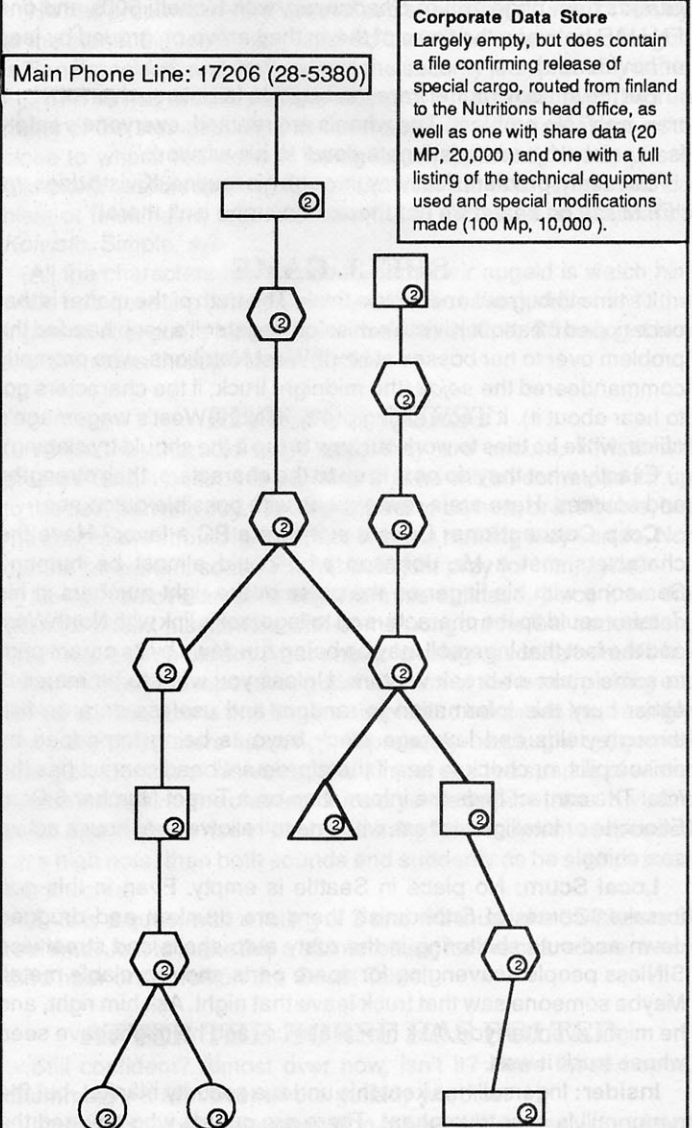
Ingersoll Aquaculture



Northwest Nutrition



Jetty



there's even some paydata lying about. See the Ingersoll Matrix System Map.

Kivistö: The characters may be unlucky and not come up with any information. If necessary, Kivistö will use the stone's true name to cast a special location spell. The problem is that time is running out, and he needs some weird and wonderful ingredients. If you have to help the PCs out with this sort of deus ex machina, at least make them work for it. Send them in every direction, gathering a griffon's beak here, a powdered reindeer's hoof there, and a hand-thrown pottery bowl to mix it all in. Kivistö will do his bit, read out some bearings (to the NorthWest head offices) and then fall, exhausted, for at least 12 hours of sleep. Watch that clock!

GETTING IT RIGHT

One way or another the characters have worked out that the stone is over at NorthWest Nutrition. Time to repeat the routine, only this time it's not so smooth. For one thing, NorthWest's astral wards are more effective, so Kivistö will have to get a bit closer. Like within 20 meters. This raises some interesting tactical questions.

NorthWest's offices fill a rather anonymous mirorglass and plascrete block in Tacoma's Fife district (map reference G22 on page 171 of *Seattle Sourcebook*), which is backed by extensive warehousing. (See the Northwest Nutrition Map.) The characters could try to break into the rear, but first they would have to deal with a five-meter wall topped with charged capacitance wires and studded with IR alarms. Behind this, the warehouses are watched by computer-controlled cameras and patrolled by armed guards. The final clincher is the fact that Kivistö will have to sing and play to cast his spell, so the PC group will have to be near the truck, which would involve getting through a double-guarded entrance. This is *not* the way to go.

On one side of NorthWest is a branch of the Union Athabaskan Bank of Commerce, the sort of shady outfit that spends disproportionate time processing large sums in credsticks whose SIN circuits have "malfunctioned" and dealing with faceless voices across secure phonelinks. Characters may have heard of it (a Corp or Street Etiquette check against a Target Number of 6). In any case, they would soon notice those subtle telltales every experienced shadowrunner looks for, like large numbers of heavily armed men in the lobby and on the rooftop, an armored van parked opposite the building, and armored iris doors ready to seal the building off in an emergency. Treat Union Athabaskan as a large bank with double the staff, half the customers, and a system coated in black ICE.

More promising is the building on the other side of NorthWest, a rather ramshackle nightclub called Ritzzy Glitzzy's. Distinctly down-market, it has a rear garage entrance leading onto a small alley out back—easy parking for, say, a light truck, just to pick one random example out of the air. At night the club becomes fairly busy, as drifters and mundanes of every shape, size and subspecies come to dance or prop up the bar (and then, as greater quantities of cheap synthbeer pour down their throats, to be propped up by it). At 1 a.m. the raucous stomp 'n' thrash band of the day or the week packs up, and from then to 2 a.m. there is a mass throwing out. By 2:30 a.m., the club has been sluiced down and shut up, and is ready to open again at 9 a.m. for the early morning drinkers. Use the Nightclub archetype in *Sprawl Sites* (page 29), with an enclosed garage/storage area behind.

The club is owned by a chiphead millionaire inheritor who leaves management to a determinedly gloomy ork everyone calls "Sunshine." She, like most people, is approximately law abiding. She won't be party to anything which is obviously and gratuitously illegal or immoral—or, more to the point, which she thinks will get her in trouble. On the other hand, she is poor, and any plausible excuse to let the characters "hire" her garage will probably prove acceptable (in case of bargaining, treat this as an opposed negotiation test, with a 1000¥ base price).

Alternatively, the PCs could either sneak or bull their way into using the garage during the day (Kivistö's spell takes about 10 minutes to cast) or try to break in at night.

The club has a simple alarm system, controlled by its equally simple computer (a Green-4 system, protected by Scramble 3). It also has physical locks and shutters requiring an axe or a check against Electronics with a Target Number of 7. More seriously, a Troll Bouncer (page 173 of *Shadowrun*) called Rumble lives in. Since he



CHRYSLER-NISSAN QUARTERBACK

The Quarterback is a light pickup truck typical of the breed and of the less-glamorous vehicles given scarce mention in the *Shadowrun* rulebook. A blocky high-rider, it is functional rather than pretty, but tough and rugged. The flatbed behind the cab can be left open or covered with a tarpaulin, and can readily take up to 16 cubic yards of cargo. 27,000¥ (though one could be rented for 100¥ a day).

Handling: 5 Speed: 40/120 Body: 3 Armor: 0 Signature: 2 Pilot: 1+ 2

QUEST TABLE

1. Kivistö suddenly gasps and moans as horrible wounds begin to open across his body, as if he were being raked by a huge cat. These wounds are equivalent to light wounding, bringing his state to medium, if he's already hurt. (Don't let him die!) If Kivistö is too badly hurt when he awakes, he may have to be taken to a hospital or streetdoc. But the word is out on the streets that Ingersoll will pay for a fingering. The characters would need to see someone discreet.

2. An unmarked helicopter flies overhead, then hovers for a full minute. Is Ingersoll onto the characters? No, the helicopter is not concerned with them, but *they* don't know that.

3. Kivistö begins to speak the *runot* under his breath and twitch.

4. Wherever the team is, it receives an appropriate (and wholly innocent) visitor: a census taker, new neighbor, sales representative, whatever. Is that a belt-looped personal hi-fi or a gun?

5. The mage begins to pant and shiver, and subliminal shadows flicker across his face. For one minute it looks like a dog's muzzle, then a skull.

6. One of the characters sees Ricky the Nose through a window, then the PCs know they're in trouble. Even in the plex, Ricky's amorality is a matter for wonder, rivalling only his ability to find people for the right price. He's lurking in the shadows opposite the PCs' safe house, and unless stopped (Snitch NPC archetype on page 118 of *Sprawl Sites*), he will leave in 10 minutes to call Ingersoll. If Kivistö is just about to awake, the team will be able to bug out just as the heavies arrive; otherwise, the team is gonna have to burn some more ammo on the two carloads of cheap muscle (three Nachtmachen Policlub members in each—see page 109 of *Sprawl Sites*—with Firearms 2 and Ruger Super Warhawks) that come screeching up.

doesn't need light, hasty shadowrunners could quite literally walk into him. One night a week or so (1 on 1D6 chance) he invites 1-6 other trolls for a few games of poker. If he has any warning, he'll be armed with a Colt America L36; otherwise, he'll just make do with a chair (treat as a staff) or bottles from the bar (nonsaerodynamic weapons doing (Str+2)L1 Stun damage).

A final option would be to cast the spell in the road. Given that the ritual involves once again rolling out the elk's skin (two meters by three meters) and 10 minutes of playing and *runot* speaking, along with the odd atmospheric side-effect, like a corona of blue lightning and a mysterious vortex of icy Scandinavian air, it's not really the sort of thing to do under a tarp on the back of a light truck. Perhaps a furniture removal van would be more appropriate? Or a faked street repairs shack? This plan lacks subtlety—any vehicle on the street may arouse the interest of NorthWest's security or, more likely, the bank's. If Union Athabaskan has a major consignment due in or out any minute, its security may be inclined to send a panzer out to blow away any potential ambushers, no questions asked. The streets around here are also parking-prohibited, so there is always the danger of an overzealous Lone Star rolling up.

THE ASP (ANNE ST. PAUL)

"No one frags with me, chummer. You got smarts, no question; you got wire, sure, but you ain't got the edge. So long, meat."

Quotes

"Geek 'em!"

"He's mine!"

"I tell you how to fill in a form, sarariman? You're in my world now, drekhead, and we'll play by my rules."

Commentary

The Asp is a mean samurai, no question; she is a bundle of sharp edges and quick temper. She works the corp circuit now, but her roots are in the street, and her contempt for corp niceties is a trademark. She's also a para-magical physical adept (see *The Grimoire*), one of those people on the borders of the arcane world whose potentials are channelled into superhuman physical feats rather than spellcasting.

She has the equivalent of level 2 increased reactions (+2 Reaction, +2D6 Initiative) and some *automatic* successes to use just like normal pool rolls: two Athletic and three Unarmed Combat successes. In combat she is cocky, obscene, energetic and almost ridiculously fast. She tends to use her Athletics skill (and autosuccesses) for a lot of swinging from gantries, etc., and her other autosuccesses as Dodges.

At all times she wears Kevlar clothes and carries a Colt Manhunter. In the ambush, she will also be carrying a Beretta 70 SMG (just an old-fashioned gal, she's a sucker for a gun with an integral suppressor).

Attributes

Body: 4
Quickness: 6
Strength: 4
Charisma: 2
Intelligence: 5
Willpower: 6
Essence: 6
Magic: 6
Reaction: 5 (7)

Skills

Athletics: 6 (+2 successes)
Drive: 3
Etiquette (street): 4
Firearms: 6
Interrogation: 3
Stealth: 2
Unarmed Combat: 6 (+3 successes)

PULLING THE STONE

The PCs have lined up their plan—all that remains is for Kivistö to yank the stone from NorthWest's clutches and onto the waiting wheels. This time the initiate's much more hyped up. "It is there, so near, I can feel it." If the ship is due to sail soon, Kivistö will also be feeling a sense of urgency. As soon as the stone is hijacked, the shadowrunners will have to set off directly for the Pohjois-Karjala Shipping Line berth on Pier 62 (Downtown, map reference H12 on page 166-167 of *Seattle Sourcebook*).

So Kivistö gets down to his magic. The notes from his *kantele* hang in the air like shards of crystal, and for a moment it seems as though the crisp, chill air of Finland cuts through the muggy Seattle smog. As he slips deeper into an astral trance, the tone of his *runot* begins to rise. Six or seven minutes after he starts, alarm klaxons start going off all over the NorthWest offices. If the characters have already attracted some hostile interest from, say, Union Athabaskan guards, this might, as it were, "trigger" a more active response.

Then there's a creaking and a groaning, and the nearest wall of the building begins to bulge and crack. NorthWest security guards (Corporate Security Guards—page 165 of *Shadowrun*—in partial armor with Ares Predators) spill out and look incredulously up as the wall gives way. The stone, a meter-sided cube of dark rock which is carved on every side with *runot* lettering, whirls out, wrapped in a flickering blue corona of its own, and silently sweeps down onto the (presumably waiting) wheels. At the same time, NorthWest's wagemage, a usually rather slick-looking number called Zee Mercury, who now looks rather battered and flustered (Street Mage archetype—page 45 of *Shadowrun*—Detector orientation, but also with Mana Bolt 3), sticks his head out of the hole in the wall and screams at the triggerboys to "stop the fragging stone!"

Security's reaction depends on the perceived situation. If the stone disappears into the club's garage, the guards will probably cautiously investigate, while if it lands on the back of a truck which screams off, a couple will open fire while the others rush for a car (an Americar). There may be a car chase of sorts, or Mercury might have the chance to fire off a Mana Bolt. Slot and run, chummers.

MAUNO KOIVISTO

Assuming that getting away from NorthWest isn't too much trouble, the last stage is to get Kivistö and the stone to the *Mauno Koivisto*. You could, I suppose, let the characters fulfill this without any hassle. But, hey, why go easy just when everyone's having

"SUNSHINE" (DAWN PFEIFFER)

"So what if it's a nice day. It's all this greenhouse effect. Of course I know what you meant, I'm not senile. Yet. Anyway, what do you want? Time's money—or rather, it's less loss."

Quotes

"I'm an honest businesswoman. I'll always be poor."

"This is gonna mean trouble—I know it."

"Frank, introduce this bum to the sidewalk."

Commentary

Sunshine—this nickname represents the height of satire at Glitzy's, so be ready to have sniggering locals explain it to the shadowrunners three or four times—may not be fun company, a hotshot administrator, witty or cultured. But she's competent, has a rough-and-ready charisma and is relatively honest. She may preside over a gloomy and decaying club where alcoholic paralysis is the order of the day, but at least she's kept it clear of drugs, chips and the encroachments of the local Yak.

Use the Bartender archetype (page 163 of *Shadowrun*), with no Sympathetic Listening skill, but Body, Willpower and Strength 5.

such fun? The fact is, it's not too difficult to guess who might have snatched the stone given that Ingersoll knew Kivistö was in town. To put two and two together and suspect that a Finnish ship about to leave might have something to do with it isn't beyond the corporate mind—suits got smarts, too.

Ingersoll's chief gunsels, Anne St. Paul (The Asp, remember?), scrambles a team and gets herself over to the docks ASAP in NorthWest's president's exec chopper. Putting down in Denny Park and double-timing it the rest of the way, The Asp and company should arrive just before the good guys, unless the team has got something special lined up in the way of transport.

The Asp and her group prepare a rough and ready ambush, and hunker down in wait. What follows depends on how you want to play it and what the characters do. The Asp has mustered six of her best (Street Samurais from page 46 of *Shadowrun* with partial body armor, carrying Ares Predators and Uzi III smartguns), and together they are a pretty tough combination. But the characters are no angels, and they may be suspicious or see one of the ambushers (a Target Number 5 Intelligence test). Or one of the samurai might jump the gun and open fire before the trap is fully sprung.

The jetty is a crowded place for a firefight, full of crates of cargo, liquid transfer pipes and gantries. In addition, dockers and Finnish sailors at the other end of the jetty might get involved if they find out what the firefight's about. (Did I call this a referee's instant equalizer? No, surely not.) There are a dozen Pohjois-Karjala dock workers of Scandinavian extraction with makeshift weapons and another dozen sailors. (Dock Workers are from page 109 of *Sprawl Sites* with makeshift weapons. Two, on guard detail, have vz88V assault rifles, Firearms: 2 and armored jackets.) Perhaps one of the characters could get through to them or radio them. Or Kivistö could cast Falcon Form and fly over to them.

Play this final confrontation as a confused, hard-fought slugmatch, making full use of the "terrain." The gantry crane, for example, would make an excellent weapon, of sorts, to extract gunsels from behind barricades. Similarly, punctured feedpipes might be empty

or might contain combustible fuels.

It might be a good idea to keep The Asp alive. She's an interesting character and could crop up in a later adventure, whether as a vengeful nemesis or a grudgingly respectful fellow-drinker in Fenris Nacht. (Perhaps a burst of autofire smashing into her back, pitching her jerking body into the scumslicked water—no more sign of her. "No one could have survived that.")

Too late, the cops roll up in force. Knowing that the *Mauno* is removing valuable artwork, they're expecting to find an attempted snatch and hence can be fed a story about the Finns and their "freelance security specialists" foiling an evil plot. For this reason they will also not see anything suspicious in the loading of a cube of carved rock. They'll just growl around, sniffing at the characters to see if there's anything they could book them for. Then they'll leave.

And so, in due course, will the stone, the ship and Kivistö. Kivistö will thank the PCs emotionally, with repeated invitations for them to stop in at Pietasaar next time they're in northern Europe. Stories of this run will circulate in Seattle's Scandinavian community and may be parlayed into contacts or lead to more opportunities.

The financial papers are full of news of Ingersoll's financial crisis for a week. Then out comes a new share issue, which is snapped up by an anonymous buyer. Sassinian announces that Ingersoll is moving into the coastal fishing market, under its new "director of coastal operations," Jiro Yabuki. People looking at the specs for the new inshore fishing vessels Ingersoll begins ordering note their extravagantly high speeds and the suspicion of stealth design. "Almost like smugglers' speedboats," says the respected editor of *Seattle Marine Gazette*, the day before his auto crash. Speculation that the Yakuza may have been the new silent partner who stepped in suddenly tails off. But that's another story, *neh?* Ω



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r. Elwyn Darke, a prominent occultist and an authority on folk superstitions, has been murdered in the tiny Louisiana town of Bayou Perdu. The local police have no suspects in the killing. The investigators may elect to look into the matter on their own or may be asked by one of Darke's colleagues at Marshall University in Indiana to find out what really happened. Or the player characters may simply be travelling in the area. The investigators should not be well acquainted with the late Dr. Darke.

KEEPER'S INFORMATION

Bayou Perdu is the site of a strange annual ritual performed by the inhabitants at a circle of standing stones just outside town. The purpose of the ritual is to reinforce the power of a mystic sign that keeps a horrible Shoggoth imprisoned beneath the stones. Darke was attempting to break the spell and release the monster when he was killed by the local deputy sheriff, Breaux.

This adventure is intended as a change of pace and a way for Keepers to surprise players who have become so paranoid and reactionary that they reflexively annihilate anything out of the ordinary. In this case, the "sinister townsfolk" are the *good guys*, and the murdered man was an evil cultist.

