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CHALLENGE 50

The Magazine of Science-Fiction Gaming

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About the Cover
Janet Aulisio brings to life the hazy atmosphere of a downport bar in **MegaTraveller**, where deals are made and tales are told over drinks for all races, major and minor.

Challenge, the magazine of science-fiction gaming, is published monthly.

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The issue price is \$3.50. Six issues are \$15 in the US and Canada. Foreign subscriptions (outside the US and Canada, but not to APO or FPO addresses) by surface mail are \$30 per six issues. Please make all payments in US funds drawn on a US bank.

Submissions: We welcome articles and illustrations for **Challenge**. Please inquire before submitting manuscripts, enclosing a stamped, self-addressed envelope. We will send submission guidelines. Address manuscripts and art portfolios to the managing editor, c/o **Challenge**. Foreign inquiries (except APO/FPO) please include an International Reply Coupon.

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The Magazine of Science-Fiction Gaming

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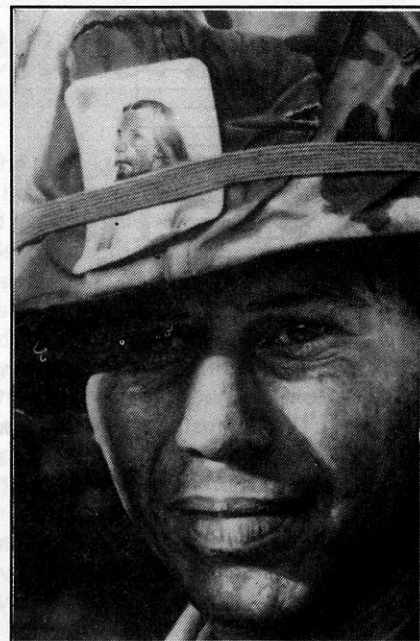
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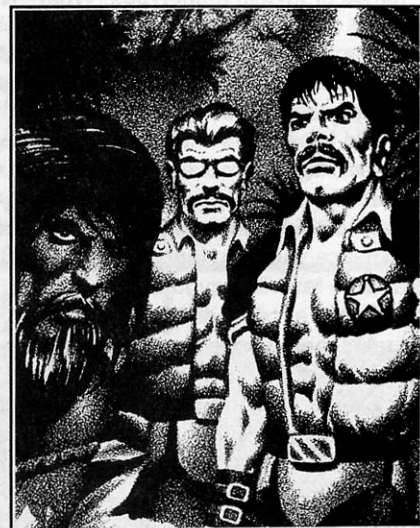
Challenge Index

A complete index of the *Journal of the Travellers' Aid Society* and *Challenge* magazine issues 1 through 49. All articles are listed alphabetically by both title and gaming system. Plus, each reference includes the issue and page numbers. By the way, since we wanted this index to be complete, it ran a bit long, so pages 47-49 are effectively part of the index, and are *not* missing.

Eric W. Haddock



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From the Management

This is the 50th issue of **Challenge/JTAS**. Gee, you hadn't noticed, right? So, although **Challenge** has come a long way, and we're extremely proud of that, and a lot of the credit belongs to you people (our faithful readers and subscribers), I'm not going to bore you with the usual editorial which seems to be published in every issue of a magazine which is divisible by 10 or 25.

Instead, I want to talk about the permanence of mythic archetypes. What? No, I didn't swallow a literary dictionary. In essence, what I mean to talk about is, "Why are most of the good ideas for adventures actually old ideas?"

Old ideas aren't necessarily bad ones. In fact, the best adventures I've seen are formed on classic themes and archetypal heroes and villains. *Ravenloft*, a Gothic romance/vampire story for *AD&D*, is still my all-time favorite adventure.

Some exceptionally erudite types say that human beings share a "collective unconscious" from which we all seem to draw images and themes. This is why certain types of people and situations seem to recur again and again, even across cultures.

Why does the character of the sage wizard, who is also often a savior (Merlin, Gandolf, Yoda and Obi-Wan, Elminster), seem so familiar?

Why are vampire legends so interesting, magnetic, and frightening?

Why is a tragic hero, one with an internal flaw or conflict (like Tanis or Raistlin of *Dragonlance* fame, or the Wolfgang Kiies of Mike Stackpole's *Shadowrun* short stories) so much more compelling than straight-up good guys like, oh, He-Man?

I don't know if there is a collective unconscious, but the presence of one or two classic elements in an adventure seems to provide both a strong backbone for the adventure and a jumping-off point for new twists on the old theme. So if you're looking for a new idea for your next roleplaying session, try looking into some old ones. You may be surprised at the strength of the scenario you come up with when you have a few classic elements to construct a solid framework from.

CHALLENGE

IF YOU'RE NOT PART OF THE SOLUTION...

I have been following **Challenge** since its inception, and prior to that **JTAS**, as well. I find it to be an excellent magazine. There may be variation in the type and scope of material that your magazine covers, but regardless of the system, it is of exceptional quality.

I read the letters from those who call for a return to your all-**Traveller** (now **Mega-Traveller**) format, and it bothers me a great deal. This is for a number of reasons. First of all, as you state in your letters columns, there is a very limited pool of people to write articles of any type, for any system. A magazine which has chosen as its audience science-fiction gaming cannot hope to survive off of the accessories for one game system. (All of you out there who have been following **Traveller** think back for a minute—how often did you see new stuff? Sure you saw it, but how frequently did it come out?) These people may not realize just how much work and research goes into the writing of a supplement, an article or a module.

Which brings me to my second reason for dismay. What is keeping someone from *modifying* a **Twilight: 2000** article to use in **Traveller**? Or a **Traveller** piece for *Shadowrun*? There is nothing saying that all that appears between these pages must be ready-made for your campaign. I don't play *Star Wars*, but I've used parts of those articles in my **MT** game; the same goes for almost all of the articles that appear in **Challenge**. Nothing is useless.

Perhaps what is needed is a conversion tool for those who have never played some of these other systems, something to give general equivalents for weapon strengths, armor types, skills, and task requirements. I know this is no simple thing to ask, but I'm sure that it could be done. This would enable more readers to be able to use more of **Challenge** than they now use. I have friends who buy the magazine and only read the sections that apply to the game they play. What a waste.

I would imagine that a significant number of you (yes, *you*) have written something for the games you play. It might be a system for generating food allergies or for current news stories. (I know it sounds silly, but my friend Patrick Fitzgerald once had the audacity to turn on the TV in the room at the TAS hotel he was staying at and ask me what was on. He was a scout and wanted to use the information to find out

information about the local society and its interests. Valid question, so I had to come up with something....) The result was a table for determining such things as that. (Never again, Pat!) The point is that no matter what the scale of the contribution, it is still a contribution, and one we can all benefit from.

The only way to change the content of this magazine is to flood them with material. Write to **Challenge** and ask for their writers' guidelines. This will increase the chance of your material being used. (Hey, are *you* going to turn down a +1 if you can get it?) Not everything that gets sent to them will get published, but it's a percentage thing. The more of you that shoot at the target, the larger the number of you that will hit it.

Scott Moir
Lynn, MA

Bravo, Scott! The conversion tool is an interesting idea, but it would be very (very, very) extensive, even if it only covered two systems. I'll be looking forward to receiving your other submissions.

AUSTRALIA: 1889

I would like to share with you some thoughts on **Space: 1889** in general and how it has fared in Australia in particular.

Sadly, if my conversations with fellow gamers and shop proprietors are any guide, the game has not proved to be popular in Australia. The slowness of sales of **Space: 1889** products in gaming shops supports this view.

I think there are two main reasons why this is so. First, incredibly, a lot of roleplayers seem to be unable to make the leap of imagination to a Victorian science universe. They seem happy with a pure fantasy setting, or a "hard science" science-fiction roleplaying game, or postholocaust world, but not a Victorian world. "The ether, that's silly, how could Mars have a breathable atmosphere, spaceships would need a life-support system...."

Second, it seems to me from my observations that a lot, if not most, science-fiction roleplayers are power-trippers, intoxicated with the destructive possibilities of the far future. They aren't happy unless they are equipped with powered battle armor and plasma rifles, and are festooned with all kinds of megaweapons. These types typically spend hours poring over weapons specifications in hardware manuals, enthusing about relatively minor

Letters from our Readers

differences in performance, and endlessly working out what is the optimum combination of weapons to produce wholesale destruction in all situations.

For such players **Space: 1889** is too horrible to contemplate. They won't be able to wield any weapons more sophisticated than a bolt-action rifle, they won't be able to annihilate hordes of hapless aliens or implement a favorite maxim of such players, "If it moves, kill it; if it doesn't, steal it." They would be forced to (gasp) be subtle, (shudder) negotiate instead of killing, (wince) use skills other than weapons skills, and (twitch) actually have to worry about the consequences of their acts.

This lack of interest in **Space: 1889** in Australia is all the more disappointing because we were part of the British Empire during the Victorian period and well into the 20th century. We have a strong colonial heritage, both in our institutions and with many splendid examples of Victorian architecture, and it might have been expected this period would be of unusual interest to Australian gamers.

For my own part, I think **Space: 1889** is

the most brilliant and innovative game to be released for many years, and is a refreshing change from the high-tech, dark and oppressive worlds that seem to be currently popular (*Shadowrun*, *Cyberpunk*, *Twilight: 2000*, etc.). I haven't enjoyed myself GMing a game so much for years! It truly combines the best of all fantasy genres, with spaceships and sabers, aliens and exotic kingdoms, exploration and politics, low-intensity warfare and high adventure. This game could equally well have been titled *Space-ships, Steam and Sabers*. It puts the roleplaying back into roleplaying and is truly roleplaying in a gentler, more civilized time.

I would like to congratulate you on your accomplishment, which is truly revolutionary. All power to GDW and **Space: 1889**!

G. J. Imisides

New South Wales, Australia

GOOD SAMARITAN

I (recently) moved from Utah to Florida. A large package arrived sometime later with all the **1889** articles in it (in response to a classified ad I ran in *Challenge*). (It had) no note asking for money or anything else for that matter.

The package had seen better days as it had been forwarded—it had virtually obliterated the sender's address. All I can make out is that it's from a box at an APO or FPO in Seattle, Washington. The name is totally wiped.

I'd like at the very least to thank this person for helping me and copying this information. It must have cost a bundle and I'd really like to pay for it.

So could you print this if possible, perhaps in the letters section? And also my address so they could contact me so I can at least say thanks.

E. W. Markle
PO Box 3324
St. Augustine, FL
32085-3324

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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OUT TIME DAYS is a highly interactive role-playing Play-By-Mail game with turns processed weekly. It has received excellent reviews, notably from *Flagship* and *Paper Mayhem*. Turn cost is \$5.00. The game is open ended and 99% computer moderated. The rulebook may be obtained for \$5.00 (refundable with startup). A special startup is available that gives you the rulebook, the startup turn, and five turns for only \$15.00.

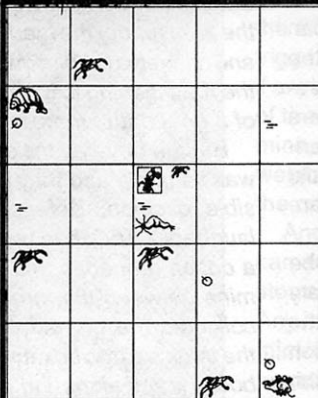


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Space Combat was designed to be easy to learn, but difficult to master. Every game starts with ten players, and as each is eliminated, the chances of the game ending will increase. Turnsheets are custom made on a laser printer to aid you in filling out your next turn. The games run about 12-18 turns. Cost is \$3.50 per turn. A rulebook (required before you can join) is \$1.00 (free if you mention this ad!).



Twin Engine Gaming; Dept 209; 3254 Maple Leaf Ct.; San Jose, CA 95121



I remember that line from an idiotic song my mother used to sing to me as a child. It seemed very appropriate for the situation I was facing. The woods were silent—no birdies, nothing but an occasional breezy rustle. That damned deer had disappeared, apparently for good. If I didn't find it, we would have another dinnerless dinner, and I'd have lost a perfectly good crossbow bolt.

I'd have never noticed the building if I hadn't been playing Daniel Boone. I stood still for almost 10 minutes, watching and waiting. The building looked and sounded empty. No funny smells, either. So I continued following the blood trail, two or maybe three steps.

I squatted, looking for something. A broken twig, a blood spot, anything to let me know Bambi had gone this way. What I did find made my heart skip a beat. It wasn't a vine—too straight, too brown. A thin wire crossed the trail, so rusted that I almost missed it.

I carefully leaned over the wire and peeked into the bushes on either side. Sure enough, to the right that old wire was tied to an equally rusty grenade that had been stuffed in a tin can. My curiosity was piqued. Why would anyone want to booby-trap this place?