BAYOU PERDU

Bayou Perdu (population 1022) is a small hamlet deep in the swamp country of Louisiana. It is located 15 miles southwest of Houma and 50 miles from New Orleans. It can be reached by a single poorly paved road or by boat along the bayou for which it is named. The town's chief industries are rice farming and fishing.

The town consists of a small cluster of houses and shops where the road crosses Bayou Perdu. The town is surrounded by swamps, which are thickly wooded with skeletal cypress trees wreathed in Spanish moss. The buildings are all shabby and run-down looking. Bayou Perdu has a drugstore with a lunch counter (Landry's Drugstore), a doctor's office (Dr. Mouton), a deputy sheriff's office, a church (Our Lady of Eternal Vigilance), and a general store with gas pumps (Mouton's General Store). As the PCs enter the town in the middle of the afternoon, they will see few people about. Several young men are lounging around on the porch of Mouton's General Store, but otherwise the streets are deserted.

Unfriendly Reception: The investigators will not exactly be welcomed to Bayou Perdu with open arms. The cajuns are fairly suspicious of outsiders to begin with

The Bayou Ritual

By James L. Cambias

(especially since such outsiders generally try to force them to abandon their native language and culture, tax their meager incomes, or take away their wine and beer). In Bayou Perdu, the inhabitants have even more reason to be unfriendly. If the player characters attempt to talk with anyone on the street, the natives will claim to speak only French. The loungers at the store will be downright hostile and will not very subtly encourage the PCs not to linger in Bayou Perdu.

There is one house with rooms for rent, but the landlady, Mrs. Landry, will demand the outrageous sum of \$10 per person to stay the night. A successful Bargain skill roll may persuade her to reduce the rate to \$7 per night. She warns the PCs that she wants no trouble of any kind in her house. The rooms are small but very clean, and all the beds have mosquito netting to keep guests from being bitten as they sleep.

Deputy Sheriff: Deputy Breaux is the local representative of the authorities. He is a conscientious official and will do his best to be fair and polite to the player characters, although he warns that if he gets any complaints from the townspeople, he'll lock them up.

If the PCs ask Deputy Breaux about Darke's murder, he can provide the following information in a very businesslike manner: Darke was found dead, shot to death with a shotgun at close range, among the standing stones just outside of town. The estimated time of death was 2 a.m. It was a rainy night, so no footprints were found. It is impossible to trace the weapon.

Breaux says he suspects that Darke stumbled across a group of bootleggers and was murdered. He claims to have no knowledge about the stones or what Darke might have been doing up there. A Psychology roll will reveal that Breaux is probably lying and seems to be afraid of something.

Darke's possessions are being kept in Breaux's office. If the PCs want to examine them, they will have to make a suc-

cessful Debate or Fast Talk roll. The property consists of some ordinary clothing, a wallet containing an Indiana driver's license and \$200 in cash, a book entitled *Occult Sites in North America*, and a strange gold ring. The ring is decorated with a little face that anyone with any Mythos knowledge at all will recognize as being the visage of mighty Cthulhu itself.

The book is a listing of all Indian sacred spots, haunted houses, and places where strange phenomena occur in the United States and Canada. It is very complete. From the standpoint of an investigator it is too complete, for it lists 10 bogus occult sites for each genuine one. The listing for Bayou Perdu says the following:

"Bayou Perdu, Louisiana, has a fairly interesting stone circle, said to have been built by Indians. A legend of the vicinity claims that the Devil frequently plays the flute among the stones."

Dr. Mouton: Doctor Albert Mouton is the local general practitioner, and performed the autopsy. He will confirm Deputy Breaux's account of the murder almost exactly word for word. Mouton is a bit more friendly than the other townspeople and has a large collection of books at his house. He can answer questions about local history.

If the PCs ask Mouton about the stones or the annual ritual, he will give factual, but undetailed, answers. The ritual is performed every year at about this time. It is an old tradition handed down from the Indians. The stones seem to have been put up by the Indians. Beyond these meager facts, he will not go.

CIRCLE OF STONES

Just outside of town is a small rise crowned with oak trees. (This kind of rise is common in swamp country and is called a *chenier*.) This chenier is unusual, for at the top is a circle of 13 large, upright stones, about 100 yards across. A successful Geology roll will determine that these stones are not from the area; they occur naturally in the Appalachians.

Scene of the Crime: The spot where the body was found is roped off, and frequent rains have obliterated all traces of the shooting. A successful Spot Hidden roll, however, will allow the PCs to notice a book lying under some bushes. Apparently Darke dropped it when he was killed. The book is a facsimile edition of the *Phakotic Manuscripts*. It is damp and starting to get mildewed, but is quite readable. An examination will show that one set of pages is spattered with blood, indicating the place Darke had it open to when he was killed.

One passage on that page is particularly noteworthy:

"The Sarsen-circles are places of mighty Power, and therein may be confined Those who come from Without. But the stones weaken from season to season and must be strengthened again when the skies are right. The stones must have their blood, and the ancient words must be said, else the Power that is in the stones will falter."

Tante Marie: Not far from the stone circle is the cabin of "Tante Marie" Breaux, an incredibly ancient old lady. She speaks only a little English and will at first be very suspicious of outsiders. If addressed in French, she will be more friendly, and a successful attempt to Fast Talk her will result in her inviting the PCs inside for coffee.

If the player characters ask Tante Marie about the stones, she will tell them the following:

"Oui, les rochers, they are very old. The Indians raised the stones, or perhaps the ones before them. Beneath them lives one of the old bad ones. It is bad luck to speak of such things at this time of year."

She will say nothing more about the stones.

If asked about the murder, she has this to say:

"Just before dawn, it was. Julien killed him up among the stones. C'est triste, but he was a bad man and shouldn't have been there."

She shrugs fatalistically and will not answer any more questions.

LIBRARY RESEARCH

If the players use the library of Tulane University in New Orleans or L.S.U. in Baton Rouge, they can learn that Bayou Perdu was settled by Acadian refugees from Canada in 1761 and has a population of 1022.

There are only two other mentions of interest: One of the early French Jesuit visitors to the area in 1695 noted the strange circle of stones and described a barbaric pagan ritual performed by the Indians there at this time of year. In 1875, a historian visited the area and noted with amusement the "quaint folk festival" held each year on the same date.

There is no library in Bayou Perdu, but at the town church Father Boudreaux has some old chronicles kept by his predecessors. The priest is one of the group that maintains the spell at the stones, so the PCs will have to convince him that they are on his side. A player character would have to succeed by rolling under half of his Oratory skill in order to convince Boudreaux. The local chronicles are written entirely in French and only mention the ritual once. In 1825, they note:

"An attempt was made by certain persons to prevent the annual rite at the

stones. They ceased their opposition when the truths of the matter were explained to them."

If the PCs pretend to be some sort of evil cultists, there is no way they can get anything from Father Boudreaux, and he will inform Deputy Breaux. After that, everyone will be *even more* unfriendly, if that seems possible.

STRANGERS IN TOWN

The investigators are not the only strangers interested in Bayou Perdu. The day after the PCs arrive, two men will come to town. They are Mr. Gray and Mr. Waite, and claim to be friends of the late Mr. Darke. They will occupy the remaining rooms at Mrs. Landry's house and will start asking many of the same questions as the PCs.

They will be friendly with the investigators, sharing any discoveries they make about the town, but not revealing very much about themselves or their connection with Dr. Darke. At their first meeting with the player characters, Gray and Waite will make a curious remark: "Soon night will fall." (They will say this even if it is morning.)

A successful Cthulhu Mythos roll will recognize the words as part of a verse from the *Seven Cryptical Books of Hsan*. The correct response is, "*And Darkness will spread its wings across the world.*" If the investigators give this response correctly, Gray and Waite will be more communicative. They still won't tell exactly why they are in town, but they will tell the PCs that Darke was attempting to discover how the stones were enchanted, and what purpose they served, when he was killed.

If the player characters try to search the strangers' room, they will find a copy of the *Phakotic Manuscripts* (identical to the one Darke was carrying) and a peculiar dagger engraved with writing in no known alphabet. There is also a letter from Darke, which says:

*Brothers,
A great discovery. The circle of stones here at Bayou Perdu contains something of enormous power. I will attempt to dissolve the enchantment on the sarsens tonight. If I fail, you must prevent the local idiots from renewing the containment. Soon it will be Night.*

E.D.

THE NIGHT OF THE RITUAL

On the night of the ritual, about three days after the PCs arrive in Bayou Perdu, 13 townspeople will gather at the stones at midnight.

Father Boudreaux and Dr. Mouton will be among them, and the ceremony is

CALL of CTHULHU

guarded by Sheriff Breaux and four other local toughs armed with shotguns. Under the direction of Father Boudreaux, who reads from an ancient copy of *True Magick*, the 13 participants chant and spatter the stones with the blood of a freshly killed goat. The rite takes an hour to complete and temporarily drains one point of POW from each participant. Player characters overhearing the rite will note a similarity to the spell Create Elder Sign, if they know the spell.

Waite and Gray will attempt to interfere with the ceremony in order to release whatever is being kept bound. They won't try a frontal assault on the circle—the townspeople have too much firepower. Instead, the two men will summon a Hunting Horror of Nyarlathotep, using Mrs. Landry as a blood sacrifice. Any of the investigators remaining at the house will undoubtedly hear the chanting and the muffled screams coming from the backyard. If the PCs do nothing, the Hunting Horror will swoop down upon the stone circle and devour those performing the ritual.

If the ritual is not performed before midnight, then at 1 a.m. the chenier will tremble, the stones will topple, and the ground will erupt as a titanic Shoggoth bursts forth, smashes the village, devours anyone who does not escape, then oozes into the bayou and disappears.

NPCS

The characters will have an occasion to interact with the following NPCs in this adventure.

Deputy Sheriff Breaux

Julien Breaux is a rugged-looking man in his early thirties. He served in the army during the Great War and returned home with a bad lung after being gassed. He is a good policeman and keeps order in Bayou Perdu. But he understands that there are some occasions when the laws of the state of Louisiana just don't apply, and killing Darke was one of those situations.

Breaux is normally quite friendly, but the Darke incident has made him suspicious of strangers, and the investigators will find him very brusque and uncommunicative. Breaux is always armed with his .38 revolver and carries a 12-gauge pump shotgun in dangerous situations.

STR 15, CON 6, SIZ 15, INT 14, POW 11, DEX 12, APP 10, EDU 14, SAN 65, HP 8.

Skills: Speak French 85%, Read/Write Latin 60%, Speak Latin 50%, Psychology 40%, Debate 20%, Occult 20%, Cthulhu Mythos 10%.

Dr. Mouton

Pascal Mouton is the only doctor in Bayou Perdu and the surrounding area. He is a heavyset, red-nosed man who is quick to prescribe a little red wine for medicinal purposes. He isn't sure if he believes this stuff about the stones, but is willing to keep the facts hidden to protect Deputy Breaux. Mouton doesn't generally go armed, but if pressed he will defend himself with a surgical scalpel (treat as a small knife).

STR 8, CON 7, SIZ 14, INT 15, POW 12, DEX 10, APP 6, EDU 16, SAN 60, HP 10.

Skills: First Aid 90%, Diagnose Disease 80%, Treat Disease 75%, Speak French 75%, Treat Poison 70%, Read/Write Latin 50%, Knife 35%, Pharmacy 30%, Chemistry 25%, Psychoanalyze 15%.

Mrs. Landry

Clair Landry is a stout widow in late middle age. She rents out rooms to visitors and owns some land which her nephew farms. Darke rented a room from her, and she noticed something odd and unpleasant

about him. Since then, she has been suspicious of strangers, particularly those asking questions about things which should be left alone.

STR 6 CON 8, SIZ 12, INT 10, POW 16, DEX 14, APP 11, EDU 6, SAN 80, HP 10.

Skills: Speak French 75%, Listen 75%, Bargain 60%, Sneak 40%.

Young Toughs

These young men work as fishermen or trappers in the swamps around Bayou Perdu, but their chief love in life is lounging around outside Mouton's General Store, drinking home-brewed wine. They are basically friendly, but are suspicious of outsiders—especially nosy ones. They all have effectively identical attributes and abilities. All carry hunting knives, but they prefer to fight with fists and clubs. On the night of the ritual, four of them will be around the chenier, armed with 20-gauge shotguns.

STR 16, CON 16, SIZ 12, INT 8, POW 10, DEX 12, APP 8, EDU 4, SAN 50, HP 14.

Skills: Speak French 80%, Punch 70%, Track 65%, Climb 65%, Swim 50%, Club 45%, Shotgun 40%, Sneak 40%, Rifle 30%, Camouflage 20%, Sing 20%, Occult 5%.

Marie Breaux

Tante Marie is well over 80 years old and has lived all her life in the tiny cottage near the chenier. She knows an astonishing amount about the plants and animals of the region, and has a great many charms and hexes to ward off evil. Her native language is French, and her English is heavily accented.

STR 4, CON 8, SIZ 6, INT 14, POW 17, DEX 12, APP 6, EDU 4, SAN 70, HP 7.

Skills: Botany 65%, First Aid 60%, Speak English 50%, Zoology 45%, Diagnose Disease 40%, Occult 40%, Treat Disease 35%, Cthulhu Mythos 15%. She knows the spells Heal (which costs three Magic Points and

no SAN, and which halves the recovery time for damage) and Elder Sign.

Mr. Gray

Edward Gray is a member of a sinister cult called the Brotherhood of Night, which serves Nyarlathotep. Darke was also one of the Brotherhood, and Gray and Waite have come to Bayou Perdu to find out why he was killed. Gray is a small, dapper man with piercing eyes. He owns a .45-caliber automatic and will not hesitate to use it.

STR 9, CON 11, SIZ 9, INT 13, POW 16, DEX 12, APP 10, EDU 15, SAN 0, HP 10.

Skills: Read/Write Latin 65%, Cthulhu Mythos 65%, Occult 40%, Archaeology 35%, Sneak 30%, Handgun 30%, Debate 20%. He knows the following spells: Summon Hunting Horror, Bind Hunting Horror, Contact Nyarlathotep, Voorish Sign, Contact Deep One.

Mr. Waite

Frederick Waite is a very fat, slow-moving man whose placid expression conceals the fact that he is a dangerous fanatic devoted to serving the evil will of Nyarlathotep. Mr. Waite always carries a large, sharp knife with him, and enjoys using it.

STR 13, CON 6, SIZ 16, INT 14, POW 16, DEX 9, APP 8, EDU 16, SAN 0, HP 11.

Skills: Read/Write Greek 60%, Knife 55%, Cthulhu Mythos 50%, Anthropology 45%, Spot Hidden 40%, Archaeology 30%. He knows the following spells: Summon Hunting Horror, Bind Hunting Horror, Contact Nyarlathotep, Shriving.

Hunting Horror

This hideous servant of Nyarlathotep is a huge, black winged serpent, whose form continually shifts and changes.

STR 30, CON 12, SIZ 30, INT 15, POW 22, DEX 15, HP 21, Move: 7/11 flying, Armor: 9 points.

Skills: Bite 65% (for 4D6 damage), Tail 90% (Grapples). The Hunting Horror cannot be impaled by normal weapons. It knows the following spells: Shriving, Contact Nyarlathotep, Create Gate. Seeing the Horror costs 1D10 SAN on a failed SAN roll.

Shoggoth

The Shoggoth is a huge, formless mass of tissue with malignant eyes opening and disappearing constantly on its surface. It will seek to destroy the town before escaping into the swamps.

STR 45, CON 12, SIZ 45, INT 6, POW 12, DEX 4, Move: 10.

Skills: Crush 100% (doing 3D6 of damage, plus an additional 6D6 per subsequent turn as it tears its victims apart). It takes minimum damage from physical weapons, cannot be impaled, takes half damage from fire, and regenerates two points per turn. Ω

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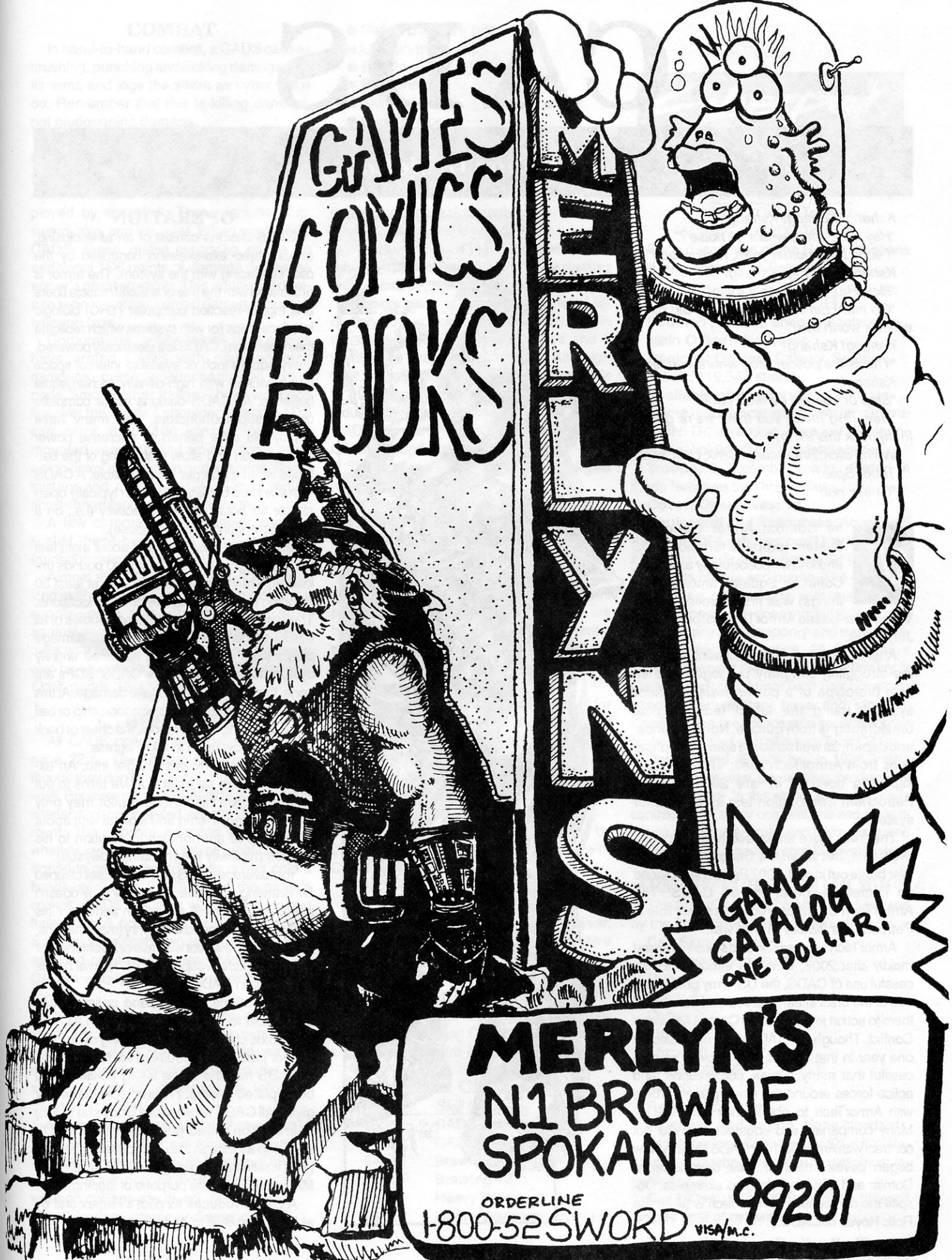


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CADS

By Legion G. McRae

Kshang! Kshang! Kshang!
 "Hey, Raz' man, wha's 'at noise?"
 "I don't hear nothin' man. Mellow out!"
 Kshang! Kshang! Kshang!
 "Hey, Raz'. Scope that thing!"
 "Oh man! Let's blaze, Dog. No old guy's
 wallet's worth this!"
 Kshang! Kshang!
 "This is the police! Stop where you are!"
 Kshang!
 "Stop or you will be fired upon!"
 "Hey, Dog [huff], you think we're gonna
 [huff] duck this thing?"
 Whirrr, click. Braaaaaap! Clink, clink, clink.
 Thud. Spash.
 "Guess not!"