SETUP

This is a **Twilight: 2000** microadventure specifically designed to fit into any referee's campaign. A broken-down Soviet supply truck, abandoned and forgotten long ago, lies rotting in an out-of-the-way barn. The only thing standing between the PCs and the treasure inside of the truck is a handful of booby traps and a mean snake. This microadventure allows the PCs a chance to refill their larders and even come away with some surplus, and the referee to make complete, raving paranoids out of the player characters.

If the PCs have not been introduced to booby traps, or they are just getting sloppy, this is a good way to instill the fear of God and TNT into them. With the map provided, this microadventure can be set anywhere along the player characters' path and can also be changed to fit any locale, even the good ol' USA. The Soviet victims and vehicles have been provided for characters adventuring in eastern Europe, but American corpses, weapons and trucks could easily be substituted if your players are touring Peoria.

The only criteria is that the building be located at least 100 meters off of a secondary road and in a wooded area, though the woods can be long dead. In fact, a collection of shattered or leafless trees can add much to the terror of the situation. Ideally, the site should be found by one of the PCs who is out hunting.

If You Go Into the Woods Today, You'd Better Not Go Alone

By Adam Geibel

THE STORY BEGINS WHEN...

Serge buttoned his fly and turned to watch Gorgi working under the truck. They were now deserters and hiding from their own army. A day ago the ancient Zil had broken down, and they had been left behind by the convoy, along with an overzealous lieutenant who looked like he was 15 years old.

As they were behind their own lines, the cargo had not been unloaded. The powers that be had been so concerned with other things that they had only left the young lieutenant behind to look after whatever was in the truck.

The Zil had just enough left in her to wheeze another 100 meters, off the road, and into an abandoned stone barn. This tiny rotting structure was tucked into a grove of thick underbrush, and it was pure luck that Serge had found it. He had been scouting the area (under the fearless leader's orders) and chased a rabbit down the road. Actually, the road leading to it was choked to the size of a goat path for most of its distance.

But the boy had insisted that their cargo was valuable and they had to find a defensible position. Defensible position! How laughable. They had two rifles, a pistol, half a dozen grenades and a "Bouncing Betty" mine between the three of them. The boy collected the grenades, rooted around in the truck's cargo box and then went off to rig booby traps along the approaches to their hideout. Perhaps he felt obliged to practice the skills he had been taught at Officers' School.

While he was gone, Serge and his friend had decided to take a look at their cargo. Prying open two or three of the crates, they found food: American MREs, German canned hams, even the hated tubes of meat paste their own army tried to feed them. This could make them very rich. The truck was hidden, and all they needed to do was find a cart and horse and return to remove the crates. Then, they'd find a place to sell the crates, and they'd be rich men.

Serge went to find the boy and returned to Gorgi half an hour later, the blood still staining the AK's buttstock. The two of them decided to leave a nasty surprise for any snoopers. Serge was rigging the AP mine under the Zil's bed, just over the gas tank, when the boy silently appeared at the edge of the clearing.

He put three shots into Gorgi before Serge brought his rifle up. The kid put two more shots from the Tokarov into Serge as he emptied the magazine in defense. The little snot was dead, but so was Serge.

At least he would be, given a few minutes. He staggered into the cool shade of the barn, next to the truck. A drink would be nice. He tugged at his canteen. It did not want to come free. The Russian was dead before he could take a sip.

LAIR OF THE ZIL

There are a dozen grenade booby traps (to discover them is Difficult: Observation) located along the old approaches to the barn (to disarm them is Easy: Combat Engineering). They are simple traps: The grenade, less its pin, has been placed in a tin can which is nailed to a tree or some such solid object. A string or wire is tied to the grenade body and strung across the path. Some poor slob walks down the path and trips over the string, pulling the grenade free. The result can be predicted.

These traps are also faulty. There is a 10% chance that the grenade will fail to explode or that it has rusted into the can and remains there while the string breaks. Imagine what fun it will be when a fearless PC feels a tug at his ankle, trips and then realizes what he just did.

The Barn: The barn and its approaches form a bowl-shaped clearing in tangled woods. The hiding place looks like a trash heap at first glance. A few pieces of dis-emboweled furniture, scattered scraps of lumber, and some shingles are buried under a web of vines and undergrowth. The remains of the Soviet lieutenant's body lies three meters from the barn door and is now covered by underbrush (to find the body is Easy: Observation or roll under half one's Intelligence). Apart from his paybook and wallet, he has no useful papers. His uniform and webgear are rotted, and his Tokarov is rusted solid.

Truck: The truck is parked inside a barn that is barely larger than the dimensions of the truck, leaving just enough room to walk between the truck and the walls. The roof, originally shingled with slate, had been patched in several places with thatch. It is deteriorating faster than the walls and now affords only about 80% protection from the elements.

The Zil is a standard Soviet military truck, equivalent to the American 2½-ton truck (popularly known as the deuce and a half; see page 66 of *Twilight: 2000* 2nd edition). Like most vehicles laboring in this time and place, the truck was far from pristine. Unlike the American Army, the Soviets drafted the majority of their transport trucks from the civilian fleet. This Zil had belonged to a poultry collective and had a plywood box instead of a tarp covering the bed. Some of the civilian lettering is still visible under the thin coat of green paint.

"Old Number 3205-Q" had bald tires, its engine smoked and tended to overheat in the summer, and the old beast was afflicted with a particularly terminal malady—a disintegrating transmission. It was this final straw that stranded the three Soviets. Now the tires are deflated and rotten, the fuel has evaporated and the oil coagulated, and the engine is frozen from inactivity. However, a fair amount of salvage could be taken off of this wreck.

Two More Bodies: The other two bodies are inside the structure and are both visible from the entrance (Easy: Observation to spot). The skeleton of Serge has toppled from its sitting position and, like the others, has been worried by animals. His canteen and rifle have been exposed to the elements too long to be of use, but his loaded magazines are still good. Gorgi's body remains under the truck, with only his feet sticking out. His rifle is still in the truck cab and is functional, despite a thin film of rust. Lying next to it are three loaded magazines in a pouch.

Gorgi attracted carrion-eaters, which in turn attracted the snake that has bedded down in the skeleton's rib cage (to discover the snake before it "discovers" a searcher of the skeleton is Difficult: Observation). The snake should be indigenous to the area and preferably very deadly. Almost any sort of dangerous critter could be put in here (bears, rabid dogs, etc.) but snakes have the best lethality for their size.

Cargo: The exact nature of cargoes in Soviet transport battalions were kept secret from the lower echelons, which is why Gorgi and Serge did not know what they were carrying until the lieutenant left. The Zil was loaded with the regiment's food reserves—over 2000 kilograms of rations, packed in crates and barrels. Half a dozen barrels held (at the time) freshly picked apples,



TWILIGHT: 2000

which have long since disintegrated and fill the building with an unmistakable odor. The remaining 50 65-kilogram boxes are made of wood and lined with plastic. Their contents have been scrounged from all over Europe. Most of their contents are in pre-packaged ration form (MREs, tin cans and tubes) and the remainder is wheat and rice (in 10-kilogram sacks).

Despite the protection, the topmost 10% of the crates have been compromised and are now as rotted as the apples. Luckily, the affected crates contained most of the Soviet-made rations, the least appetizing of the lot. Left are 40 crates, each holding enough food for a man to survive for nearly a month.

The Bouncing Betty: Gorgi was skilled at being vindictive, but he was not particularly bright. The antipersonnel mine is rigged to explode should one of the crates in the truck be moved, killing the thieves and destroying the cargo (the fuel tank was half full when Gorgi set the mine). The mine is wired to the rear axle, and the trip wire runs up through the truck bed and is tied to the handle of the fifth crate (to discover the trip wire is Difficult: Observation). Theoretically, the explosion would have also set the fuel on fire and totally destroyed the cargo. The mine is also rigged with an antihandling device (to disarm the device is Difficult: Combat Engineer), evidenced by the taut tripwire. There is little chance of a misfire (1%, let's say) as this mine was well cared for (somebody put silicone grease on its detonator threads) and has been protected from the elements.

VARIATIONS

Some versions of the "Bouncing Betty" only activate when the triggering weight is removed from the mine's pressure plate. If the PCs miss the mine entirely, delete the triggering wire (say it fell off due to old age, if anybody asks you later). The wooden bed of the truck has rotted and settled onto the mine, and it will only detonate when that weight shifted—say after three-quarters of the crates are removed.

Another fun stress point that the referee can add is a time element: an approaching storm, a pursuing force, dwindling supplies. Any half-wit can cautiously navigate such a mini-minefield, but how good are the PCs at negating booby traps under pressure? Once the food is theirs, can they get it out or will they meet the same fate as Gorgi and friends? Ω

CHALLENGE

CAMPAIGN '91, May 11-12 at Woughton Campus, Milton Keynes, UK. For more information, contact the Milton Keynes Wargames Society, 117 St. Johns Road, Bletchley, Milton Keynes, UNITED KINGDOM MK3 5DZ.

ONCE UPON A CON '91, May 24-26 at the Radisson Hotel South in Denver, CO. For details, write to IFGS/Once Upon A Con '91, PO Box 3577, Boulder, CO 80307-3577.

GAMEX '91, May 24-27 at the Los Angeles Airport Hilton Hotel. Please contact Strategicon, PO Box 8399, Long Beach, CA 90808.

SO DA CON II, May 25-26 at the Howard Johnson Convention Center in Rapid City, SD. Please contact Black Hills Society of Gamers, 2416 Cameron Drive, Rapid City, SD 57702.

MOBI-CON, June 7-9 at the Days Inn in Mobile, AL. For more information, send a SASE to Mobi-Con Inc., PO Box 161257, Mobile, AL 36606.

MICHICON GAMEFEST '91, June 21-23 in the Southfield Civic Center in Southfield, a northern suburb of Detroit, MI. Write to Metro Detroit Gamers, PO Box 656, Wyandotte, MI 48192.

MADISON GAMES DAY, June 30 at the Quality Inn South in Madison, WI. Contact Pegasus Games, 6640 Odana Road, Madison, WI 53719.

ORIGINS '91, July 3-7 at the Baltimore Convention Center in Baltimore, MD. Write to Origins '91, PO Box 609, Randallstown, MD 21133.

COSCON, July 5-7 at Slippery Rock University in Slippery Rock, PA, sponsored by the Circle of Swords Gaming Guild. Send a SASE to Circle of Swords, PO Box 2126, Butler, PA 16003-2126.

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II-KHAN (previously I-Khan), July 12-14 at the Holiday Inn North in Colorado Springs, CO. Write to Miniature Wargamers Guild, 7040 S. Highway 85-87, Fountain, CO 80717.