The Combat Armor Defensive System (properly termed CADS and known colloquially as a Can, Coffin, or Squatch among other things) was first unveiled by the Vancouver-based ArmorTech corporation in July 2006.

After an eight-year development program, the struggling company put together a viable prototype of a power-assisted armor system, using the latest technological breakthroughs from Europe, North America, and Japan, as well as some spin-off applications from ArmorTech itself. The company signed a contract in late 2006 to have Petrochem Corporation test its new armor system.

The trials were supposed to last at least two years, but when the Second Corporate War broke out in mid-2007 Petrochem placed an immediate order for 30 CADS. The ArmorTech CADS played not a minor role in Petrochem's victory in that war.

ArmorTech's expansion and sales increased rapidly after 2007. Viewing Petrochem's successful use of CADS, the US Army purchased 100 of the units in early-J 2009 and committed them to action in the Second Central American Conflict. Though the CADS were only used for one year in that conflict, they proved so successful that many armies, corporations, and police forces around the world placed orders with ArmorTech to obtain their own CADS. Many companies and countries that did not contract with ArmorTech for CADS have by now began development of their own designs, Dornier and Militech being two examples. Despite the competition, ArmorTech is by far the Rolls Royce of CADS.



OPERATION

CADS designs consist of an all-enclosing, armor-plated exo-skeleton controlled by the pilot interfacing with the system. The armor is articulated with the use of artificial muscle fibers and trigger reaction computer (TRC) biologic interface chips (or with systems which replicate their operation). CADS are electrically powered, every square inch of available internal space being packed with high-density rechargeable batteries. All CADS designs make complete use of superconductors, and many have deployable solar panels to decrease power consumption and allow recharging of the batteries when a charger is unavailable. A CADS with standard battery packs can typically operate for six hours of normal activity (i.e., on a patrol or working in a warehouse).

Most CADS designs stand about eight feet tall and weigh approximately 1100 pounds unloaded. They are all armored with at least 30 stopping power (SP) of Kevlar on all locations. The advanced alloy and synthetic bodies of all CADS can take at least 40 structural damage points (SDP) before being rendered entirely dysfunctional. Once all of a CADS' SDPs are gone, the pilot will begin to take damage. At this point the pilot may elect to abandon ship or bail out. Depending on the model, the chest or back plates will blow open to allow egress.

CADS are fairly easy to get into. An experienced pilot takes about five turns to put one on. Inside his CADS, a pilot may only wear an armor T-shirt and a pistol with about 50 rounds of ammunition in addition to his clothes (typically a tight-fitting bodysuit).

Your average CADS pilot has himself chipped for Brawling or Melee Weapons if he doesn't possess these skills already. In addition, if his CADS mounts ranged weaponry (machineguns, rockets, etc.), the pilot will have or be chipped for the appropriate weapons skills. Martial Arts is not usable in CADS.

Corporations, armies, and police forces use CADS for hazardous jobs such as handling toxic chemicals or disposing of bombs, and for jobs which require great lifting ability. A CADS has the same lifting abilities as a body-plated cyborg. (This is represented by giving all CADS an effective Body stat of 40.)

In addition to their great strength, all CADS may leap as though they had paired cyberlegs (This is reflected by giving all CADS an effective MA stat of 15 for the purpose of leaping).

A CADS reduces its pilot's Reflex stat by at least one due to its bulk.

COMBAT

In hand-to-hand combat, a CADS causes crushing, punching and kicking damage with its arms and legs the same as cyber limbs do. Remember that this is killing damage, not bludgeoning damage.

The hands of a CADS are slightly less dextrous than those of a man. Only a few melee weapons, specially made by ArmorTech and other firms, may be employed by a CADS. These include club, sword, axe, and hammer. When swung by a CADS, these melee weapons cause an additional 1D6 points of damage due to the armor's great strength. This additional damage is on top of the normal damage for each weapon type.

Corporations, police forces, and armies have armed CADS with back-mounted miniguns, grenade launchers, and rocket pods, among other things. These weapons fire over the armor's shoulders. Most CADS can carry about 100 kilos of externally mounted weaponry and ammunition without a significant decrease in performance. Some military and corporate CADS may mount short-range ground surveillance radar units.

A few corporations are developing up-scaled, hand-held "small arms" for CADS (miniaturization in reverse!).

Almost all CADS are sealed and pressurized with either filters or an on-board air supply—often both—to make them proof against gasses. Most are also treated externally with fire-retardant coatings. They may also be shielded against radiation (see *Near Orbit*, pages 16-19).

CYBERNETICS

All CADS operate as cybervehicles (see page 22 of *The Cyberpunk Handbook*), although they don't give a bonus to the pilot's skill level. Because of this, all CADS have one set of interface plugs installed as standard equipment. The sensors mounted on a CADS, whether cybernetic or conventional, are designed to project the data they collect onto a heads-up display (HUD) inside the armor's cockpit. CADS are fitted with a radio, a loud hailer or bull horn, and audio pickups with automatic amplification and dampening for quiet and loud noises respectively. Most, if not all, CADS are equipped with two cyberoptics at the very least.

Other than those discussed above, almost any cyberenhancements can be installed in a CADS. Referees should use their own judgment, but it is suggested that they allow the use of *all except* the following cyberwear in CADS:

- Cyberarms (they already have them).
- Cyberlegs (they already have them).
- Body plating (they already have them).
- Cyberarm options (built-in "pop-up" type weapon options are okay).
- Cyberleg options and weapons (all).

- Reflex chipware (all).
- Memoryware (all).
- Boosterware (all).
- Biomonitor.
- Skin watch.
- Slice 'n' dice.

AVAILABILITY

Although CADS were designed for combat, many agencies have employed them for more mundane tasks ranging from fire rescue to mining and beyond. They are also used extensively on the moon because of their high protective value and because they can be sealed, pressurized, and shielded.

In some parts of the world, it is legal for civilians to purchase unarmed CADS. This is the case in many American states and a number of Canadian provinces. Although they are sold unarmed, they are still capable of mounting weapons. An unlicensed individual found in possession of an armed CADS is liable to serve at least five years in prison if found guilty.

The Mob is known to have employed armed CADS on a few occasions.

On the civilian market, a CADS typically sells for approximately \$15,000 Eurodollars. Civilian CADS are by definition less resilient than military or police (or corporate) models.

Most CADS dealers are willing to allow their merchandise to be purchased with a payment plan similar to the manner in which cars are bought. Of course, there is the matter of interest on the customer's financing!

SKILLS

A character may have himself chipped for CADS skills. He might simultaneously buy chips for Brawling. This would allow a CADS operator with no fighting skills to do some good in close combat and would be a useful change of pace for a character with no (or very low) combat skills.

Descriptions are given first, followed by the costs of the types of chipware used with CADS.

Reflex-Based Skills

CADS Operation: The ability to wear, work, and fight in a Combat Armor Defensive System. *Extra IP Cost:* +10.

Technical Skills

CADS Tech: The required skills for maintaining and repairing Combat Armor Defensive Systems. *Extra IP Cost:* +10.

Reflex Chipwars

Cost	Skill Chip
\$500	CADS Operation +1
\$700	CADS Operation +2
\$400	Brawling +1
\$500	Brawling +2
\$500	Heavy Weapons +1
\$600	Heavy Weapons +2



Memoryware

Cost	Skill Chip
\$500	CADS Tech +1
\$600	CADS Tech +2

For a description of the Heavy Weapons skill, see page 74 of *Solo of Fortune*.

ARMORTECH

Powered personal armor manufacturer.

Main Office: Vancouver.

Regional Offices: Calgary, Seattle.

Stock: 419,365 shares.

Available on Market: 38,952 shares.

Name and Location of Major Shareholder: Dr. Brandon Packard, Calgary, Canada, holding 37.9% of total shares.

Troops: 273 combat ready, divided in thirds between the three offices.

Covert Operatives: 18.

Equipment and Resources: ArmorTech has three AV-4 vehicles, one Osprey II, eight Airogyros, and one corporate jet dispersed among its offices and plants. The company has strong connections with many other corporations and governments, and can obtain nearly any weaponry and transportation on fairly short notice. All offices have infirmaries; only the Vancouver infirmary is surgery-capable. ArmorTech has access to almost every military base and range in Canada, and the company's security forces make extensive use of ArmorTech CADS.

Background: Established in 1998. Within eight years it was the leading producer of personal armor in the world. ArmorTech has contracts with many corporations and governments, including Arasaka and Petrochem, and the Australian, Canadian, and US governments.

ARMORTECH CADS MK 2011-5

The ArmorTech CADS Mk 2011-5 is used by the Los Angeles Police Department.

Call Sign: Thunder

REF Penalty to Pilot: -1

Run: 60

Leap: 6

Carry: 200

Lift: 800

Throw: 120

Armor: 40 SP

SDPs: 50

Batteries: 4 hours

Weapons and Ammo: None standard

Cybernetics: Cyberoptics (2) with tele-scopes, targeting, and thermographics; interface plugs

Basic Cost: \$20,000 Eurodollars (doesn't include cost of cybernetics) Ω

Holdup at the Memory Bank

A GURPS Cyberpunk adventure for 3-8 characters

By David L. Pulver

This adventure is set in Texas in the world of *GURPS Autoduel* (perhaps a few years in the future, perhaps not), but the opening scenes can occur anywhere in North America.

With appropriate modifications, it could take place in almost any cyberpunk setting where braintaping technology is available.

The PCs should be adventurers who have a reputation among the right people as reasonably trustworthy soldiers of fortune who will not balk at undertaking extralegal covert operations. If the characters are freelance operators, they may be contacted through whatever normal channels they employ (bar, contacts, mercenary BBS, etc.). If they are already working for an agency or corporation, the best explanation may be that their employer owes Matsai Corporation a favor (or is trying to curry favor with it).

CELIA

At some point, the adventurers will be contacted by phone or modem by a Eurasian-sounding woman who introduces herself as Celia and claims to represent a major foreign corporation (in fact, a Japanese multinational—a zaibatsu), which, for obvious reasons, will remain unnamed. She describes her interest in hiring the characters for whatever the local code words are for extralegal corporate dirty tricks. If the PCs are interested, she will provide further information on the job.

Celia explains her company's problem: She works for an "Asian interest" which has few operatives in North America. So the company has been forced to use freelance help—the characters. A figure of \$100,000 is mentioned. The operation is described as penetration of a corporate facility. If the adventurers are willing to accept or seriously consider the mission, a meeting will be arranged at some mutually satisfactory and secure spot to discuss terms.

In person, Celia is cool, elegant and urbane. She wears the newest Swiss fashions. Her bodyguard is the latest model from Tokugawa Biotech, wired to the max, and

can give the PCs a hard time if they decide to do something rash. Celia will try to get the characters to accept the mission based on the information she has already given them, or at least get them to sign a bond that swears them to secrecy with dire threats of legal (and implied physical) retribution for leaks. She will warn the PCs that everything further is confidential.

BRIEFING

Celia provides the following information: "Dr. Lucas Caine is a brilliant researcher whose work in applied genetic engineering may revolutionize the field. Years ago, he helped develop the algae products that eased the grain blight. He has since turned his talents to other areas of applied bio-engineering. We think he has recently achieved a major breakthrough in an area of interest to us.

"Unfortunately, Dr. Caine is not working for our organization. Instead, he has an unbreakable 10-year contract with another company, ConTexCo. However, he has become unhappy with his present working environment. Our agents have approached him and found him willing to defect to us for a substantial pay raise. The problem is in extraction. ConTex knows how valuable Caine is and severely restricts his movements. Security at the genetic engineering lab in Arlington is such that an extraction attempt would have absolutely no chance of success.

"Fortunately, Caine has managed to inform us that he has gotten permission for a business excursion and will be travelling by road to visit colleagues at the Rice University Medical Center in Houston. His ConTex escort will be well-armed and equipped, but with our prior knowledge of his route, a carefully timed vehicular ambush could dispose of it. The problem is taking him alive. Besides the dangers of a firefight, it is likely that his ConTexCo guards have orders to kill him before letting him fall into another company's hands. This would not be a tragedy for ConTexCo: If Caine were killed, they could simply revive him.

"For like many important people, Dr. Caine is registered with Gold Cross' Death Insurance Plan. In exchange for phenomenal insurance premiums, his cells are stored for cloning, and his continuously updated memories—his braintape—is kept in a mechanical memory storage device at Gold Cross' local facility. Caine can die—and live again. And that is the basis of our plan.

"Three days from now, Caine will begin his journey from Arlington to Houston, travelling by private jet to Houston International and then taking an armored limousine to Rice University. Timing is imperative, and you must execute the mission while he is in the air.

"Your goal is simple: You are to penetrate Gold Cross' Arlington facility, appropriate Lucas Caine's brain tape, and terminate any other clones or brain tape recordings. If possible, you are to acquire his cell samples as well. You will be provided with a medium-range communicator with a booster unit so you may remain in satellite contact with us.

"As soon as you have obtained the objective, you must give us a coded signal. That is vital—if the signal is not received, an attack will be staged to try to get Caine out, an attack which will likely cost him his life. Once the signal has been received, we will send a helicopter to a prearranged rendezvous point on the edge of town, where the tape will be picked up and you will be paid. If necessary, we will also medivac any wounded to a secure facility for treatment."

Celia offers \$100,000, split up among the PCs as they see fit, upon delivery of the brain tape. She will offer up to 20% in advance and may be bargained with to a limited extent.

DEATH IS ALSO AFFORDABLE

Celia is being fairly honest with the PCs (as abilities such as Detect Lies will show). However, she is holding a few things back.

Unknown to the characters, their success signal will not call off a suicide attack on the limousine. Matsai lacks the North

Gold Cross

Arlington General Hospital

Key

- F Fire escape
- Window
- Door
- Clone tanks
- ⌣ Console/seat
- E Elevator
- MMSD machines
- ▤ Cryogenics
- ▥ Stairs

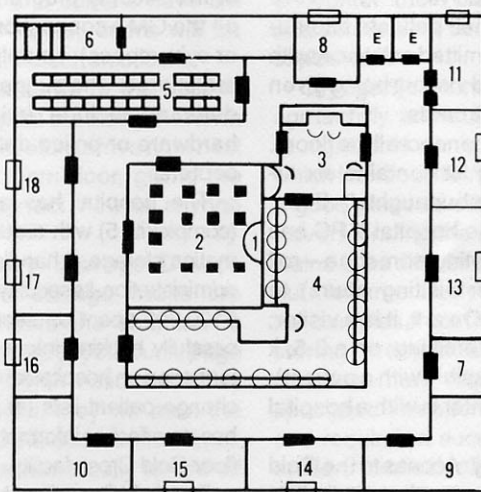
American resources to pull off any major raid. Upon receiving the signal, an operative waiting in ambush near Houston airport will use an advanced anti-aircraft missile to destroy Dr. Caine's jet at a high altitude, killing both him and his escort. Matsai will then have the only Lucas Caine. If the characters fail in their mission and give the signal, Lucas Caine will live—Matsai can always try again some other time.

Matsai does not really need cell samples, only the brain tape and (preferably) destruction of other samples or recordings. Caine has sent them tissue scrapings in his covert letters, and Matsai has already started a "blank" clone of him. All Matsai needs now is the brain tape to play into it.

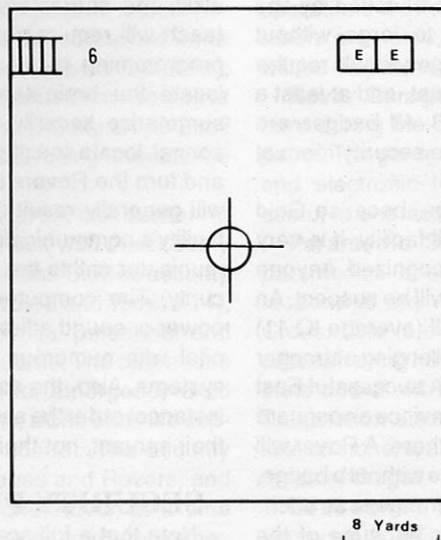
By present interpretations of international law, only one version of an individual is allowed to exist at a time. Once Matsai gets the tape, it will take it to a hospital ship waiting in international waters off the Gulf of Mexico and transfer the brain tape into a clone of Caine in order to announce his "defection" to Matsai. With luck, the speed of the transfer will utterly confuse ConTexCo, which may believe that Caine somehow survived the crash. The characters are being kept in the dark about the existing clone for security reasons (in case they betray the operation or are captured), a fact that may not sit well with any PC who risked his life to retrieve the cell tissue samples!

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

The adventurers may have some questions, but Celia has no details on the Gold Cross facility save its Arlington address: After all, the PCs are the local experts, and they are being paid to do the work. Matsai believes that Caine's flight will be at night, and it will arrange to contact the characters (by satellite) to give the "go" command. This will occur just after midnight three days from now. If the characters agree to the deal, Celia will deliver the advance money and the boosted communicator, give them the satellite's coordinates, and wish them luck. Next stop, Arlington.



25th Floor



Roof/Helipad

GOLD CROSS ARLINGTON

Gold Cross stays in business by selling clone insurance. For those who can't afford to readily update memories or keep a clone on-line fulltime, it sends teams of paramedics to disaster sites to "read" the brains and clone the cells of the newly dead.

Gold Cross rents space on the top floor of a 25-story Arlington general hospital building in downtown Arlington, from which it coordinates its operations in Texas and the Southwest.

Lower Hospital Building Floors: The lower floors are much like any other hospital. Security is reasonably light, though three uniformed hospital security guards are on duty. They have ST 11, DX 11, IQ 10, HT 10, Guns (Pistol)-12 and Guns (Tangler)-12, and Brawling-12. They are armed with Colt Python .357 Magnums and nonlethal tanglers, and protected by PD 2, DR 8 light monocrys.

Only medical personal, patients and authorized visitors are permitted entrance, with ambulatory patients and visitors being given temporary nonphoto ID cards.

Stairs and elevators connect all the floors. The basement parking lot contains six armored ambulances ("ambunaughts"). Every two minutes while in the hospital a PC has a 2 in 6 chance of meeting someone—roll again (adding +2 after visiting hours) to determine who is met: On a 1, it is a visitor; on a 2, it is a patient exercising; on a 3-5, it is a doctor or nurse (possibly with a patient); and on a 6+, the encounter is with a hospital security guard.

Gold Cross Security: Access to the Gold Cross installation on the top floor is limited to those with special Gold Cross ID badges (not normal hospital cards). These are restricted to employees and VIP visitors. Gold Cross patients are all dead. The badge has both a hologram of the owner and an infrared code that prevents attack by the Rovers (see below). Badges are checked by the guards and are difficult to forge without acquiring one to study. Forgery would require a sample, proper equipment, and at least a day, plus a skill roll at -3. All badges are collected and stored in the security room at the end of a shift.

Even with a fake badge, because Gold Cross is a relatively small facility, it is very likely a stranger will be recognized. Anyone without a security badge will be suspect. An employee has an IQ-3 roll (average IQ 11) chance of noticing and challenging a stranger with or without a badge. A successful Fast Talk might be in order to convince a nonguard that a character belongs there. A Rover will always challenge someone without a badge, but it will not recognize strangers as such.

Entrances and Exits: Because of the value of Gold Cross' cloning and brain tape equipment, routine security is fairly tight. As the Gold Cross Map shows, the only entrances are the stairway (only supposed to

be used as a fire escape), elevators, rooftop heliport, and windows. One helicopter is usually fueled and ready to go in two minutes, with pilots and crew at the paramedic station. The elevators are simple to operate, but can be locked down from the operations center in 10 seconds if the computer is working.

Windows do not open and are protected by nonlethal laser beam sensors. See the description in *Cyberpunk*, page 54, for means of countering them. The alarm is silent and alerts the operations center.

Computer Systems: Characters with a good cyberdeck may wish to hack into Gold Cross' computer system to facilitate entry. This might even be done on the road to Arlington via modem, or before leaving the characters' starting place. The exact nature of the security programs used will depend on the GM's conception of the Net (realistic or cyberspace), so only general guidelines are offered. The suggested effects of being detected include frying the characters' hardware or police datacops sending helicopters.

The hospital has a central mainframe (complexity 5) with around 1000 gigs of information storage. It handles recordkeeping and administration. Its security is relatively light (about \$100,000 spent on security programs). Successfully hacking into it can give the PCs information on hospital routine and allow them to change patient lists (or similar activities), but has no effect or information regarding the top-floor Gold Cross facility.

The Gold Cross floor has its own mainframe, with about 600 gigs of information storage. Security is tighter (\$1,000,000 spent on defensive programs—which ones depend on which netrunning system the GM decides to use, but they should be dangerous).

Hacking into the Gold Cross systems can allow the characters to do the following (each will require separate datasearch or programming rolls): study the floor plan, locate the brain tape, control elevators, summarize security procedures and personnel, locate specific clones, turn off lights, and turn the Rovers on or off. The last two will generally result in a full alert over the facility's communicators, as well as a communicator call to the police or hospital security. The computer cannot turn off the power or sound a fire alarm—this is a hospital with numerous independent backup systems. Also, the computer could not (for instance) order the security people out—it is their servant, not their master.

SECURITY PROCEDURES

Note that a full-scale, through-the-front-doors assault on the building is unlikely to succeed. Aside from the Gold Cross personnel, the hospital has 25 armed hospital security guards, and this area of Arlington is

regularly patrolled by city police vehicles. The characters will have to use stealth, though a few well-armed vehicles waiting nearby can be useful for a fast getaway.

If an alarm, guard or Rover reports an intrusion, the operations center will alert all Gold Cross guards and send the nearest ones toward the location of the alarm. In case of a general firefight, an alarm bell will ring, all guards will converge on the area, and hospital security will be notified. Within a minute, two hospital guards will be posted by each stairway or elevator leading down from the top floor, and 10 more will seal off the lobby. Within five minutes, a police tactical squad will arrive with several police vehicles and heavy weapons.

If the characters escape the area under hot pursuit, Gold Cross will radio the Arlington city police. If the characters' vehicles were spotted and identified, the police will put out an all-points bulletin on the characters. In game terms, this means that unless the characters take precautions (change cars, etc.), the GM can set up one or two high-speed urban combats between the party and the local police department. The city police *won't* set up cordons or roadblocks. In 2036 Texas, a roadblock wouldn't last a minute.

ROVERS

Gold Cross recently took delivery of two new Optronics Industries security robots for mobile night security. The Optronics Security Rover is a highly sophisticated (for 2036) robot, programmed to move through the hallways and rooms (but not offices) looking for unauthorized intruders.

A Rover resembles a box on rubber wheels, topped by a sensor globe with low-resolution visual and effective infrared and audio sensors (in game terms, it has a sight IQ roll of 9 and a hearing roll of 12). It will hear and home in on any disturbance such as gunfire. While not "artificially intelligent" by any means, it can identify intruders (those people not wearing the infrared-coded security IDs) and respond, taking a photograph and alerting the operations center. It orders intruders to remain motionless ("Do not move!"). If they attack or fail to obey within one second, the Rover extends a laser tube and fires.

The robot has PD 6, DR 30, with 20 HT. It weighs about 200 pounds. It has a Speed and Dodge of 6, but is not able to move down stairs. It mounts a bulky laser weapon equivalent to a TL8 military laser rifle, which it can use at Beam Weapons-14 (usually on full auto setting). Its integral power cell has the normal number of charges. It uses an electronic infrared "key" to open and close doors. Characters with Electronics (Sensor) skill who make a skill roll may be able to dismantle the infrared key within five minutes and use it themselves.

ENCOUNTERS

Gold Cross operates 24 hours a day. Every two minutes spent on the top floor there is a 1 in 6 chance of encountering something. Roll one die to determine what: a patrolling Security Rover (roll of 1-3), 1-2 Gold Cross employees (roll 4-5), or a security guard (roll of 6).

BIOSEC SECURITY

All Gold Cross security guards in the building are agents of BioSec Private Security Corporation. Guards will use force appropriate to the situation. Armed and dangerous foes may be shot with little or no warning, while others will be asked to surrender, and the guards will use their electric stun wands on such unarmed foes.

An average guard has ST 11, DX 11, IQ 10, HT 11. Skills are: Guns (Pistol)-13, Brawling-12, and Shortsword (for the stun wand)-12. Typical disadvantages are (roll one): 1, Overconfident; 2, No sense of humor; 3, Greedy; 4, Lecherous; 5, Bad temper; 6, Sense of duty to employer.

The typical guard's equipment consists of a heavy monocrys helmet equipped with a gas mask, short-range communicator and infrared goggles; .40-caliber machinepistol with two magazines and laser sight; electric stun wand; full heavy monocrys body armor (PD 2, DR 24 but only PD 1, DR 2 vs. impaling); flashlight; and two pair of electronic handcuffs. BioSec personnel often have some cheap implants (roll once randomly for each guard).

BIOSEC PERSONNEL IMPLANTS

Roll	Implant
1	Macho chip (shuts off pain, <i>GURPS Cyberpunk</i> page 39).
2	Amp chip (keeps guard from falling asleep, <i>GURPS Cyberpunk</i> page 39).
3	Clock chip (absolute timing, <i>GURPS Cyberpunk</i> page 39—if this guard fails to report, his boss will always be suspicious).
4	Reflex chip (for Shortsword-12 or Pistol-12 which gives this guard Shortsword-14 or Pistol-15, see <i>GURPS Cyberpunk</i> page 40—he will always prefer that weapon).
5	Weapon implant (<i>GURPS Cyberpunk</i> page 33, typically a gauss needler) in arm.
6	Radio reception (<i>GURPS Cyberpunk</i> page 37, guard need not use communicator to call for help).

Security personnel are in touch by radio communicator or implant, and are expected to report in at 20-minute intervals. A single guard failing to report will prompt a call, but not necessarily a general alarm (since it could be a com malfunction). If the guard

doesn't answer the call, a Rover or human will investigate.

Note that there are only three patrolling guards and two Rovers on the 25th floor; the rest are at fixed locations. Other Gold Cross employees are mainly white-coated medical techs or supervisory personnel with average attributes (ST 9, DX 11, IQ 12, HT 10) and good (12 to 15) skills in Diagnosis, Computer Operations, and Electronics Operations: Medical). If confronted by intruders, they are unlikely to be violent, and they will surrender if faced by armed foes. They will alert security or try to escape if the characters let them.

FLOOR LAYOUT

The Gold Cross map shows the top (25th) floor of Arlington General Hospital and its roof. Most corridors and corners have fire extinguishers. After hours, doors will be locked with basic TL8 electronic locks.

Elevators: Elevators up to the helipad and down to the hospital are along the north wall. Note that the elevators arrive right next to the open guard room door, giving the security guards a perfect view of anyone entering the floor.

Magnetic Memory Storage Device Vaults: The MMSD storage vaults are locked, and after hours the chamber is covered by sonic sensors (*Cyberpunk*, page 54) that flood the room with motion-sensitive ultrasound. If triggered, they will alert the nervous Rovers and the operations center. These sensors are automatically turned off when a robot is entering the room (and turned back on again afterward).

Several hundred brain tapes are kept in the magnetic memory storage devices in here, along with a computer terminal. A successful Computer Operations-3 roll at the terminal will allow the characters to quickly locate Caine's tape (one minute per attempt, which should be shortened if the PCs have already hacked into the computer); otherwise, the characters will have to look at the labels on the tapes—make an IQ-2 roll every five minutes of searching to locate the right one.

Operations Center: This center is manned around the clock with the security chief (Geneva Valois—use BioSec security guards stats but with IQ 13 and Tactics-14), three Gold Cross hospital personnel and two Biosec security guards. The operations center is responsible for emergency Gold Cross rescue missions, clone bank life support, and helicopter control. The security panel monitors all alarms and Rovers, and can directly control one Rover at a time remotely. Two of the Gold Cross employees are capable of operating the Cryogenics system. The operations center also houses the Gold Cross complexity-5 mainframe and four terminals for it.

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Clone Tanks and Forced-Growth Facilities: The tanks contain partly or fully grown bodies. Each tank has a DR of 1 and is shattered if it takes 10 hit points of damage. Gold Cross personnel will be reluctant to use firearms here unless fired upon. A clone of Caine exists, but it will take 1D minutes to determine this. If the characters have any relatives, friends, or enemies who make use of Gold Cross's Arlington facilities, it might be interesting if they were to encounter their clones, especially if the characters were causing damage or setting explosives!

Cryogenic Storage Facility: Cryo storage is chilly, and is usually dark and deserted at night. It is dimly lit with cold, blue light which leaks out from the refrigeration units—a good place to suddenly meet a security Rover! Finding the correct cell samples for Caine is as difficult as locating a brain tape, but it is immediately apparent that removing the samples from the cryogenics units and storing them in a portable refrigerated container may require the services of a specialist. The operation takes two minutes and requires a successful Electronics Operation: Medical roll (with the usual defaults if unskilled). Failure destroys the samples (but as noted above, Matsai doesn't really care about them).

Fire Escape: This fire escape leads down to lower floors and up to helicopter pad and rooftop guard post. A TV camera monitors the stairs and feeds the picture into the operations center. If any suspicious characters are noted, a Rover or security team will be dispatched.

Rover Garage: The Rovers are stored here during the day—at night, they are on patrol. The garage also contains spare parts and electronic tool kits, which could be useful to characters.

Paramedic Station: A team of three paramedics is constantly at the ready to respond to any emergency requiring Gold Cross. One is a helicopter pilot (treat the pilot as having hospital security (not BioSec) stats and a .44 IMI Eagle, but no armor). This station also includes several medical kits, stretchers, and a full supply of standard medical drugs.

Restrooms: There is a 1 in 6 chance someone is using or patrolling them—roll for an encounter on a 1 on 1D6.

Guard Room: Two uniformed guards are on duty here day and night, and usually three others are walking the floor and two

are on the roof. A window opens on the elevator, and a guard will check the badge of anyone entering the floor.

Executive Lounge: The executive lounge is nicely appointed with tables, computer terminals that slide out of the tables, a coffee machine, and abstract art. It is usually busy during lunch breaks. Along one side behind sliding panels is a small bar, usually reserved for entertaining major guests.

Offices: These offices are used in the day for meeting insurance clients, arranging coverage, and general paperwork. Each has a desk, computer terminal, several chairs, and any personal touches its normal users have added. There is a 1-in-6 chance that an executive or secretary is working late here; otherwise, the offices are locked and deserted. Matsai officially does not negotiate with hostage takers, but the local guard commander may allow the PCs to use a hostage as a shield to get out of the complex, if they have no other demands.

GETTING IN

The characters have a few days to plan the mission, so they may want to do some preparation. There are several ways that inventive characters might try to get into Gold Cross beyond charging in with guns blazing. As Celia, the GM should subtly encourage the players to come up with a reasonably creative (or at least cinematic) plan. Some possibilities include:

- Kidnapping off-shift Gold Cross employees (perhaps using Sex Appeal or Causing to arrange a meeting) and using disguise with forged ID cards and biosculpt surgery to gain entry to Gold Cross.
- Staging a messy diversion to draw police away from the building.
- Landing on the roof in a rented, stealth-equipped helicopter or via parawings or dragonfly ultralights.
- Climbing up the walls at midnight and storming in through the windows (on a lower level or the Gold Cross floor).
- Taking out insurance at Gold Cross and faking death (or ambushing an insurance holder), then phoning in a call to draw in the paramedics and hijacking the armored ambulance or helicopter. Note that paramedic crews may be accompanied by one or more armed and armored guards.
- Suborning a guard or employee (with bribery, Sex Appeal, blackmail, etc.)
- Using a data penetration raid or agent to capture control of the operations center and disorganize security procedures, or even to seize control of the Rovers with some quick computer programming rolls.

One thing that will not work is phoning in a bomb threat or starting a real (or fake) fire. The guards are trained to remain at their posts with respirators until actual evidence

of a major explosion or fire is spotted or police/firefighters take over (of course, cunning PCs could disguise themselves as member of a bomb squad or as fire fighters). The Rovers will not be bothered by fire or threat of fire in any case.

ESCAPE

Getting out is as important as getting in, especially since a noisy assault will alert local police and hospital rent-a-cops as well as Gold Cross security. The old standby is a suitably armed and very fast getaway car. Other possibilities include hijacking one of the helicopters or an ambulance from the basement garage. Most options allow for some autoduelling (or aeroduelling) if the GM feels inclined, with dramatic vehicle or aerial chases as the police or Gold Cross operatives close in and the PCs race toward the rendezvous point.

Note that current autoduelling rules for armor and weapons do not match the damage values or ranged combat rules in *GURPS* third edition. GMs wishing to run an autoduelling should consider multiplying all damages, armor, and vehicle HT values by 4. Use ROF 8 for full-automatic weapons and ROF 1 otherwise, along with the new explosion rules (on page 121 of the *Basic Set*) for burst-effect weapons, and ACC 10 and SS 0 for all vehicle-mounted weapons.

RENDEZVOUS

If the characters are successful, Matsai will arrange for them to meet with an armored helicopter waiting on the outskirts of Arlington. The helicopter has two pilots and a door gunner, with room for eight passengers plus the brain tape. In addition to two corporate soldiers and the PCs' contact, the helicopter contains a medical technician and an MMSD reader, which the inhabitants will use to check that the party has snatched the correct brain tape (after taking off, if pursuit is close). If the tape is the right one, the chopper will head for a Matsai vessel, the freighter *Kitsune Maru*, waiting with Celia (and a dozen armored Matsai cybersoldiers) just outside the territorial limit in the Gulf of Mexico.

The ship, owned by Matsai through a tortuous chain of holding companies, has had one hold refurbished into a complete medical and cloning laboratory. The brain tape will be played into the clone; in a few hours (or a shorter period, if the GM feels dramatic), Dr. Lucas Caine will live again.

The PCs will be paid and may stay on the ship or be returned somewhere else along the coast after the copter has refueled. GMs inclined to drama may wish to have Celia invite the PCs to a formal breakfast or dinner aboard ship. While the PCs are being wined and dined by Celia and some nameless Japanese executives, a refurbished Caine

will join them at the table.

Or the PCs may wish to go about their own business with their reward to watch the story of Caine's death and mysterious rebirth/defection in tomorrow's news.

COMPLEXITIES

So far, the mission is fairly straight forward: break in, find the tape, get out, deliver it to Matsai. If this is too simplistic for the satisfaction of some players, GMs may wish to complicate things—whether it is the cleaning lady showing up in the cryogenics vaults, a late-working executive turning out to be the branch president of Gold Cross, a sudden disaster (a six-car collision and fire?) resulting in a flood of emergency patients into the hospital, or the PCs' copter running out of gas.

One particularly nasty possibility is that the plan has been compromised and one of the PCs' contacts is a ConTex agent. In this case, the PCs may find the Gold Cross offices swarming with security guards, or they may stumble into a well-laid trap. Another possibility is that the PCs' mission succeeds, but the attack on Caine is blown, and Matsai wants the adventurers to do the job before they get the rest of their cash.

If the PCs visit the *Kitsune Maru*, the plan could be blown after the PCs' run succeeds, which leads to an armed assault against the ship by ConTexCo mercenaries. It is even possible that Caine wants to free himself from any corporate entanglements and has hired a second team to intercept the PCs en route to the copter and acquire the tape himself!

RESOLUTIONS

Both ConTexCo and Gold Cross will take steps to discover the perpetrators of the raid. Their success will depend on the precautions taken by the characters. Assuming Caine is killed, and the brain tape is captured or destroyed, ConTexCo will do its utmost to apprehend those responsible. Gold Cross' reaction will depend on the characters' actions. If the characters' operation was sufficiently covert, Gold Cross may even try to cover things up to prevent damage to its reputation, and clever characters may take advantage of this for blackmail purposes. On the other hand, if the party shot up everything in sight, Gold Cross' only hope is that a vigorous investigation will prevent any loss of public confidence in its operation.

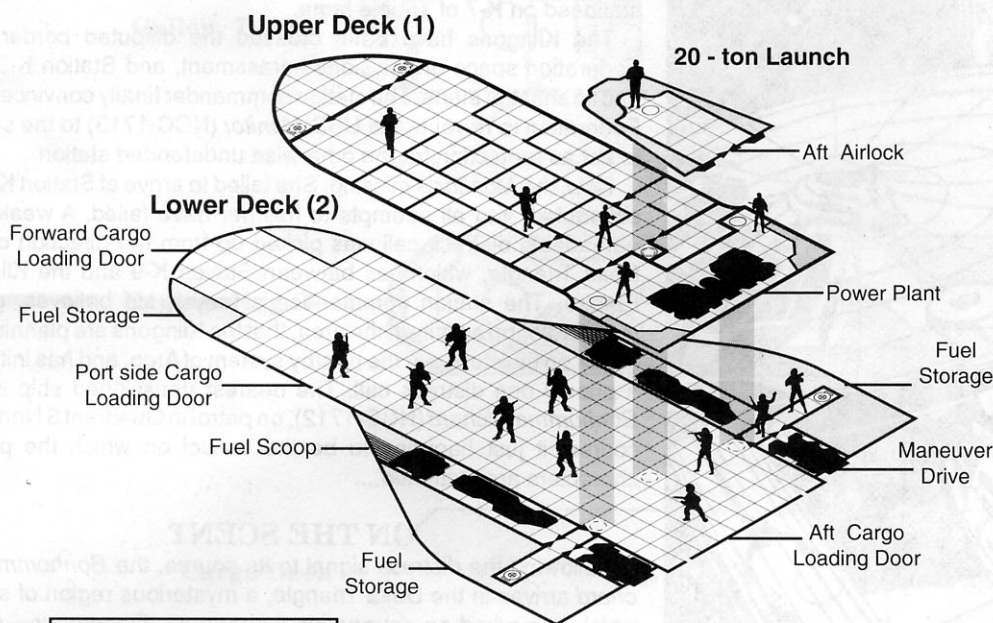
Finally, Matsai may contact the characters for further jobs if they performed satisfactorily. While the Japanese corporation has little real muscle in America, its reach and memory are long, and if the PCs made any attempt to double-cross Matsai, they will likely wake up one night to find a ninja at their door. ☺

Thanks to the REDCON '90 GURPS tournament players for playtesting this adventure.