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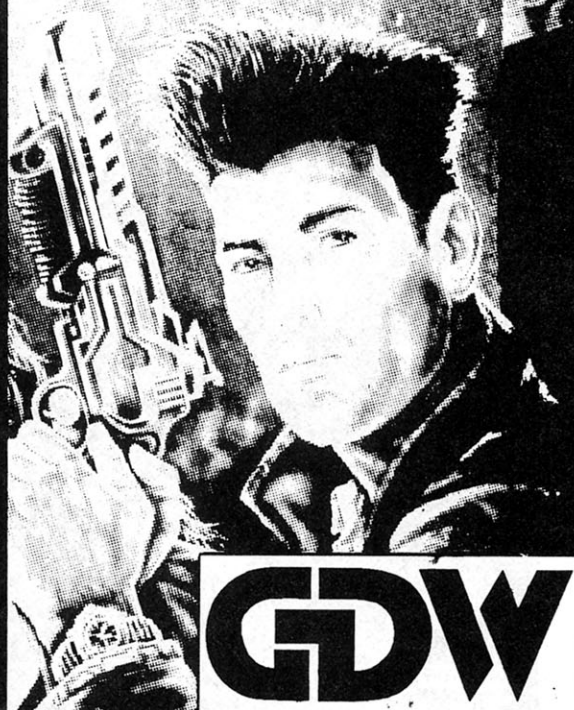
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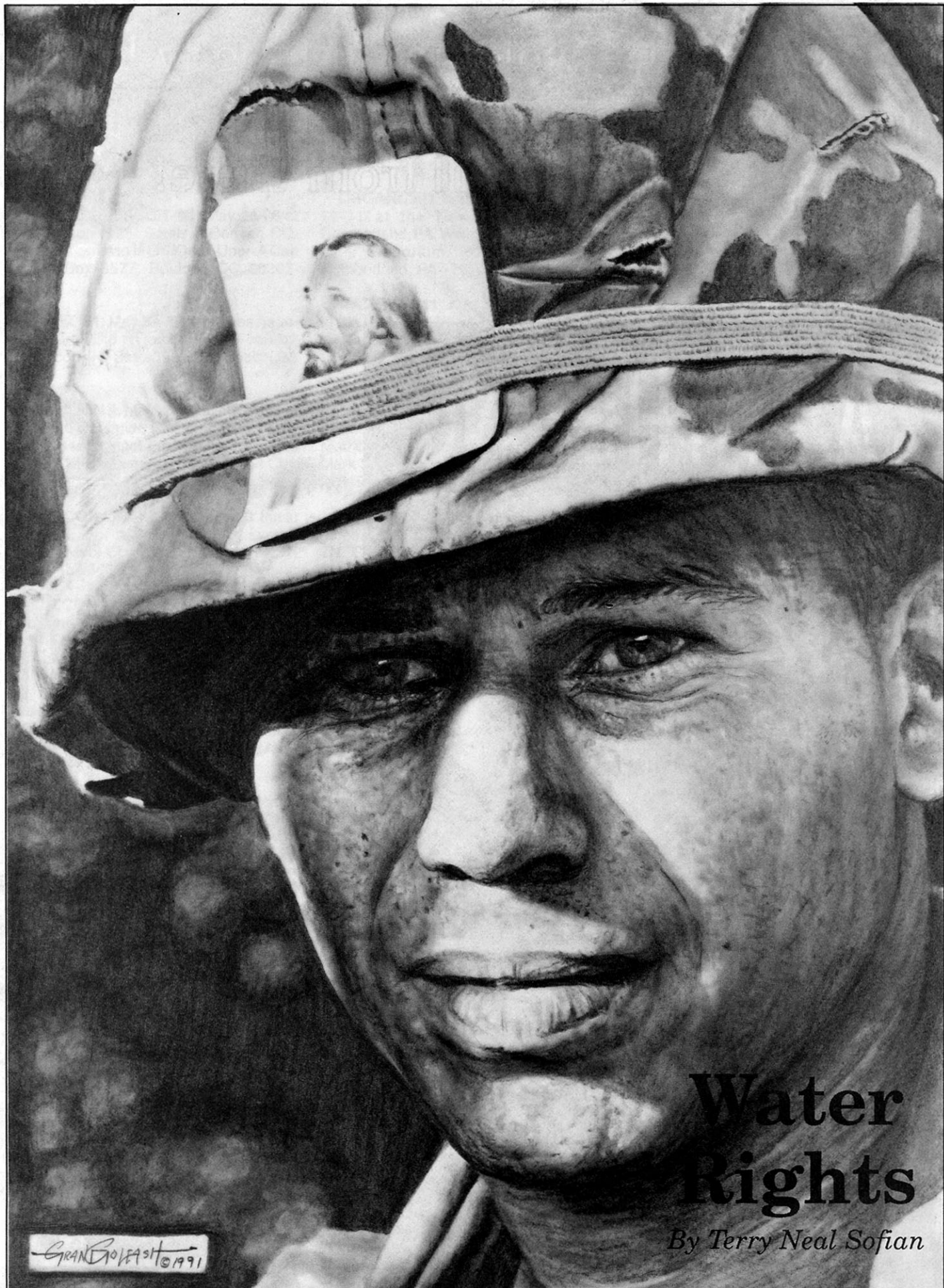
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A GATHERING EVIL



GDW

The First DARK CONSPIRACY Novel.



Water Rights

By Terry Neal Sofian

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After the war we never thought we'd make it. Things in Silverton, Wyoming, got pretty bad. We were lucky, though. The bombs had all fallen other places. No hordes of refugees came to us, so looters and the plague mostly passed us by. But starvation was knocking on the door, and we did have more sickness than Doc James had ever seen.

One thing we did have going for us was that Rheinhardt boy. Before the war, Robert Rheinhardt had gone to State and gotten an ag degree. He'd also been in ROTC. When the big one hit, he was home on leave. We sort of figured that the Pentagon wouldn't miss one little first lieutenant and talked him into staying. He had learned a thousand things at college and in the army that kept Silverton from becoming just another Old West ghost town.

The other thing that Silverton had was the Little Red River. In the spring it was fed from mountain snows and the rest of the year by springs. It had never been a big stream, but in the drought that came after the war, it meant life and death for those of us in Silverton. We never dreamt that one day we would wake up and find that someone had stolen our water.

April 21, 1999, dawned for Silverton a little quieter than any ever had before. At first the residents were at a loss to explain the eerie silence that hung over their tiny village. Suddenly, a discovery was made. The bed of the Little Red River, a small mountain stream, was completely dry. The slanting rays of the sun were quickly turning its dark mud into hard clay. The villagers realized this for the crisis it was. Without the water from the Lil' Red, Silverton would dry up in the sun as rapidly as the river bed's mud.

A town meeting was called. The town elders, mostly the oldest members of each family, debated several plans. The town was not in any immediate danger; enough water had been stored in case of too many unrainy days to last a month. Unlike the Americans of the prewar era, the town folk did not debate endlessly. Within an hour, it was decided to dispatch a scouting party to discover what had happened to the Lil' Red, and if possible, restore its flow to the lower part of its valley.

MOUNT 'EM UP BOYS, WE'RE MOVIN' OUT

The characters are, of course, the town's scouting party. They may have gotten to Silverton in a variety of ways. They may be civilian residents of the area with a desperate interest in where the water went. Or, perhaps the group is migrating through the region; it is composed of survivors from

destroyed military units on the Great Plains or in the Southwest. In this case, the characters will be more than happy to do the town's patrolling and dirty work for a few meals and some water. If all goes well, maybe the townsfolk will see the value of a few hired guns.

The characters may be soldiers who served with Rheinhardt, and remembering how he talked about Silverton, rightly guessed where he went AWOL at. If this is how the PCs ended up in town, they did so through a harrowing series of adventures, and probably have no desire to see the safe haven they have finally found in a world of madness destroyed.

Finally, the group may be from Milgov or Civgov. Long-range patrols from both of these groups occasionally range through the high mountains. In an effort to encourage support for the government they represent, the characters may wish to assist the town's people—they may even, in fact, have orders to do such in cases where their means allow.

SILVERTON

In the immediate poststrike period, any town that could feed more than 10 families was a thriving metropolis. By this criteria, Silverton was well on its way to being a new Las Vegas. Under the leadership of Rheinhardt, Silverton supports almost 150 people by farming and raising livestock.

The Little Red River supplied adequate water to support the low-moisture farming that Robert had learned as an ag major at State. He was also able to build a working forge and supply a tiny amount of hydroelectric power to the town.

Not only can the town feed itself, but it produced enough of a surplus to store at least two months' supply of food and have a little for trade as well. The town militia has been able to fend off several attacks from marauder bands, and now has a reputation that will keep all but the most desperate or heavily armed away.