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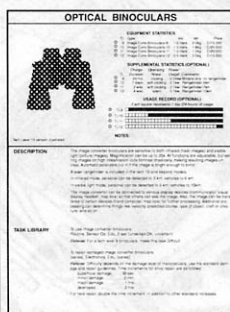
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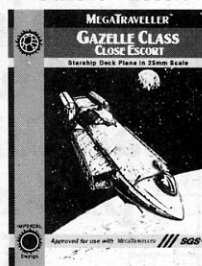
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CommsLink Gambit



The *Monitor* is missing, the only sign of her a weak and unreadable distress call picked up from the Delta Triangle. Could this signal an imminent Klingon attack?

By Jeffrey Groteboer

In the years since the Organian Peace Treaty, the Federation and the Klingons have had to rely on cunning to accomplish their goals in Quadrant 3 South. Overt military action has given way to covert operations. So-called "Black Ops" have become a specialty of the Klingon Fleet as they use subterfuge and bravado to accomplish the goals of the Klingon High Command.

Communications Relay Station Gamma 6 is an automatic communications relay between the outer reaches of the quadrant and the interior of the Federation. It is only one link in a network of stations which provide a rapid flow of information between Earth and Federation ships as they patrol their sectors of space.

Less than 10 parsecs away, Deep Space Station K-9 services the commslink and the ships travelling the sector. With the Klingons 30 parsecs away on one side and the Romulan neutral zone equidistant on the other, K-9 is in a unique position, enviable only to those stationed on K-7 of Tribble fame.

The Klingons have often crossed the disputed border into Federation space on missions harassment, and Station K-9 has had its share of alerts. The station commander finally convinced the Federation to re-route the USS *Monitor* (NCC-1713) to the sector to act as protection for the otherwise undefended station.

Now, the *Monitor* is missing. She failed to arrive at Station K-9 as scheduled, and all attempts to hail her have failed. A weak and unreadable distress call was picked up from the direction of the Delta Triangle, which lies between Station K-9 and the Klingon Empire. The station commander is frantic. He believes, given recent Klingon activity in the area, that the Klingons are planning an attack on the station or the nearby system of Argo, and has initiated a priority one distress call. The nearest unassigned ship is the *Bonhomme Richard* (NCC-1712), on patrol in Quadrant 3 North. Of course, it just happens to be the vessel on which the player characters are stationed....

ON THE SCENT

Following the distress signal to its source, the *Bonhomme Richard* arrives in the Delta Triangle, a mysterious region of space which is marked on astrogational charts as "Dangerous—Avoid Entry." Unfortunately, a distress call, no matter how suspect, is something Federation ships must not ignore, and the *Bonhomme Richard* sails in.

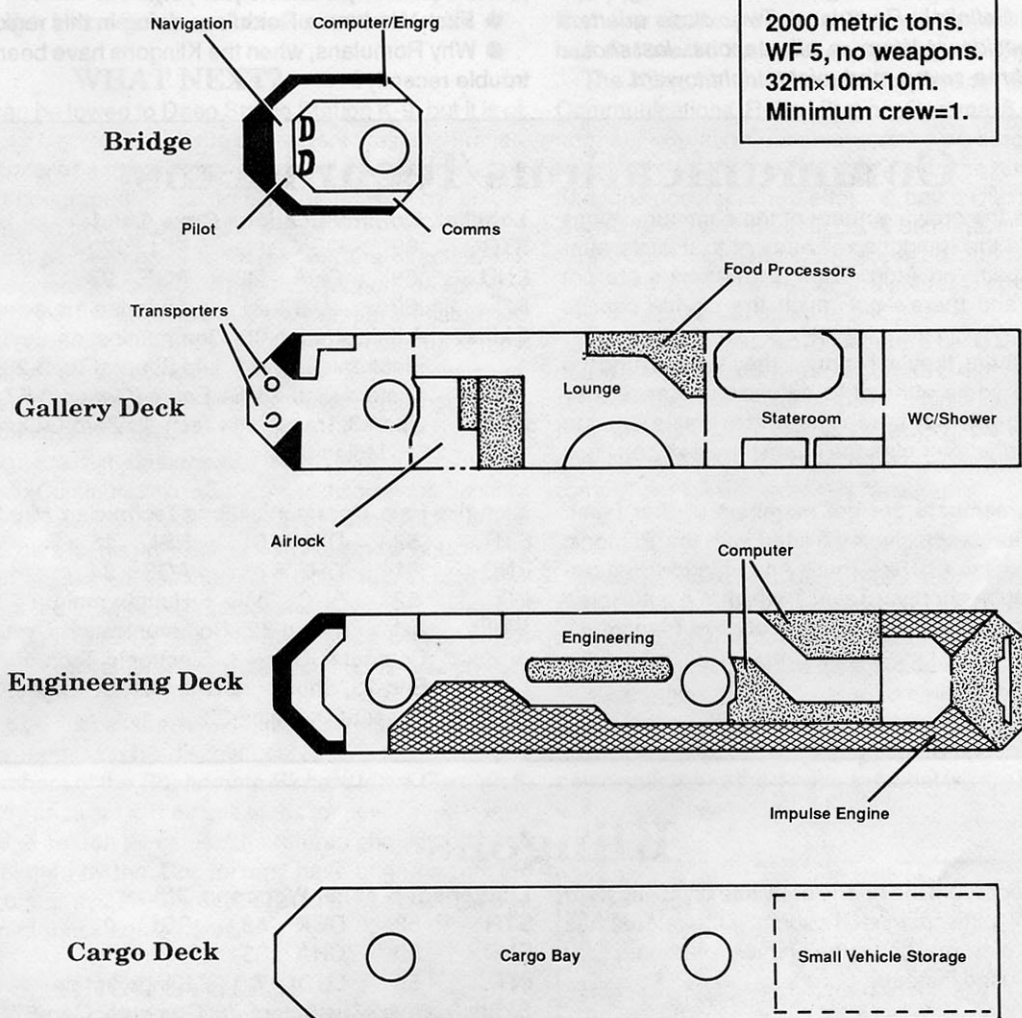
Abruptly, the signal ends, and shortly thereafter the *Bonhomme Richard* encounters the wreckage of the *Monitor*. Her hull is severely damaged, obviously from a recent battle. There are no life signs, and a damage control and emergency medical team are beamed over to investigate.

The damage control team finds the ship irreparable. The central computer is useless, but the ship's emergency marker buoy was loaded and ready for launch: The crew apparently didn't even get the chance to jettison it before the final attack which killed them and crippled the ship.

As the *Bonhomme Richard*'s science officer plays back the tape from the buoy (containing a copy of the *Monitor*'s log), the bridge crew listens:

"Captain's log, stardate 3722.6. First Officer Roland in command. The captain is dead. We were attacked by two ships—Romulans, I think—just outside the Phylos star system. The ship sustained major damage from their plasma weapons. We couldn't return fire due to their cloaking devices. Captain Cutler was killed on the second hit.

Communications Maintenance Shuttle



Impulse Engines

SPD 1, DEFL 1	5
SPEED 1	4
	3
SPEED 0	2
	1

Deflectors

PORT	
STBD	

Superstructure

4
3
2
1

"We escaped before they could attack again. They're afraid to enter the Delta Triangle. So am I, but it's the only place to run. There's no time to warn Station K-9. We took major communications damage in the attack. We are concentrating repairs on the shields and the warp drives."

The next recording has a scrambled picture and intermittent sound.

"S...date 3723.1 First Off...recording. Have ta...damage. Destroyed one sh...p.... Definitely Romulans. Two...close quarters fight...exploded right beside us. Warp...s, all weapons...last shot.... One got away...zero-three-seven-mark-eight...right toward...."

First Officer Roland's recording is interrupted by another voice on the tape, crying out, "Here they come!"

At this point, the first officer apparently forgot to turn off the recorder, because he then yells, "Evasi...right! Jettison the buoy...."

Then the recording ends, abruptly.

The crewmembers of the *Bonhomme Richard* may ask themselves some interesting questions (and the referee should not provide too many answers just yet):

- First, what were Romulans doing in this region of space?
- Why Romulans, when the Klingons have been causing all the trouble recently?

Communications Technicians

The following are the crewmembers of the communications maintenance shuttle the Klingons will attempt to destroy after completing their repairs on Argo. The crewmembers are not expecting trouble, and there's not much the shuttle can do against a D-7 anyway!

If the D-7 attacks them, they're history. If they survive (and the PCs ought to make some attempt to defend them once they figure out what going on), they may be used to examine Gamma 6 for tampering, or whatever else the characters can convince them to do.

The shuttle crewmembers are not members of Star Fleet. They are independent technicians affiliated with the Primonic Paelpentarikon Syatkitae (PPSk—that's Andorian for "Federation CommsLink Troubleshooting Team"), which is a quasitrade union under contract with the United Federation of Planets.

Lebeltar, Communications Crew Chief

STR 63 DEX 55 PSI 22
END 69 CHA 21 AGE 27
INT 58 LUC 81 Andorian male

Skills: Administration-40, Communication System Tech-72, Electronic Tech-66, Life Support Tech-28, Shuttlecraft System Tech-26, St. Engrg (General)-57, Transporter Opn-43, Transporter Tech-35, Zero-G Opn-19, Phaser-56, Melee-50.

Klondike Hale, Communications Technician, Mnt Shuttle Pilot

STR 58 DEX 61 PSI 15
END 61 CHA 54 AGE 34
INT 52 LUC 11 Human male

Skills: Astron/Astrog-52, Communication System Tech-37, Computer Opn-43, Electronic Tech-48, Mechanical Eng-73, Shuttlecraft Pilot-41, St. Engrg (General)-40, Phaser-28, Melee-23.

Klingons

These Klingons represent the bridge crew and chief engineer of the remaining D-7 battlecruiser. Of course, if the referee has his own Klingons which are better balanced to his particular game, they may be used instead.

Commander K'ah Tlenh, Commanding Officer

STR 64 DEX 53 PSI 48
END 53 CHA 35
INT 58 LUC 46 Klingon male

Skills: Starship Combat Tactics/Strategy-54, Sensor Opn-54, Helm-80, Human Language-63, Phaser/Disruptor-62, Melee Combat-51.

Subcommander Taregg, Science Officer

STR 58 DEX 43 PSI 25
END 64 CHA 28
INT 52 LUC 1 Klingon male

Skills: Sensor Opn-54, Transporter-53, Computer Opn-53, Physics-41, Phaser/Disruptor-78, Melee Combat-44.

Subcommander K'a Tallak, Engineer

STR 59 DEX 49 PSI 0
END 63 CHA 31
INT 44 LUC 1 Klingon male

Skills: General Engineering-75, Transporter Tech-50, Warp Drive Engineering-72, Computer Technology-67, Phaser/Disruptor-48, Melee Combat-59.

Lieutenant K'asha, Weapons Officer

STR 58 DEX 48 PSI 0
END 50 CHA 35
INT 58 LUC 7 Klingon male

Skills: Ship's Disruptors-78, Computer Opn-57, Sensors-55, Tactics/Strategy-80, Phaser/Disruptor-50, Melee Combat-57.

Sublieutenant Amakh', Helmsman

STR 70 DEX 54 PSI 0
END 54 CHA 34
INT 45 LUC 58 Klingon male

Skills: Helm-51, Computer Opn-54, Sensors-51, Navigation-46, Phaser/Disruptor-63, Melee Combat-50.

Sublieutenant T'achh', Communications Officer

STR 57 DEX 49 PSI 0
END 53 CHA 31
INT 44 LUC 1 Klingon male

Skills: Communications-62, Computer Opn-42, Transporter Opn-45, Human Language-49, Phaser/Disruptor-41, Melee Combat-53.

- How many are still out there?
- If the first attackers were afraid to enter the Delta Triangle, who made the last attack?
- What does the number 037 mark 8 mean? If it's a course, where does it go?

The easiest question is the last. Assuming 037 mark 8 to be a course from the last position of the *Monitor*, the characters will be able to draw a line from that position directly to Communications Relay Station Gamma 6. Little other information is available here at the *Monitor*.

WHAT NEXT?

The *Monitor* can be towed to Deep Space Station K-9, but it is of little value except as scrap iron. If the characters waste too much time with the *Monitor* or extensive memorial services for the crew, they should be "encouraged" to get on with the mission by a blunt request for an update from Star Fleet Command.

The next logical place to go is to Gamma 6, the direction the Romulans were apparently taking. When the *Bonhomme Richard* arrived in the vicinity of the buoy, the buoy will appear undisturbed. Should anyone want to beam over to Relay Station Gamma 6, they may do so. It will, of course, appear completely normal unless the landing party members performs a thorough electronic inspection of the communications systems.

Finding anything unusual inside the circuitry of the commslink equipment requires a successful Communications Systems Technology roll. Secretly penalize anyone who has never been assigned to starbase duty 50% of his skill level to account for his unfamiliarity with this type of equipment. A thorough search which avoids interrupting the commslink will take at least eight hours. If the crew of the *Bonhomme Richard* obtains permission from Star Fleet to turn off the link (thereby silencing an entire sector, something Star Fleet is likely to frown upon), the search can proceed in half that time.

Should anyone be successful, refer to the Answers to the Puzzle section below for details on his discoveries.

If the crewmembers of the *Bonhomme Richard* leave Gamma 6 without finding any answers to their questions (or never even board it), they will need to search for clues. The referee should point out that the course plotted by the *Monitor* may have been erroneous and that the Argo star system is the closest known system in the general direction of those coordinates.

ARGO SYSTEM

Upon arrival in the Argo system the characters will immediately notice a *D-7* battlecruiser in standard orbit. After the *Monitor*'s reports of Romulan attacks, it will seem likely that this is one of the *D-7*s which the Romulans bought from the Klingons. If so, the crew of the *Bonhomme Richard* has just discovered a blatant breach of the Neutral Zone—a Romulan ship nearly 40 parsecs inside the Federation is cause for serious consternation. How many others have been this bold?

What the PCs decide to do about the situation is left to them. A few options are:

- Attack and (attempt to) destroy the Romulans. Of course, they would probably never learn the truth of the situation (and so would not receive commendations from Star Fleet).
- Land on the planet and try to discover what is really going on. The events on Argo are left to the referee's discretion (see The Answers to the Puzzle, below, for more information).
- Monitor and tail the *D-7* to see what happens next. If the PCs choose this option, the *D-7* will, after a few days, leave orbit and head toward a spot near Gamma 6. It will wait there for a maintenance shuttle from K-9 to arrive. If the *Bonhomme Richard* has remained undetected by the *D-7*, it will see the *D-7* attack the maintenance shuttle and attempt to destroy it. It will then, if still unopposed, turn on course for *Klingon* space.

ANSWERS TO THE PUZZLE

That the *D-7* is returning to Klingon space is the twist you were

waiting for. These are not Romulans, but Klingons. The attack on the *Monitor* was made by two Klingon *D-7*-class battlecruisers equipped with Romulan cloaking devices. They destroyed the *Monitor* because it had discovered their presence inside the Federation.

The Klingons' mission was to plant an electronic "bug" inside Communications Relay Station Gamma 6 so it would relay all normal Federation communications as before, and also transmit those signals to a listening post inside the Klingon Empire. This the Klingons accomplished after the battle with the *Monitor*. Their sojourn on Argo was to repair battle damage, including the installation of new dilithium crystals, which can be found in limited quantities on Argo. (If the PCs landed on the planet to spy on their adversaries, they could find out much of this.)

The Klingons returned to Gamma 6 because they knew the maintenance shuttle would arrive soon; on the bulkhead inside the relay station someone had thoughtfully taped a maintenance schedule—which the Klingons read with interest. Destroying the only two people in the quadrant who could discover the tampering was thought by the Klingon commander to be a necessary precaution.

ENDGAME

If the PCs debug the communications relay station, they will be hailed by Star Fleet as heroes and probably awarded a commendation. The Klingons will have a lot of explaining to do if their ships were discovered, destroyed or disabled deep within Federation space. If, however, the crew of the *Bonhomme Richard* fails to find the listening device the Klingons planted in Gamma 6, future events will favor the Klingons. Someday, some conscientious maintenance person might find the device, but what will the Klingons have learned in the meantime? Ω

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Wolftrap

Harrow's Sun, June 25, 3029

By Dale L. Kemper

From the cockpit recorder, Captain Mohammed Raisul, 1st Provisional Company, Gamma Regiment, Wolf's Dragoons:

"Say again, Ops. You were garbled that time around."

"I repeat, Green One. We have Kuritan infantry in the perimeter! Six confirmed tunnel openings have been blasted through the defenses. They're behind the trench line. You are to pull back and deal with the infantry before they make a mash of your rear."

"Negative, negative, Ops. We've got an enemy company-strength 'Mech force getting ready to hit the perimeter again. If we turn our backs now they'll have you and us for breakfast!"

"That's the order, captain. Pull back and deal with the infantry. We'll try to send a lance from the Second and Third companies to cover your position."

"Can't be done. Singh has enemy activity along his front, and Third Company is just about to. Where's the reserves? Still covering the starport?"

"The reserves were committed an hour ago to find all of these damn tunnels! But they were too late. Carry out your orders, Captain Raisul. We're caught between a rock and a hard place here. Ops out."

"Raisul to the First P.C. Well, you heard. We're going to fall back in echelon of lances. With luck, the Rat Traps and the trench will slow down the 'Mechs up ahead until we can put paid to the infantry's accounts. We might be able to blunt the attack in our rear and still get back here to ward off the next assault."

"Stokes to Cap. And what if we can't get back in time, sir?"

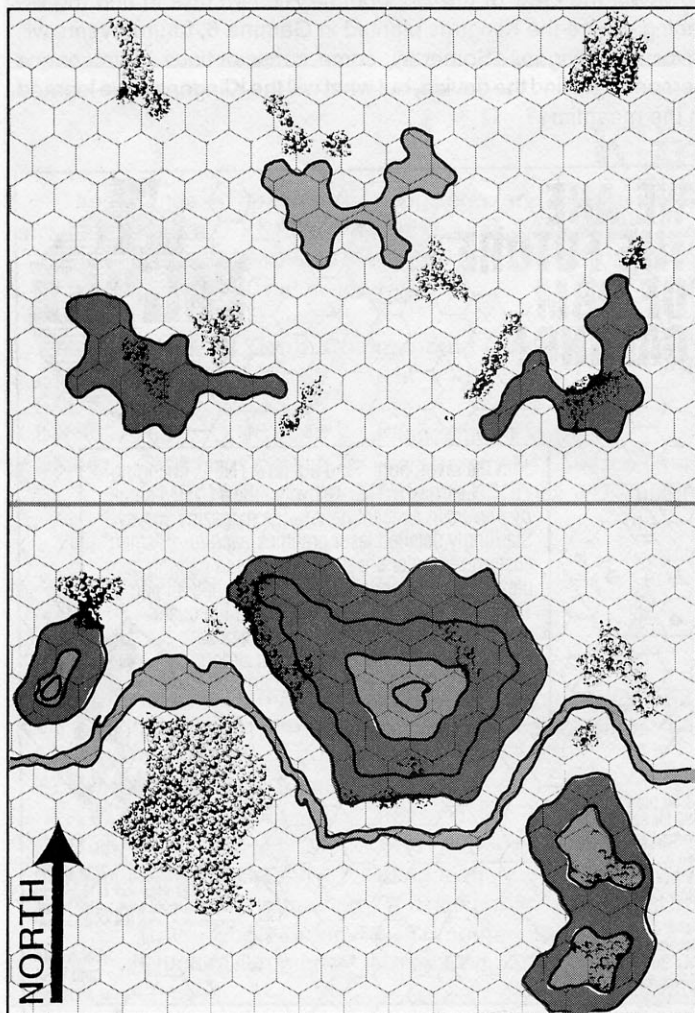
"Then we'll be just that much closer to the DropShips when the colonel gives the bugout order."

"Uh, affirm."

"So that's it. Recon, withdraw to the high ground on my mark. Command and support lances will hold here until you're clear. Then support will head out. Clear?"

"Misty to command. The Dragoons are beginning their move. Want to reconsider the pull out?"

"Negative, recon. We have our orders. Prepare to pull back. Mark!"



During the heavy fighting around Fort Belvoir between the remnants of Gamma and Epsilon Regiments of the Wolf's Dragoons and the Eighth Galedon Regulars, the Kuritan General Victor Nicholas ordered that a series of tunnels be built under the defenses by his combat engineers.

Seven tunnels were constructed, and for eight weeks sappers burrowed closer to the Dragoon lines while covered by probing attacks from Combine 'Mech companies aboveground.

Early on June 25, 3029, a Dragoon Centurion 'Mech pulling back to the starport for resupply fell through the roof of one of the tunnels, sounding the alarm.

Although the Kuritans' timetable called for the tunnels to be opened up some five days later (when they would have been in the starport perimeter), General Nicholas ordered that the tunnels be blown open immediately and scraped together enough assault infantry to throw into the fort before the Dragoons could react effectively.

The plan worked. As the reserve units of the Dragoons began to discover the other tunnels on their sonic detectors and direct artillery on them, the tunnels opened up, and Kuritan infantry poured into the base.

Only one of the seven tunnels had been completely destroyed before the trap was sprung.

With hundreds of enemy infantry within the fort rapidly destroying the rear area command posts, supply and repair yards, and medical installations, the regimental command had no choice but to order some of the front-line 'Mechs to the rear to deal with this new threat. It was then that General Nicholas ordered his 'Mech battalions to assault the perimeter once again.

Caught between the massed firepower of enemy 'Mechs and infantry, the Dragoons slowly gave ground. Soon the battle took on the appearance of a wild melee with no battle lines or command control.

The fighting raged all night and the next day, finally ending as 'Mechs ran out of ammunition and began to pummel each other with armored fists and ramming tactics.

In the end, the Dragoons were forced back to the starport, where the massed armament of their DropShips kept the Draconis forces at bay long enough for the survivors to board their vessels.

Less than 40% of the Dragoon 'Mechs that had started the battle were able to board the ships, and most of those were heavily damaged.

On July 27, 3029, the Dragoon DropShips left Harrow's Sun for the planet Crossing with the exhausted Kuritan victors hardly making any effort to stop them.

GAME SETUP

Lay out the *BattleTech* maps as shown. Use all advanced *BattleTech* and *CityTech* rules. Treat the stream running through the southern map as the Fort Belvoir defensive trench system. The defending player must randomly place 15 medium buildings and 10 heavy buildings anywhere on the northern mapboard as outlying installations of the base.

DEFENDER

The defender is the 1st Provisional Company of Gamma Regiment, Wolf's Dragoons.

Command Lance

Captain Mohammed Raisul, Orion (ammunition for AC/10 and SRM20 down to 10 shots each), Gunnery 2, Piloting 2.

Lieutenant Norah Jane Stokes, Griffin (LRM10 ammo down to 12, center torso armor down to 10), Gunnery 3, Piloting 2.

Torvald Vanney, Trebuchet (right arm armor down to five points), Gunnery 3, Piloting 4.

Hal Meskline, Thunderbolt (LRM ammo down to five rounds), Gunnery 4, Piloting 3.

Heavy Lance

Lieutenant Harold Spim, Catapult (LRM ammo down to four rounds, center torso armor down to 15 points), Gunnery 2, Piloting 3.

Sergeant Simon Prosser, Crusader (no damage, full ammo), Gunnery 3, Piloting 2.

Wallace Chagall, Firefly (no damage, full ammo), Gunnery 3, Piloting 4.

Sheldon Woolrich, Crusader (SRMG jams on a roll of 6+), Gunnery 4, Piloting 4.

Recon Lance

Lieutenant Samantha "Misty" Ryker, Panther (no damage, full ammo), Gunnery 3, Piloting 3.

Sergeant Gary Himmer, Stinger (no armor on right leg), Gunnery 3, Piloting 3.

Maurice Frenn, Falcon (no damage, full ammo), Gunnery 2, Piloting 3.

Ludwig Raist, Wasp (SRM2 down to 10 rounds), Gunnery 4, Piloting 4.

Deployment

Set up anywhere within the trench line south of the base of Hill 0607. The defender deploys first.

ATTACKER

The attacker is Volkrath's Voltiguers, First Company, Second Battalion, and the Twelfth Assault Group, Eighth Galedon Regulars.

Grenadier Lance

Captain Douglas "Davout" Volkrath, Dragon (no damage, full

ammo), Gunnery 4, Piloting 3.

Lieutenant Ike Marsala, Ostsol (center torso armor down to 15 points), Gunnery, Piloting 4.

Alvarez Romy, Quickdraw (no damage, full ammo), Gunnery 4, Piloting 4.

Initia Ormsby, Marauder (AC/5 down to five rounds) Gunnery 3, Piloting 4.

Lingne Lance

Lieutenant Rolf von Toerback, Warhammer (right PPC misfires on a roll of 7+), Gunnery 4, Piloting 3.

Edwin Dowlman, Rifleman (no armor in the rear torso), Gunnery 4, Piloting 5.

Frank Peter Gardener, Phoenix Hawk (no damage, full ammo), Gunnery 4, Piloting 4.

Isoru Kamachi, Assassin (no damage, full ammo), Gunnery 4, Piloting 6.

Tirailleur Lance

Lieutenant Jacques Montayne, Javelin (no damage, full ammo), Gunnery 3, Piloting 3.

Jessica Palmer, Panther (SRM4 jams on a roll of 8+), Gunnery 4, Piloting 4.

Armand "The Bloodletter" Miribaud, Commando (SRM6 down to five rounds, SRM4 down to 10 rounds), Gunnery 4, Piloting 4.

Sally "Crazy Legs" Bester, Locust (no damage, full ammo), Gunnery 4, Piloting 3.

Twelfth Assault Group

1st Platoon, foot infantry, machineguns.

2nd Platoon, foot infantry, flamers.

3rd Platoon, foot infantry, lasers.

4th Platoon, foot infantry, SRM.

Deployment

Volkrath's Voltiguers enter the southern edge of the map on turn one.

The Twelfth Assault Group may set up on any hill hex on either board at the beginning of the game.

VICTORY CONDITIONS

Defender must destroy all enemy infantry, then exit off of the northern edge of the map by turn 20.

The attacker must eliminate at least eight defending 'Mechs before turn 20.

Any other result is a draw.

SPECIAL RULES

Defense Trench: Any 'Mech that enters the defense trench must stop all movement and may not fire that turn. It may only be fired upon by units at Level One elevation or higher. When a 'Mech leaves the defense trench, it may only move one hex but can fire normally.

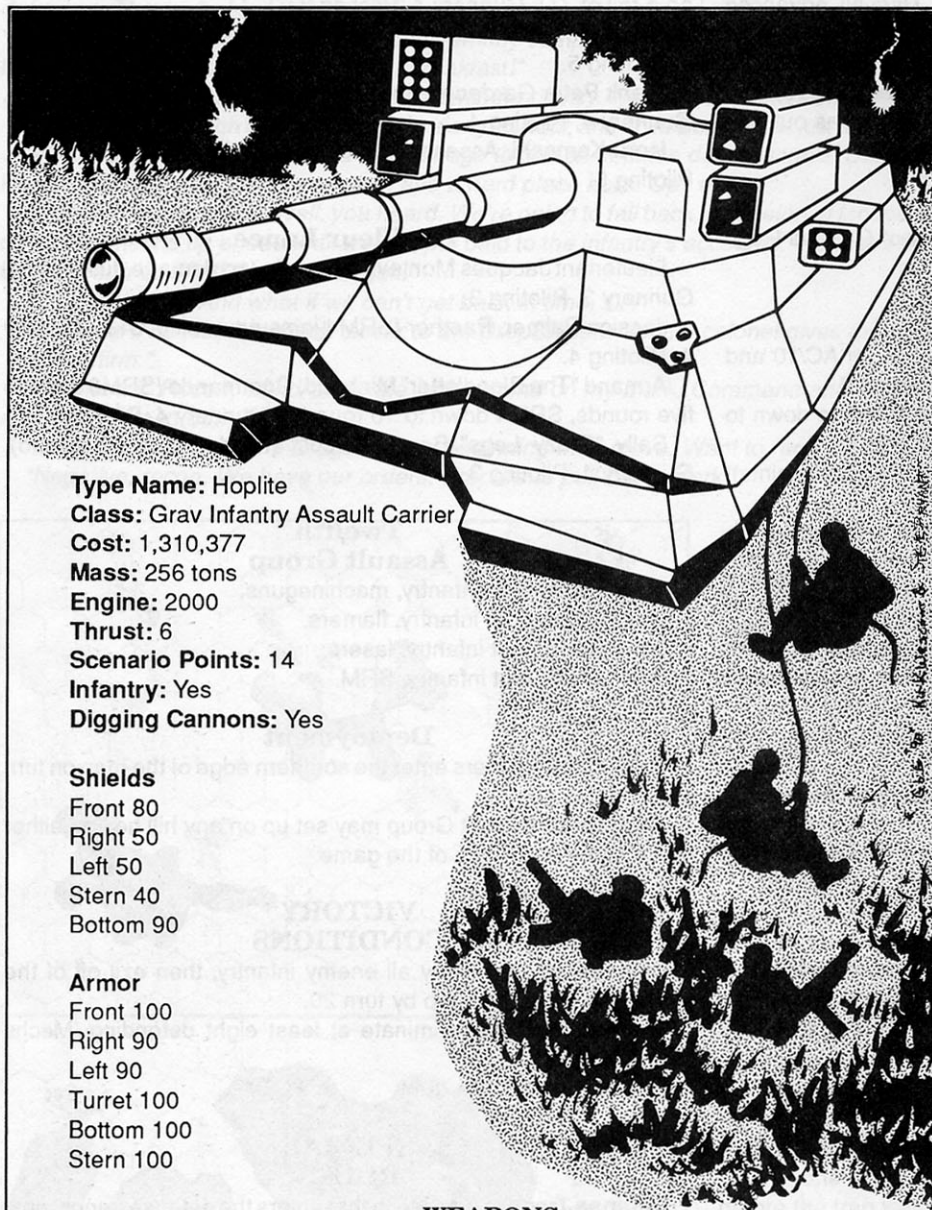
RatTraps: The defender secretly selects 10 hexes on the southern map and five hexes on the northern map to be used as RatTraps.

If an enemy 'Mech enters one of these hexes, its pilot must immediately make a Piloting Roll to avoid falling and taking normal damage. Ω

BATTLETECH

Hoplite Infantry Assault Carrier

By Rich Ostorero



Type Name: Hoplite
Class: Grav Infantry Assault Carrier
Cost: 1,310,377
Mass: 256 tons
Engine: 2000
Thrust: 6
Scenario Points: 14
Infantry: Yes
Digging Cannons: Yes

Shields

Front 80
Right 50
Left 50
Stern 40
Bottom 90

Armor

Front 100
Right 90
Left 90
Turret 100
Bottom 100
Stern 100

WEAPONS

Type	Location	Damage	Max Range
100mm gauss	Turret	T	10
TVLG-6	Hull 1	T	6
TVLG-12	Turret	T	6
SMLM-1	Hull 2	T	10
SMLM-2	Hull 2	T	10
SMLM-2	Turret	T	10
SMLM-2	Turret	T	10
SMLM-2	Turret	T	10

The Hoplite is the premier vehicle of a new class of TOG armor: the infantry assault carrier (IAC). It is designed to drop bounce infantry into close contact with the enemy from high altitudes and support the infantry with indirect missile fire.

While the battlefield transport role has fallen to the Lupis APC for the last 40 years and the heavy support role has been the province of the Romulus carrier, unacceptable attrition rates of up to one in three vehicles—killed by falls when the grav drive is damaged on bottom hits—have led TOGSOG (Terran Overlord Government Strategy Operations Group) to plan this new class of grav armor for the assault role.

Plans for the Hoplite IAC have existed as mere "artist's concept" holomages and design studies for decades. The impetus for moving the plans from concept to reality was the 6827 defeat by the KessRith on Bruno's Sorrow. The 44791st Strike Legion's grav vehicle envelopment tactics were thwarted there when KessRith armor crews trained their lasers on the attacking forces' thin bottom armor. TOGSOG's evaluation of the Bruno's Sorrow action, written by Overlord Albertus "The Bear" Ursinus, laid down the requirements for corrective action:

The infantry assault carrier itself must be able to do these tasks:

Task 1—rapid transportation and drop-deployment of a squad of legionnaires.

Task 2—have enough protection to withstand heavy defensive fire from gauss cannons during closure.

Task 3—possess sustained indirect fire capability to support the infantry.

The report favorably impressed Caesar and found favor with Overlord Mannius, a Ursinus ally and Belinski Arms board member. Never one to bypass an imperially sanctioned opportunity for profit, Mannius ordered old IAC design studies broken out of storage, and he handed the project to the design team responsible for the successful Ferrox Rex heavy grav tank.

The design team faced formidable challenges. The state of the art in combat vehicle design had advanced far since the design studies were published, and military bureaucracy was dedicated to the idea of "results at any cost." Overlords are notoriously unable to understand that physical laws are unamenable to the will of Caesar. More than one engineer who failed to deliver miracles on command has found himself enslaved. With high-profile attention on the Hoplite project, the pressure on the design team was intense.

As a consequence, development took only 14 months from CADD file to prototype, a speed almost unheard of in bureaucracy-laden TOG technology projects. The design team, the best in TOG space, saved months by adapting many of the Rex's subsystems to the Hoplite. The first Hoplites reached selected

field units in early 6830. The ongoing field evaluation trials will continue for another four years before a final procurement decision is made.

CAPABILITIES

The Hoplite design team followed Overlord Ursinus' dicta to the letter. The talented crew quickly adapted much of the Hoplite's equipment from other successful projects. Starting with a plant prototype developed and later scrapped during the Romulus/Pompeii vehicle projects, the 2000-rated plant provides ample power for the high thrust maneuvers APC crews favor in drop assaults.

The Hoplite, like its ancient namesake, is heavily armored. Fifty-seven tons of the best damage-deflecting materials the armorers at Belinski Arms could create are coupled to advanced passive protection systems first developed for the Ferrox Rex, resulting in what one lab wag describes as "the free man's nightmare." Shield generators designed for the Ferrox Rex were also adapted to the Hoplite without flaw. Surplus LeBaron 100mm gauss cannons—from an Aeneas assembly plant shut down by the lictor—were promptly adapted to the design.

The remainder of the project demonstrated the true genius of the design team. Newly developed under-armor Mars-6 and Mars-12 TVLG racks from Mars Arms were quickly mated to modular ScatterPak SMLM pods for the Hoplite's main firepower. The infantry doors are located and shaped to prevent the IAC's slip-stream from impeding the exit of the infantry, a rare concession to the needs of the "pedes."

All systems are designed for easy field maintenance, a problem that marred the Ferrox Rex. The modular electronics are housed in large, easy-to-access bays just under the armor. Each bay has its own multiconnector to a diagnostic computer that quickly isolates problems within that bay's modules. One veteran grav vehicle technician moaned, "The Hoplite's so easy to fix that a trained monkey—or a typical infantryman—can do it right." This statement does not speak highly of the mental capacity of the TOG's legionnaires, but it speaks volumes for the Hoplite's maintainability.

ASSESSMENT

Tests so far have shown that the Hoplite can indeed rush an entrenched enemy, withstand a pounding, deploy its infantry from flight, and provide indirect missile fire on infantry paints far longer than any TOG APC—but it can do little else.

Critics of the design have registered their protests with TOGSOG. First-year engineering students have noted that thrust is gained at the expense of respectable flank shielding. The Hoplite carries no antimissile or antiinfantry armament. It is, to quote a senator, "a viper with a hideous vulnerability to its own venom." Another critic asked, "Why carry nine minute's worth of missile fire when the average combat vehicle has a life expectancy of two minutes?"

Two overlords with a penchant for restating the obvious wrote, "The Hoplite has two problems. One, when the missile load is expended, the tank is left with a light tank's popgun for defense. Two, the Hoplite's weapon systems are short-ranged. None of them can engage a target beyond two-kilometers range, making heavy gauss and laser fire unanswerable."

Defenders of the Hoplite assert that the design is a specialist vehicle best used in close terrain against light or medium armor. Hoplites survive to launch all 27 missiles by staying away from heavy armor. Answering the charges of vulnerability to infantry, the combat arms liaison to the Hoplite design group added, "So what if the 'Lite carries no (expletive deleted) AP lasers? Infantry has more to fear from the four-klick range of light mortars than it does from anyone's 600-meter-range AP laser." The lead engineer, a former infantryman, supported this statement, saying, "The best antiinfantry defense is closely cooperating friendly infantry, which this design features as integral equipment."

As the procurement decision date nears, the debate is expected to intensify.