The town proper consists of an earthen wall five feet high enclosing about 20 houses, a large number of storage buildings, a blacksmith's shop and a tiny electrical generating station which uses a waterwheel and windmills to charge old car alternators and batteries. There is also a water-powered gristmill. The old church steeple is used as an observation post, with the ringing of the bell signaling danger.

Traders are met with some suspicion, but also with a keen eye toward commerce. The town council has been debating sending out trading parties of its own, but as yet has reached no decision.

In terms of government, the council serves all functions, from court to legislative body to planning commission. Two members from

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each family sit on the council. These are usually the oldest. Decisions are reached by open debate, in which anyone, including outsiders, may speak. Following debate there is a voice vote from the council members. The system is simple, but it works.

The council also allocates resources. This it does as evenly as possible on a one-person, one-share basis. Although not everyone is always happy with this method, enough people realize its necessity to make it work.

CHECK YOUR SIX-GUNS, PARDNERS

Wherever the characters originate from, they are going to be short of everything. The normal mode of transport in the Silverton area will be by horse. The characters are very lucky if they are mounted on a light truck or in a jeep.

If the referee is composing an "on the spot" character party, each character should have no more than 150 rounds for his personal weapons, and a few hand grenades may be spread out among the party. One support weapon, a PRC 75, and two handy talkies are also available.

If the characters are town folk, they will be armed with civilian hunting rifles and improvised explosives instead of grenades. The town can supply them with food and water for a week, a fortune in itself, and 100 kilos of industrial explosives. If the characters have no horses or their vehicle will not handle the rugged terrain of the upper valley, six horses and five mules will be made available. In these troubled times, these are riches beyond most men's wildest imaginations.

Whatever the composition of the PC group, Robert Rheinhardt will accompany them on their mission.

HOMETOWN BOY

Robert Rheinhardt was the kind of boy every family hopes to have. He was both a good student and a star athlete all through school. When offered both academic and track scholarships to college he, instead, accepted one from the Army ROTC.

As a young lieutenant in a Ranger unit he experienced the war in Europe firsthand. When he returned home for leave while retraining, the townsfolk almost did not recognize him. The hopeful and enthusiastic boy they had said good-bye to when he started college was dead somewhere on

some bloodstained field in Poland. The new Robert is cold and calculating. It is not that he's actively unfriendly, it's just that somehow it seems he just doesn't have time for it anymore.

Somewhere deep inside Robert still has the emotions a younger and more naive person once held, but now it's very hard for him to crack his shell and let them out. The only outlet for them is helping the town he grew up in survive. He loves Silverton above all else. It's the only link he has to the past.

Robert has provided low-moisture farming techniques, power generation, food storage methods and a great many other things from his college education that have allowed Silverton to survive, if not prosper. He has also killed people to prevent his home's destruction. He has killed with no mercy, but always with deep regret. He will do so again if need be.

UP THE CREEK

The valley of the Little Red River is rugged and impassable to any vehicles larger than a motorcycle. The riverbanks are overgrown with small trees and scrub brush that has found a haven against the drought. The terrain is rocky; the river flowed over a series of small waterfalls and rapids as it came down from the high mountains. Large outcroppings of boulders dot its channel.

The sides of the valley are steep, and the hills to either side are also rugged. This will tend to channelize the characters' line of march. The only real path they have to the headwaters of the Lil' Red is along its banks. Since the going is tough, and uphill to boot, the PCs will only be able to move at one-half the normal cross-country rates. Even the mules will have a difficult time of it.

The characters will notice the toll that the loss of the river is already taking on the local environment. Dead fish dot the drying streambed. An otter, starving, will beg for food from the characters as they make their first night's camp. With the exception of these encounters, the first day of travel will be uneventful. The immediate desperation of the local animals and the implications that the situation has for the characters' town should be enough to instill a sense of foreboding within the PCs. The gamemaster should play this up with a few descriptions of the rapidly drying streambed and its associated ecosystem.

Midway through the second day, the PCs will hear a dull thumping sound from upstream. If they are observant (Easy: Observation), they will see an observation post on a hill overlooking the riverbed. The post is manned by two soldiers wearing camouflage with blue armband emblazoned with white stars.

As the two are eating lunch and not paying particular attention to the valley be-

low them, they may be surprised (Difficult: Stealth). If they are caught napping, they will be surly and uncooperative. They will tell the characters nothing about who they are or what they are doing.

They are both armed with M16A1 rifles and have 100 rounds apiece for them. Their canteens are full, and they have plenty of food.

If the characters do not spot the sentries or are unable to take them by surprise, a firefight will ensue. The two NPCs are both Experienced. They will fight until one is wounded and will then fall back to the main camp (if possible). They have no interest in fighting to the death.

From the captured vantage point the characters will see a large camp occupying the greater portion of an alpine meadow beside the Little Red. Filling the rest of the area is an earth and wood dam behind which a lake is forming.

CAMPING IN THE WOODS

In a clearing beside the lake are several tents, a few jeeps, brought in on the old logging road, a manually operated pile driver (the dull thumping sound the characters' heard), and depending on the manner in which the characters gained control of their vantage, a number of people engaged in various activities. If the characters still have surprise at this time, a large group of ragged-looking people will be pulling the hammer of the pile driver up and letting it go as it forces a thick post into the ground near the edge of the stream. There will be three armed men standing around them, possibly protecting them from the dangers of the wilderness, but it's equally likely that they may be overseers or guards. From a distance it's hard to tell. A cooking fire is burning in the camp and a number of other armed people are milling about eating, talking quietly or working on assorted maintenance tasks.

If shots have been fired, the characters will not see this peaceful rustic scene. The armed people around the workers will be rushing their charges into the cover of the woods. The soldiers in the camp will be preparing a defensive perimeter and readying a patrol to check on the observation post. If the firefight takes more than 20 turns, five Experienced troopers armed with four M16s and one M203, and with 100 rounds per M16, and 40mm HE grenades, will make up the patrol.

The base defense force consists of 15 other soldiers armed with M16s, three with M203s and an M60 machinegun team. The entire unit has a reserve of 1500 rounds of 5.56mm, 100 40mm grenades and 750 rounds total for the M60. In addition, they have one LAW and two claymore mines. All the fighters are Experienced, with the exception of Eric, the team leader (who carries

one of the M203s), who is Elite, and the M60 gunner, who is Veteran.

The unwelcome visitors have far more firepower than the player characters can hope to face head on. If the PCs make a mess of the observation post encounter, they will have a rough time completing the adventure.

"NEW AMERICAN" HERO

Eric Wilson is as close to being New America's idea of a perfect leader as the characters are ever, hopefully, to meet. Before the war, Wilson had been expelled from a prestigious eastern college for editing a far right-wing magazine off campus. He fully espouses the NA view of white male dominance.

Of undiluted western European stock, well-educated, intelligent and physically fit, Eric, at 25, was an ideal NA convert. Since the bombs started falling he has been leading a platoon-sized force of New American warriors in actions designed to isolate the northern Rockies from the rest of the shattered country and place them under New America's control. He has terrorized the modern *untermenchen* much as his ideological forbearers ran roughshod through eastern Europe. He is completely convinced of his right to do this as God's will, and his dedication to the NA cause is without question.

If he has any failing, it is his overconfidence, which has been brought on by a string of easy victories and a lack of experience in dealing with capable enemies. If he survives the first encounters with the characters, he will quickly learn from his mistakes—he rarely makes the same one more than once.

Eric will fight the enemies of his New Order to the death if needed, but won't throw his life away uselessly. His men follow him without question. So far he has brought them only victory and glory.

THINGS THAT GO BUMP IN THE NIGHT

If the PCs managed to silence the observation post, they will be able to watch the camp for about three hours without attracting any attention themselves. During this time they will be able to determine that the workers are in fact slaves being kept against their will.

The 50 or so wretches that are building the dam are brutally treated. One will be shot in cold blood while the characters watch. Others will be savagely beaten, seemingly without provocation. The guards will not be lax as they take their sadistic pleasures, though. The dam is being enlarged with frightening rapidity.

As the sun begins to sink below the ridges, two soldiers and four slaves will

slowly make their way up the hill to the observation post. The two soldiers will make remarks to the men whom they believe they will be relieving about the fun they missed in camp and about the fun they'll have tonight. (Some of the slaves are female and the discipline of the camp doesn't appear to be strict when it comes to taking liberties with the slaves.)

The two soldiers will not be expecting trouble when they reach the observation post and may also be ambushed. One of them will be a little more talkative than his three companions and can be persuaded to enlighten the characters as to the nature of the business at hand.

THERE GOES THE NEIGHBORHOOD

The young soldier will tell the PCs that he is a member of a group called New America. Ideologically, NA seems to be somewhere near the Nazis. If the activities in the valley are any indication, they would truly have a place in Adolf's heart.

The camp was set up to build a dam on the Little Red to force all the people living in the lower valley to move or die. Other NA groups are engaged in similar projects. Slaves are captured as often as needed for these projects and are used until they die.

The young trooper will tell the PCs that his commander's name is Eric Wilson. He will not disclose how many troops are in the camp or their armament.

The four ex-slaves will be very cooperative, but not much help. They say there are about 20 soldiers with many machineguns and grenades, but won't know much else. They are all women and have been badly underfed and abused by their captors. Any kindness directed toward them will be appreciated in the future. Right now, the women are too much in shock to be thankful for anything but their lives.

Even as the characters discover this information, total darkness will fall. As one of the New American's threatens, it won't be long before a search party is sent out. The obvious reaction to that threat is a quick series of hit-and-run attacks against the NA camp. With the intelligence they have already gathered, the characters will be able to sting their new enemies pretty hard.

It should be brought home to the PCs that New America apparently also has a large resource base, and even if the group in the valley is destroyed, it will not guarantee the safety of Silverton.

TO STRIKE A BLOW

If the characters decide to hit the New American camp, they will find that half the troops are awake and armed and that a patrol is ready to pursue any attackers. The characters should be able to badly damage

the camp and ambush the aggressive patrol. One strategy would be to help stage a slave revolt and use the anger of the freed slaves as a weapon against their tormentors. Other options would be a feint attack or simple sniper harassment.

One thing should be made clear to the characters: This is more than they bargained for. "Where did these people come from, and how did they get here?" should be two of the characters' main questions. This patrol is only the tip of an evil iceberg. Even if the characters can destroy the patrol or force it to retreat, more of these New Americans will show up. How can this be prevented?

ONE ROAD HOME

A big clue as to the route taken by the would-be invaders is the fact that they are traveling in jeeps and light trucks. Only one road runs through the region—an old logger's trail that leads to the main interstate highway about 30 miles north. Interrogation of prisoners or the questioning any freed slaves will reveal that part of the logging trail is actually the remnants of an earlier main highway.

On that stretch of road is an old, but sturdy, bridge more than 150 feet long. Destruction of that bridge will hamstring New American efforts in the upper valley of the Little Red River.

The bridge is unguarded unless the characters have attacked the camp and failed to kill Eric. If he is still alive, he will head for the bridge as rapidly as possible with his entire remaining force and attempt to hold it. The woods go right up to the edges of the chasm that the double-span steel bridge crosses.

Ample cover exists on each side of the gorge to hide both attackers and defenders. Any firefight in this area promises to be confused and deadly. If the PCs get to the bridge before the New Americans, or take it from them, they can blow it up (Difficult: Combat Engineer) with the explosives obtained from Silverton.

With the bridge gone, New America will cut its losses in the region and move on to more profitable areas until the time is ripe for a movement in force on the Red River Valley.

If the players are unable to destroy the bridge, then New American reinforcements will arrive, be it days or hours later, with an unstoppable force.

If the characters do blow the bridge, they'll be out of explosives. They will have to put their heads together to determine a way to destroy the dam, their original mission. If the PCs get stumped, they can always fall back on Rheinhardt's knowledge and skills.

AFTERMATH

The characters' expedition has opened a new can of worms for the town of Silverton. First, what is going to be done with the newly

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freed slaves? There may be as many as 50 of them. Can the town support that many new mouths to feed?

Also, there is a powerful evil that the people of Silverton never even suspected existed threatening them. If they confront it directly, they will be overwhelmed. Do they move, seek allies, try and strengthen their own defenses? They need to learn more about New America, its motives and its resources. Scouting missions would seem to be in order.

There is plenty for the group of characters to do: diplomatic missions to other surviving towns or a search for the United States Army that is supposed to defend them. Maybe the remnants of the government don't even know that New America exists—shouldn't someone try to tell them?