The design is not without its quirks. Field reports of catastrophic gauss cannon feed coil failures were quickly traced to a long-hidden LeBaron quality control report. The weapons were faulty, and LeBaron passed off the cannons as "surplus." The lictor's subsequent investigation uncovered the evidence that sent the entire LeBaron QA department to the laser crystal mines. The feed coil failures were quickly corrected in the field. The infantryman's ejection system, crucial to the vehicle's mission, often imparts a spin to the departing "pede"—an unnerving experience for even the bravest legionnaire. "Grav drops are dangerous enough without being spun by the eject charge," sighed one squad sergeant. The Hoplite also has positive quirks: a very roomy infantry compartment to accommodate the pede's TVLG reloads or an exhausted squad in need of sleep; surprisingly agile NF handling for a vehicle designed for gravblitz tactics at TTF/LAF; and internally reloadable smoke grenade launchers which ease the maintenance load greatly.

DEPLOY

Three Hoplite cen-

RENEGADE LEGION

turies are assigned to strike legions and auxilla in Shannadam County. IACs in legionary formations are broken into platoons and integrated into the medium and heavy grav armor centuries of legionnaire first cohorts. Surprisingly the 13379th Strike Legion (Harbingers of Death), a unit that has often given new TOG equipment its baptism of fire, fields no Hoplites. The 8895th Strike Legion (the Storm of Vengeance), a specialist in close-terrain grav AFV battles, has one platoon of Hoplites in each century of its first cohort. The remainder are assigned to the 45543rd Infantry Auxilla, a cohort-sized unit formed to test the tactical doctrine of IAC-equipped centuries. The auxilla contains one all-IAC century, one non-IAC century, and two centuries each with one and two platoons of Hoplite IACs. The balance of the auxilla's grav armor is heavy.

VARIANTS

As the Hoplite is still undergoing field trials and evaluation, TOGSOG has authorized no variants.

With the small number of Hoplites in service at this time, unauthorized field expedient modifications by crews would be very rare, but not unknown. □

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Space Ork Tactics

By Craig Sheeley

Right, y' skivvin' gits! Lissen up an' lissen good. Skarbad Grimork—dat's me, see?—is gonna try ter beat sum know-whats inter yer naffin' humie 'eads 'bout 'ow da boyz goez 'bout drubbin' you lot all th' time. I'ze even got a interpratter...inteptrater...intaper-tor...whatever you zoggin' scum call a lad what tells yer what I sez in humie talk! An' 'e better not be tellin' no spuggin' humie jokes behind me back, neither—got that?

What Skarbad Grimork is going to lecture on is the proper use and treatment of Ork troops on the battlefield of *Warhammer 40,000 Rogue Trader*.

The reader will please note that some of his remarks don't make any sort of recognizable tactical sense—great intellect is not a necessary quality among Ork war leaders. Luck and force of personality, as well as the ability to see an opportunity and seize it when it presents itself, are more important.

ORK TROOPS

First yer gots ter unnerstand dat da boyz is da best fighterz in da ooniverse, see? We doesn't take cheek from no one, an we doez fings our own way—every Ork knowz what 'e 'as ter do wivvout some git tellin' 'im. You humies doez fings da wrong way alla time 'cuz yer keep lissenin' ter some ovverhumie 'stead o' just doin' what yer know is best. Fink about it! If da humie tellin' yer what ter do iz wrong, den y' deserves what yer gets fer doin' what 'e sez! Every boy knows what 'es doin'. Yer boyz comes from different gangs, see? Each gang sendz der boyz in a mob ter fight, an each mob sticks tergether. 'Course, each mob'z got some sorta big blaster—it's a matter 'o pride. Da rest ov 'em's got bolterz an' stickbombz, wiv some armor an' maybe a couple extrer guns. Since daboyz in deez mobz moves tergether, they is what you humies callz a "unit o' moover," or some such.

Contrary to Skarbad's boast, Ork troops are not the "best fighters in the universe." Indeed, the average Ork is a competent, but mediocre, warrior, equal to the Imperial Guard in most respects (although a bit thicker in skin and cranium). Young Orks receive only minimal training in the arts of war, enough to teach them how to use weapons and take care of them. This results in a high

attrition rate, so that Orks that survive grow quite skilled at killing and survival (see Nobs).

The basic Ork "unit of maneuver" is the mob. Ork mobs are similar to squads, and vary in size from five Orks to up to 20 or more. All these Orks are from the same family lineage, so they have a natural interest in fighting together and maintaining cohesion during the battle. This serves to counteract the natural rebelliousness of the individual Orks, who all want to go their own way.

Each mob is centered around the family heavy weapon—usually something loud, visible and destructive—and the rest are armed with standard weapons. Orks tend to use bolt guns and frag grenades, equipping each "boy" with flak armor more as a matter of custom than of protection—an Ork's tough skin and resilient biosystem make for better protection than flak armor. As a whole, the average Ork soldier is every bit the equal of a trooper of the Imperial Guard or a regular Eldar pulled away from his lifepath to fight for the craftworld.

O' course, you humies makez a big deal out 'o stormboyz. Th' way yer talkz, yoo'd fink dat day'z da best Orks what ever fired a bolter! Dat'z zoggin' humie talk, an' dead wrong. Stormboyz isn't really so bad, yer know. Day'z just young an' dassn't know da right way ter do fings yet. Day fink dat walkin' 'round in linez an' each tryin' ter act like da ovver is how ter do fings. It ain't Orky, see? Day all learn soon's day get da troof bashed inter 'em by a few thick rows!

Stormboys may be young and inexperienced troops, largely disdained by Orkish veterans (Skarbad's opinion is quite lenient), but they are a potent force when encountered. Stormboys are Orks that practice discipline, order, coordination and other qualities of good soldiery. They band together out of rebellion against the wisdom of their elders—to Orks, conformity is the height of nonconformity. Marching together and drilling are otherwise foreign to Orks, and most older Orks either ignore Stormboyz, hoping they'll "grow out of it," or despise and ridicule them. However, some shrewd warlords are beginning to understand Stormboy possibilities. An Ork Stormboy is every bit the equivalent in prowess and discipline to an Imperial Space Marine or Eldar Aspect Warrior. The war-dedicated Goff clan bosses



are particularly interested in stormboys and cultivate the lethal social groups. Indeed, given that a Stormboy mob is like a whole crop of nob's (and easier to deal with), nearly every warband tends to haul as large a unit of stormboys as it can.

Madboyz is boyz what isn't all dere, yer know? Lucky dere isn't many ov 'em. Day just sorter doez whatever comez inter dere 'eadz at th' time. Dis is not a good fing if dere's a fight goin' on at da time! Day can turn inter real Orky Orks—or just as easy go wanderin' orf fer some reason or over.

Madboy mobs are loose squads formed of Orks suffering from various forms of insanity. Usually the madboys cluster in one mob since they enjoy each other's company (and are ostracized by normal Orks). On the battlefield, madboys create a great deal of interest—and bother. No one knows what they'll do next—including the madboys.

At random intervals, single madboys dominate their mates, influencing them to follow the delusion of the current leader and act according to his distorted view of events. This sheer unpredictability would exclude them from Ork warbands except for the fact that a madmob can perform lucky and astonishing feats on the battlefield, if it's in the proper mood. However, in the wrong mood, it can cause equally great disasters. War bosses employing madmobs tend to stick them on one flank, escorted by Dreadnoughts or other heavy vehicles, where they are out of harm's way but close enough to make a difference if they switch to a useful psychosis.

MOVEMENT AND MANEUVER

What's dere ter say? Yer sees da enemy an' whips 'im, roight? O' course, yoo humies likes ter talk 'bout strategy an' like dat, an' yer wastes too much time an' talk onnit. An Ork just drubs da enemy a good 'un an' dassn't worry 'bout 'ow 'e went an' did it.

Skarbad's attitude is typical. Although Ork war bosses don't admit it (and frequently don't realize it), their grasp of strategy and tactics is quite workmanlike. An Ork war leader has to exercise the same care and thought in deploying his forces as any human, Squat or Eldar commander. Even Orks use the bounding overwatch tactic. When Orks are facing fire, they instinctively move in mob pairs, one mob moving forward while the other covers the advance. If the enemy is behind cover, often the covering mob's heavy weapon will adopt an overwatch posture (see *Warhammer By The Numbers, Challenge 44*) to pick off enemy soldiers if they move out to attack the advancing mob. A common problem with Ork mob deploy-

ment is how to advance the mob while leaving the heavy weapon (always a slow-firer) stationary to fire. The answer is either to flank the heavy weapon with other mob members or place the heavy on one flank, allowing the other boys to move forward while the heavy weapon gunner fires. The end result is mobs advancing in a single slanted line or reversed wedge (V-fashion).

When facing foes of equal or lesser firepower (Imperial Guard, Squats and Guardian Eldar), Orks can and will advance in a line or wave, each coming to grips with the enemy. The weapons and skill of these forces leave them at a disadvantage when dealing with Orks, whose heavier weapons kill more efficiently. Aspect Warriors and Imperial Marines are faced more cautiously—a favorite Ork strategy is to withdraw and set forces in position, daring the Eldar and Marines to come to them instead. When dealing with these expert killers, an Ork war leader has to make sure that the maximum number of his boys can fire at all times; it takes two Orks per Marine/Aspect Warrior to kill the enemy and survive the onslaught of well-aimed bolter and shuriken fire. Orks will, of course, make use of available cover, just like any regular soldier. Blood Axe mobs, emulating human tactics, tend to stick close to cover whenever possible. This just contributes to other clans' contentions that the Blood Axes are "whinin', sneakin' gits wiv no guts."

MORALE AND DISCIPLINE

You humies'll never unnerstand it. It's like goin' real fast, 'r tacklin' a face-eater. It just hits yer an' bam! Yer wants ter go up an' dakka-dakka da enemy, 'r thump 'im 'round da 'ead. Innit?

Orks have long been known for their unpredictable and frequently unwise habit of charging the enemy when it's not in their best interests. In *Warhammer 40,000* this is explained as *hatred*. Orks hate everyone they face. A better explanation is the Orkish love for combat—after all, to them combat is the be-all and end-all of Orkish existence. Most Orks just can't stand standing around and shooting the enemy—it's fun, but not half as fun as going into personal close combat. Of course, this love for combat doesn't extend to a love for dying. Fortunately for the race, Orks don't place as much emphasis on winning above all else as humans and Squats are likely to. If a battle is going badly, the Orks will withdraw from the field. "He who fights and runs away, lives to fight another day" sums up the feeling nicely.

Yer. If we don't win dis time, we goez away an' comez back later ter 'ave anovver go, see?



Smart war leaders learn not to depend on their troops doing exactly what they want them to.

Mob pairs complement each other well in this instance, too. Since each Ork unit in sight of the enemy makes a Cool test before it moves to see if it charges the enemy, most of the time only one mob of each pair will act unwisely, leaving the other to cover for its impetuosity.

HAND TO HAND

Oil Every Ork what's Orky knowz what ter do as soon as 'e's whelped: Yer runz up an' getz stuck in but good! Stands ter reason, dunnit.

While it is true that Orks love hand-to-hand combat, they are some of the worst hand-to-hand fighters in the entire universe. Their skill in close combat is medium, but so is their Strength. Their low initiatives dictate that they strike after every kind of soldier except Squats (and other Orks). Their only saving grace is their natural toughness, which protects them from a lot of damage. Orks may safely charge Imperial Guards. Guardian Eldar are somewhat more chancy, since they all carry las-pistols for close work. Squats are right out—they're just as tough as Orks—and better hand-to-hand fighters to boot.

Charging Imperial Marines and Eldar Aspect Warriors is foolish. Aspect Warriors are better fighters, and Marines are both better fighters and stronger. An Ork might survive an Aspect Warrior's las-pistol or shuriken pistol, but he's unlikely to survive a Marine's bolt pistol!

Naturally, "sticking it in" to Ogrins is suicidal. The big brutes are too tough to notice most Orks in close combat, and mop their way through mobs in a casual fashion. And Orks should *never* engage Genestealers! A Purestrain can slay Orks nearly forever, with little fear of retaliation. If confronted with a charging Ogrin/Zoat/Marine/Aspect Warrior/Genestealer, an Ork's smartest tactic is to stay away from it and shoot it. If they are already engaged, Orks may (and do) shoot into the combat, risking hitting Orks in order to pick off a fearsome opponent. If they want to narrow the field, the engaged Orks try to withdraw from close combat and let others blast the foe. Of course, the foe gets a free shot at the Ork breaking away, but if the foe is certain death anyway, what does the Ork have to lose?

NOBS

Nobz is tough boyz what comez from powerful familie, loike mine, see? Nobz iz bigger, meaner, an' better 'n da ovver boyz.

Ork nobs are the survivors of the Ork love of battle. Experienced warriors with superior equipment, Ork nobs are the answer to other races' heroes. Nobs are deployed any way they want to be (or their boss wants them to be). They can be put with regular mobs as "squad leaders," banded together in mobs of their own, or employed as nonunit strikers. Since they tend to have better armor than the average boy (mesh and flak is common, and powered armor is popular), they are better suited to battlefield survival unprotected by the mass of a unit around them.

Nobs typically carry more exotic weapons, such as plasma guns and hand flamers, as well as bolters—they've got the skill to make their shots count. A few carry heavy weapons, and some may have jump belts (these are considered nearly mad by other Orks).

Nobs are best used as either squad/mob leaders or mobile counterforces. A small group of nobs with plasma and/or flamer weapons can wreak havoc on such usually tough targets as Space Marines or Ogryns. The greatest concern in their deployment is to mask them behind other mobs until they can get close enough to employ their short-ranged, if deadly, weapons.

ODDBOYS

Oddboyz is, well, odd. Runtherdz 'n meks n' painboyz 'n weirdboyz, day'z all useful. Wivout Dronggit Spanner, my kart wouldn't work, 'n wivout Dok Drok, I wouldn't 'ave no bionic arm ter replace th' one what got shot off on Stungwort Foive. O' course, day gets stuck in like any ovver boyz, 'cause day'z Orks, see?

Ork "oddbOys" are the Ork version of battlefield support personnel. Mekaniks are field mechanics, repairing and maintaining their strange mechanical creations with unskilled competence (and "lotsa nails"). Painboys are Ork medics and doctors, specializing in bionic replacement rather than regeneration therapy for serious cases. Still, an Ork painboy is as useful a medic as any Marine or Guard medic. (Suggested rule: If a wounded Ork comes up with a Serious wound of any kind on the Wound Chart—*Warhammer 40,000 Compendium*, page 30—he's due for bionic replacement of the wounded part when employed in his next battle.) Runtherds, caretakers and breeders of Snotlings and Gretchin, are seen less often in battle. Usually they are present only when their herds of Snotlings and Gretchin are employed as sappers and minefield-clearers.

Ork weirdboys are a common sight in

combat. The communal psychics are useful to any war boss, and some of their attacks are as deadly as they are spectacular. Still, weirdboys are quite visible and draw a lot of attention (and fire). Most war bosses counter this problem by screening weirdboys with other mobs until they're ready to fire, thus treating them like a strange heavy weapon (which, in a sense, they are), or by putting them in with Gretchin or regular mobs to spread incoming fire. The war bosses' greatest precaution is to make sure the weirdboy has a clear field of fire when his psychic attacks burst forth; weirdboys are none too picky about what they hit.

Weirdboys really shine when warp beings and psykers are on the field. Their attacks have devastating effects on other psychic beings—up to total destruction of the most fearsome warp creatures. Of course, all oddboys carry weapons and armor, and use them competently. After all, they are Orks.

VEHICLES

Hur hur hur! Karts 'n sickles iz lotts a good fun! Day'z all nobz, natch, an' da pride o' da force. 'Course, yer always gots some Snots inna canz ter keep an eye on, but day usually doez dere job roight, yer know. An' yer know what yer doez when yer gots a kart 'r sickle? Yer sticks it to da ovver side, 'at's what!

Orks employ a wide range of vehicles as fire support. They lack almost any sort of battlefield transports or APCs, and won't ride any sort of enclosed vehicle into combat—they've got to be able to shoot from it! Imperial Rhinos used by Orks are almost always modified to include firing ports and an open top.

Ork mechanized infantry consists of boys clinging to wildly speeding vehicles, firing madly as they careen across the terrain. Ork combat karts are robust and crude frames supporting as large and noisy an engine and weapon as the owning nob can afford and barely enough room for the crew (there are no slow Ork vehicles—the entire race shares a mania for speed). Ork "sickles" (cycles) are either reworked versions of Squat or Imperial bikes, or entirely Ork-built contraptions like the Warbike or the Wartrak.

These heavily armed conveyances are usually employed without care for tactical realities. They dash forward from Ork lines to come to grips with the enemy, fire, then actually ram through troops and lesser vehicles. (Ork vehicles are tough enough to take substantial impacts without damage.) Because of this dangerous tactic, many vehicles have optional power fields to protect the crew from return fire. Sometimes the war boss even manages to persuade the nobs to spread out and flank the enemy, driving in behind their lines to cause mas-

sive damage to the rear.

Strategically, Ork karts and sickles cannot be ignored. Their high speed and firepower makes them one of the most potent light forces available. Ork "canz," or Dreadnoughts, are a regular and frightening sight on any Ork battlefield. The smaller Killer-class DN's are piloted by small Orks, while the large Onslaught-class machines are directed by spinal-linked Gretchins.

Oddly, the Gretchin machines are more powerful than the Ork machines. The Killer is an antipersonnel machine, usually outfitted with a heavy bolter or plasma gun and employed like a mobile MG nest. It lacks the toughness and weaponry to tackle armor or other dreadnoughts—even regular Orks, Space Marines or Aspect Warriors can destroy one with hand weapons alone. The Super-Attack Onslaughts are the vehicle-killers, festooned with heavy weapons and power claws. A Killer has to skulk at range, but an Onslaught can (and will) stride directly into battle, confident that its armor will protect it from harm.

As usual, dreadnoughts are excellent snipers and perfect for taking out pesky and tough enemies (Zoats, Ogryns, major heroes, Terminators, high-level psykers), and their pilots delight in proving that they're tougher than anyone else. The com-channels echo with the Gretchin squeals of glee when an Onslaught vaporizes a foe.

Orks rarely (if ever) employ off-board artillery or support weapons—usually, they don't have any to use. Larger assault tanks, either Imperial battlefield salvage or home-built mechanical nightmares, are occasionally seen—usually with large invasion forces. Bonecrushas, war wagons, Gobsmashas, Gibletrindas and other massive armored vehicles are normally seen only with Ork armies and Gargants. They are rarely encountered with small skirmish forces.

CONCLUSION

Oi fink I covered everfing 'bout da boyz and dere stuff, an' if I didn't, den servez yer roight fer not knowin' in da first place! Yar boo! Waa Ork!

As you can see, an Ork force is a daunting foe on the battlefield. Undisciplined but heavily armed and numerous, Orks are the greatest threat to the future of the Imperium.

Ork society and customs are examined in *Waargh the Orks*, Games Workshop's treatise on Orks and Orkyness. Ork army lists, essential for any Ork player, are in *White Dwarf* 123 and 124—the former includes the base lists, while the latter adds vehicles and weirdboy rules. *White Dwarf* 126 adds madboy rules. Eventually all Ork rules (probably modified) are to be gathered into a collection, *Waargh the Orks II*, the rules supplement on Orks. Ω

Rifts review by Eric W. Haddock.
Era Ten review by Lester W. Smith.

Rifts

Palladium Books.

\$24.95

Design: Kevin Siembieda

256-page softcover book.

Cyberpunk, magic, psionics, technomagic (technology and magic combined), supernatural horror, and a world gone mad that is "eerily familiar yet disturbingly alien." All this and big guns, too.

Rifts is a multigenre game combining science-fiction, horror and fantasy elements into a unique game background while allowing referees to incorporate any of the other Palladium games into one campaign. The game employs 30 different character classes, one of the best magic systems I've seen, and extensive rules for combining magic with technology. It borrows some of the best aspects of some of Palladium's previous games.

The world of *Rifts* is an apocalyptic one where many types of monsters and dimensional beings (called "D-Bees") coexist with humans. The cause of the world's apocalypse is a mystery to many of the player character classes since the average person in *Rifts* can't read, and the ones that can usually don't tell anybody since they're tucked safely away in the upper levels of Chi-town, seat of North America's largest and most repressive government, the Coalition.

What everyone does know is that something terrible happened on Earth many years ago (no one knows for sure when). Because of that, floods changed coastlines, the rifts opened up, monsters poured out of them, and almost all of civilization collapsed.

What is a Rift?: Rifts are tears in the fabric of space that occur when there is a buildup in the Earth's natural power network of psychic energy. This psychic energy travels in straight paths known as ley lines. When two or more of these lines cross each other, they form a nexus point and create a site of concentrated psychic energy. It's in these energy concentration points that rifts open up and bridge the gap between dimensions, letting all sorts of creatures, both good and evil, into Earth's dimension.

Player Adversaries: The Coalition is a Nazi-like government which takes advantage of the populace's illiteracy to foster an extensive propaganda campaign against both humans who use magic or psionics and against anything that just isn't human. Since few character classes aren't magic- or psionic-oriented, this makes the Coalition the natural—but by no means the primary or only—villain for *Rifts* players.

If players tire of fighting the Coalition, they can try to deal with the problem of the Xitix (pronounced *Zi-tik-iks*), a race of xenophobic insectoid dimensional beings who have gotten quite a foothold on the North American continent. The Xitix serve as the primary "monsters" of *Rifts*, as they seem to hate every sentient or semisentient living thing but themselves.

Cyber Connection: There is a heavy emphasis on cybernetics and bionics in *Rifts*, but this game is by no means another version of

Cyberpunk or *Shadowrun*. *Rifts* is a whole new environment which allows players to play normal people, scholars, brain-chipped mercenaries and psychic mages with equal emphasis. Although there is a Computer Hacking skill, there are no rules for netrunning or managing cybercombat with computers in *Rifts*.

AIDS FOR THE GM

Referees are given a sizable (15-page) background and history into the rift-torn Earth. This gives brief explanations (usually just a paragraph or so) about what has happened to the features and cities of America since the rifts came. Even more space is reserved to explain the logistics and theories of how psychic energy and magic works in the game and how the player characters can take advantage of them.

This background gives both players and GMs an excellent framework within which they can base their characters. It also makes magic and psionics easier to understand as a concept. The magic system, when taken as a whole, is clear, concise and logical, explaining magic in general in a new and "realistic" light.

The list of general equipment and of cybernetics and bionicequipment is exhaustive. The GM will not want for equipment examples nor the player for artificial implant options. The cybernetic and bionic rules give ample choices to allow for the construction of unique player characters and villains.

The lists of starting equipment for each character, though seemingly minor in scope, helped me out greatly as a GM. The lists save a great deal of time during character generation and can even shed some additional light on what the world is all about.

Rifts also has a good table of contents and even a separate Quick Find Table to help locate some important, frequently used information.

For a game that is meant to stand alone, it's surprising that no introductory scenario was included. Nor were any character sheets, handouts or pull-outs provided to aid the players. The only text included that is directly aimed at helping the GM run the game is a set of tables to randomly generate monsters that might come out of a rift.

COMPATIBILITY

Rifts is a stand-alone game that borrows some things from other Palladium games. The biggest stumbling block to bringing in monsters and characters from other Palladium games is the fact that M.D.C., or Mega-Damage Capacity, rules are used. Originally instituted in the *Robotech* line of games, M.D.C. is included in *Rifts* to accommodate the use of big laser guns.

Unfortunately, each and every character walks around with these laser guns that can easily level houses and buildings. This makes even the toughest Palladium RPG monster no physical threat at all. Plus, villain NPCs walk around, as the characters do, in armor that is tough enough to withstand these super guns.

The toughest hero from Palladium's *Heroes Unlimited* wouldn't live past his first battle in *Rifts*. To handle this problem, Palladium is supposed to be coming out with a *Rifts Conversion Book* that will make

it possible to bring in your favorite heroes and toughest monsters and villains into *Rifts*.

No information about its release date is available currently. But, considering the fact that this game is supposed to tie all the others together, one would assume that it cannot be far away.

RULES

Rifts uses basically the same rules framework as all other Palladium games. Some combat actions are given a more detailed explanation, and a whole new section of the rules is devoted to combat between large combat vehicles. Rules for the supernatural and much of the ley line and psychic energy information are taken directly from *Beyond the Supernatural*, Palladium's horror roleplaying game, with only a few changes.

The advantage to this generalized rules duplication is that one does not have to learn a whole new set of rules to play if one has played a Palladium game before. On the other hand, I saw *Rifts* as Palladium's chance to include, clear up or eliminate rules that have given GMs and players headaches over the years, such as the lack of rules for movement during combat and the lack of modifiers for shooting guns at moving targets or at long ranges.

Instead of clearing up old discrepancies, *Rifts* creates many of its own. Perhaps the area which suffers the most from this is the information contained within the Psi-Stalker and Dog Pack character classes. Here, rule contradictions, discrepancies and inconsistencies abound to a degree unprecedented even for Palladium. It is up to individual GMs and players to weed through the rules that contradict each other and arrive at a workable solution—something no one should have to do.

ORGANIZATION

A preponderance of organizational problems and simple editorial errors (like incomplete sentences and spelling) all detract from the overall quality of *Rifts*.

Without a doubt, *Rifts* is one of the most abysmally organized books I've seen. It is extremely difficult to find rules within a section easily and quickly when one needs to. A GM should not expect to start running a game and assume that whatever rules he isn't clear on can be looked up during play. In the games I played and ran, it took more time to find a rule than it took to read it, despite the Quick Find Table.

Perhaps a significant reason for this is the way headings and sections are arranged. Many important information and rules are buried in sections that one would never think to look in. As a prime example, rules about identification papers and how they are used are important for running the game whenever the characters enter a Coalition-governed city. The How Visitor Papers Work section is located in the Black Market section, under the subheading of Illegal Documentation (which is right after High Technology).

And the combat section has an error in headings that hides critical information about shooting machineguns, which apparently (the rules aren't clear) are the rules one looks to when managing laser gunfire.

Magic spells, however, are organized in a superior manner compared to previous Palladium games. As the spells are listed by level and alphabetically, one never has trouble quickly finding the description for a spell.

Why this level of organization and consideration for players wasn't extended to the other 98% of the book is a mystery.

AESTHETICS

The art is good throughout the book, and the cover by Keith Parkinson is particularly eye catching. Two sections of color plates (16 pictures in all) illustrate different aspects of the game. Technical illustrations of guns, cybernetic implants, bionics and vehicles are plentiful enough and are well drawn.

Some of the color plates are not particularly pertinent, instead being just pretty pictures. At Gen Con this year, the designer of the game repeatedly commented about the lack of space he had to work with. It might have been better to forgo some of the plates in favor of helpful text, such as a character sheet or introductory scenario.

FINAL COMMENTS

I highly recommend *Rifts* because of its setting and potential for great scenarios, which can have as much connection with other Palladium games as the GM wants. However, until the *Rifts Conversion Book* comes out, not everything in Palladium's previous games can be put directly into a *Rifts* campaign. There is enough here, though, to keep any GM busy thinking up new scenarios and creating new archvillains for players for quite awhile.

One solution to defeating the organization problem is to read the book from cover to cover one section at a time and to use your best judgment in solving rule inconsistencies. After doing that, you'll realize that you have an excellent game in your hands that offers a world incredibly rich in scenario possibility and uses a quick, easily customized rules system that has proven itself over the years.

Era Ten

Better Games.

\$11.99.

Design: George Rahm and Joseph Hillmer
Two 39-page books and a 52-page book in a color referee screen (paper).

Era Ten is set some time in the distant future, when the term *human* has come to refer to three alien races besides Terrans. These four races have formed a galactic empire called the Tetra-League. As a result of earlier wars, the civilian populations of the empire's worlds have been "civilized" with a pacification virus. But one person in a million proves to be an immune, unaffected by the virus. Many of these individuals become society's criminals, but most are drafted into MACE, an acronym for Military Assault and Combat Expedition (jokingly referred to by its troops as "most anyone conscious and expendable"). The player characters are members of one squad among hundreds, and they begin the game having seen no combat outside a simulator. In order to get some real experience, MACE allows them to hire out for all sorts of missions, much as PCs in most other science-fiction games might do.

Each PC wears an articulated, multifunction combat suit. These suits are so complicated,

however, that literally no one knows how to operate all their functions. As well, many troopers specially adapt their equipment, converting jet packs to flame throwers, for example. For all practical purposes, the characters and their suits are inseparable from the very beginning. Over the course of time, as troopers take damage the suits repair or replace normal biological systems.

The PCs have no statistics, per se. Instead, they are defined by four basic areas. The first is race. The second is a set of five traits: durable, fierce, imperial, inventive, and spirited. (These traits are not rated by degree; you either are fierce, for example, or you aren't.) The third is function in the squad: sarge, grunt, doc, tech-ninja, spec, or new guy. The last is suit functions (skills) known by the character. All these areas are interwoven; that is, race affects traits, and traits and function affect skills. Skills are used in a task roll system that breaks results down into four types—complete success, slight success mixed with slight failure, complete failure, and catastrophe.

The mission generation system uses a deck of ordinary playing cards to provide, within just a few minutes, the outline for an entire adventure with a wealth of plot details. A separate encounter generation system uses playing cards to create diversionary encounters as you play, further fleshing out the adventure.

FREE-STYLE STORYTELLING

Era Ten is set up to emphasize a storytelling sort of roleplaying. There are no lists of equipment or costs, only skills and task roll results. The authors call this free-style roleplaying, using "quick and dirty" rules. With this in mind, then, and with characters and mission generated, you turn your player characters loose in a civilization that is virtually pacified, but with other immunes lurking in the shadows, and with hostile alien races prowling the fringes.

The result can perhaps best be conveyed by describing a sample session with my own playtest group. (In the following description, game results such as "action fails and lose next action" have been translated into story imagery as the game recommends.)

My group's PCs were in the mess hall when everyone inside was called to attention and Major Doolittle walked in. He crossed to the squad's table and told the sergeant to report with his troops to the offices of Dadbala Imports in a warehouse on the other side of the city. The PCs headed off base, where they decided to take a city bus to the warehouse. After nearly an hour of riding, they began to suspect that they had missed their stop (they had failed a roll concerning local knowledge). The sergeant walked to the front of the bus to talk to the driver, who responded by apologetically pointing out a sign reading "No Standing While the Bus Is in Motion." One of the other PCs, a hair-trigger sort, responded by blasting the sign to bits with his assault rifle, at which point the bus screeched to a halt. With the other passengers trembling in their seats, and the driver politely protesting that his schedule was being ruined, the PCs commandeered the bus and took it to the warehouse.

Once there, they spoke to the owner of Dadbala Imports, who informed them that her cargo ship captains who hauled domestic robots from Logan's World had been receiving vague, anonymous warnings to go on strike. She wanted the PCs to travel to that system and see what they could find

out about her mysterious enemy. After some haggling, she agreed to pay for all their expenses, and she called for a hover platform to take them to the starport. On their way there, however, they were swarmed by a gang of Young Bloods (immunes) yielding crowbars. There followed a welter of confusion as the PCs got to try out their combat skills for the first time.

The sarge spent his first action trying to prepare his assault rifle for autofire in the next, but mistakenly flipped the weapon to safety instead. The party's one grunt accidentally torched himself while attempting to spray the gang with flame (his suit negated most of the damage, however). Next, the doc disengaged the magazine from his assault weapon while trying to switch to autofire.

The Young Bloods attacked, banging on the PCs with their crowbars, but were largely unable to get through the armored suits. Finally the tech-ninja, who had held his action until after the Young Bloods acted, initiated a Star Point Overload (a momentary force field) to block a crowbar blow that would have damaged him. Unfortunately, he rolled a mixed success, with the result that the field managed to block the blow but drained all power from his systems for the next round.

That next round, while the sarge and doc readied their weapons again (in game terms, did nothing), the tech-ninja stood helplessly immobile while a Young Blood tried to lever his helmet off. But the grunt managed at least a partial success with his flamer, torching everybody in the vicinity, including his buddies. The player described this as turning the nozzle upward to examine it, then accidentally shooting flame straight up in the air to rain back down on everyone.

After a few more rounds of this sort of nonsense, mixed with a couple of lucky autofires, the PCs had finally chased the surviving Young Bloods off and continued on their way, and we halted the adventure for the night. Interestingly, the next time we got together to playtest something else, my players asked to play *Era Ten* again sometime soon. And considering how easy the game is to run, I'm sure we will.

MECHANICS

The game has one major problem. That is, the writing is terrible. The books consist largely of poorly expressed, ungrammatical sentences collected into paragraphs that ramble relatively aimlessly from topic to topic, resulting in a text that is difficult to follow the first time through and worse to search through during play. The Better Games products I have seen are absolutely the worst written of any of the roleplaying games I've ever read (approximately 200 at last count). It pains me to have to say that, but it's true.

CONCLUSION

Despite its problems, *Era Ten* is a lot of fun. The trouble with its text mechanics is offset by its inventiveness. The designers have some interesting perspectives on roleplaying, things that can be carried over into other games. And the price is low enough to make the purchase worthwhile. The scenario and encounters design books are easily adaptable to other science-fiction games. They lay out an adventure skeleton, to be fleshed out with details from your favorite game, making them very generic.

If you cannot order *Era Ten* through your local game store, you can write to: Better Games, P.O. Box 11424, Burbank, CA 91510-1424. □

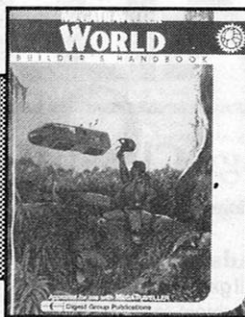


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HIWG (UK): The History of the Imperium Working Group is seeking UK **MegaTraveller** players interested in participating in the development of GDW's Shattered Imperium background (with special reference to events in the Vland Domain). For details, write to J.D. Law-Green, 1 Whitelands, Rawdon, Leeds, W. Yorks, UK, LS19 6BU. (47)

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MAPS OF THE IMPERIUM. Large maps of the Imperial interior and the battlefields of the Rebellion. Two 24x36" sheets covering 17 sectors. Based on the *Atlas of the Imperium* (GDW, 1984). Includes explanatory material and references. Contact Karl Gaarsoe, PO Box 733, Champaign, IL 61824-0733. (48)

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FIVE MERCHANT SHIP designs

for use in **MegaTraveller**. Designed using new **MegaTraveller** construction rules. Deck plans available separately. Send \$10, which includes shipping and handling, to Mark Hamalton, 2245 Buffalo Rd., Erie, PA 16150. (47)

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OUT-OF-PRINT *Star Trek* supplements by FASA—*ST: TNG Officers Manual* and *Trader Captains & Merchant Princes*. Send list and prices to Jason Wells, 745 Elmwood Dr., West Fargo, ND 58078. (47)

ALL ARTICLES from **Challenge** to do with **Space: 1889** prior to #44. Send price for photocopies to Edward Markle, 1903 N. 820 W., Pleasant Grove, UT 84062. (47)

COPY OF Air Modules I & II for **Twilight: 2000** (from issues 26 and 28). Please contact James Boone, Drawer A 73200, Ft. Leavenworth, KS, 66027. (47)

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BACK ISSUES OF Challenge, White Dwarf, Dragon, and Dungeon magazines. Any issue/any quantity. Send an accurate list with descriptions for my offer. Contact M. King, 371-H Kenai Ave., Ft. Richardson, AK 99505. (46)

FANZINES

ALARUMS & EXCURSIONS is a fanzine devoted to every aspect of RPG play and covering every genre—science fiction, superhero, fantasy, historical, and more. Product reviews, game writeups, fiction, open forums, rules tinkering, and special issues. Now in its 16th year of publication, *Alarums & Excursions* welcomes new contributors and readers. For more information, please send SASE to Lee Gold, 3965 Alla Road, Los Angeles, CA 90066. (48)

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PARSEC, a new **MegaTraveller** newsletter. First issue now available for \$2/issue, \$8/one-year subscription. Also produce other materials for use with **MegaTraveller**. Write to Charles Ryckman, 21211 West Ten Mile, Apt. 115, Southfield, MI 48075. (47)

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<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	9. Zombies (Dark Conspiracy)
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	10. Time Voyager (Space: 1889)
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	11. Finland (Shadowrun)
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	12. The Bayou Ritual (Call of Cthulhu)
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<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	14. Holdup (GURPS)
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<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	20. Letters from our Readers
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	21. Traveller News Service
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	22. Cartoon
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	23. Conventions
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	24. Briefs
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<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	26. Classifieds
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Next Issue

Don't miss **Challenge 49** in March. This special locations issue will feature "Cowabunga! It's the Beach," our April Fool swimsuit insert.

TWILIGHT: 2000

"Pennsylvania Crude" by Mitchell Schwartz.

MEGA TRAVELLER

"Julian Protectorate" by Michael R. Mikeshe explores a region of space dominated by Vargr-human interaction. Plus "The Dam," where PCs rescue prisoners in a controversial Imperial project, and part 2 of "Behind Blue Eyes," a three-part adventure by Chuck Gannon.

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Attack of the Mud Men (Twilight)	2.8
Just Like Magic (MegaTraveller)	4.2
H.P.P.E. (MegaTraveller)	3.7
Fated Voyage (MegaTraveller)	4.1
The Tree of Souls (1889)	3.7
Contagion (2300 AD)	3.5
Dead Time (Cyberpunk)	3.7
Quicksilver Sayonara (Fiction) (Shadowrun)	4.1
The Quick and the Undead (Shadowrun)	3.7
The House on the Hill (Torg)	2.6
The Space-Eaters (Call of Cthulhu)	3.5
The Horror out of Partridgeville (Call of Cthulhu)	3.4
It Came from Beyond the Stars (Late Show)	3.1
Imperial Research Station 13 (Star Wars)	3.0
From the Management	3.4
Letters from our Readers	3.6
Briefs	3.9
TNS	4.1
Cartoon	3.3
Conventions	3.4
Reviews	3.7
Classifieds	3.7
In My Opinion	3.7
This issue's cover art	3.9
This issue's interior art	4.0
This issue as a whole	4.0



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