This adventure is just the beginning of the region's interaction with the New American menace, and for the creative referee it should serve as the starting point for a campaign to identify, contain and finally destroy the New American threat to the northern Rocky Mountains. Ω

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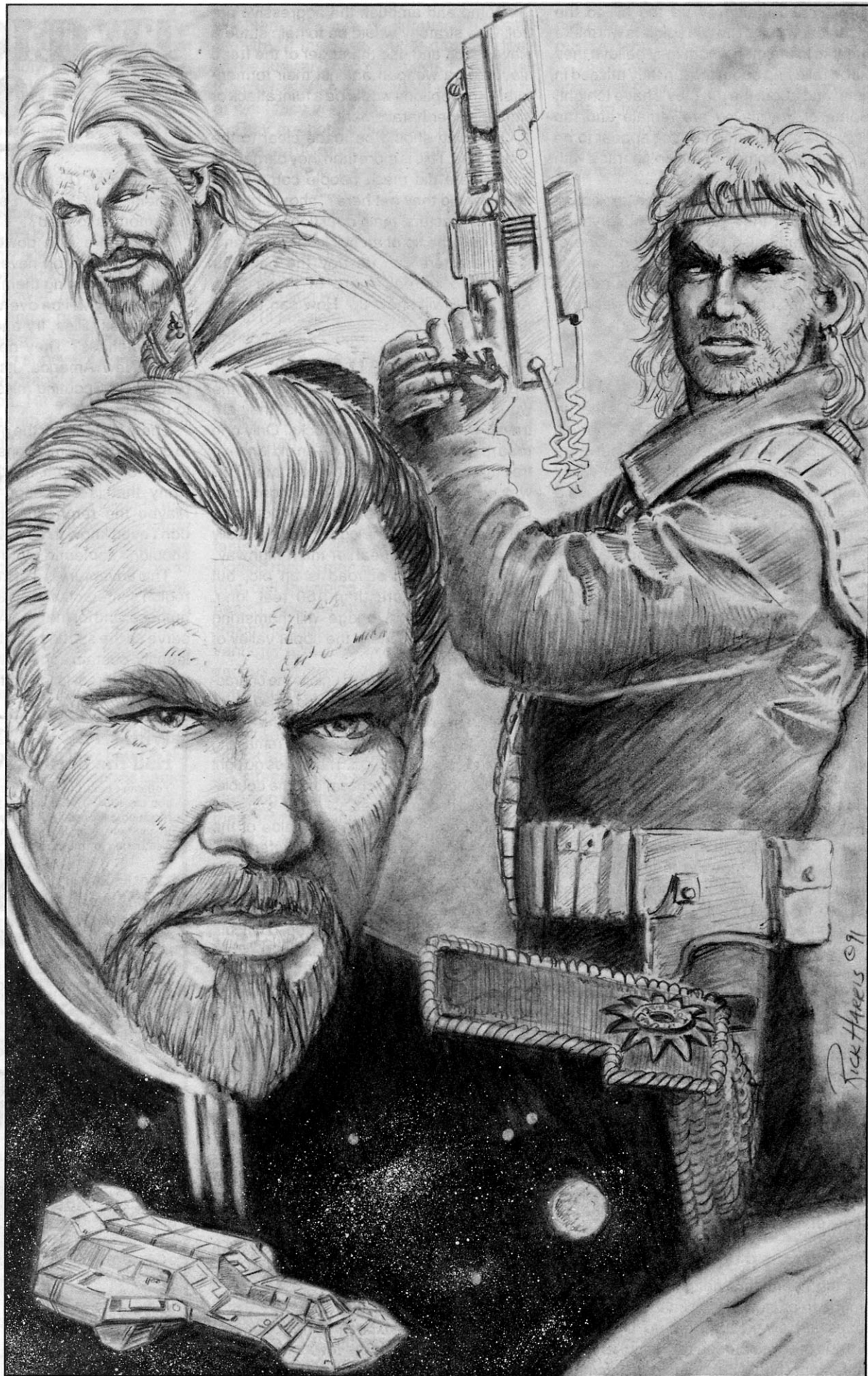


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No Time To Rest



By Robert N. Sprinkle



powerful baron is kidnapped, and the entire Regina Subsector is looking for him. Not only do your IRIS employers expect you to find him before anyone else, but he must be at a council meeting on Regina within 43 days. Unfortunately, your contract requires you to accept and complete the assignment at all costs.

This adventure was designed for characters who are contractors to an IRIS office located on Regina in the Spinward Marches. The group should consist of at least six characters with their own jump-2 capable ship.

NO REST FOR THE WICKED

You have just completed your last assignment and are resting on Regina. A letter arrives at your ship by normal carrier, but you can tell it is not a normal communication. The group leader calls you all together after the computer translates the coded message. He reads the following:

23-1120 1000 Hours: Mission Briefing

Early this morning, the Reginan Department of Subsector Affairs received notification that Baron Urnst von Alksburg was kidnapped about a week ago in the Roup System. In 45 days, von Alksburg must appear at a council meeting here on Regina. Without his presence, legislation opposed to our ideals will most probably be passed.

The baron's yacht, *Venturi*, was preparing for its final jump to Regina from Roup. Starport Control reports that just prior to engaging the jump drive, the ship squawked the hijack alarm. System defense boats responded, but none were near enough to help. They were able to determine that the jump was reprogrammed to different coordinates.

Four hours after the *Venturi* disappeared into jumpspace, a ransom message was received by the authorities of Roup. The abductors demanded that MCr400 of precious metals be loaded in a cargo container and dropped at indicated coordinates on 050-1120. The coordinates supplied indicate a spot in open space between Forboldn and Roup. The drop ship must be unarmed and immediately jump out of the area. Once the payment has been verified, the baron will be released.

IRIS believes Count Everet de Saven of Feri to be behind the

abduction. The count has repeatedly opposed the Regency both publicly and privately. It is the opinion of IRIS that Baron von Alksburg will not be released in time to attend the council meeting regardless of the status of the ransom.

Your mission is to locate and rescue the baron, returning him to Regina by 066-1120. If possible, obtain any information and evidence indicating those responsible for the abduction. Do not concern yourselves with the payment or the drop point; we will monitor that situation. We suggest you jump to Roup and gather as much information as possible.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In the Regina Subsector, the Subsector Council is a governing body that oversees trade relations between the different worlds and determines how to divide Imperial funds among the various departments. A particularly strong member of the council is Baron Urnst von Alksburg. One of his personal projects is to make sure the local IRIS office has sufficient funds to uphold its five mandates.

Count Everet de Saven is known to mastermind an organized crime ring of smuggling and a "protection" scam targeting the merchant industry. IRIS has long maintained an ongoing investigation on him, but to date been ineffectual in bringing about his arrest. Foiling the plans of Baron von Alksburg and IRIS are among the count's favorite pastimes.

X-BOAT MESSAGES

As the group prepares for the initial jump out of the Regina System on 024-1120, two messages are broadcast by an x-boat arriving in the system (see sidebar). Once the PCs arrive at an intermediate jump point, no additional information is available on the airwaves. Any intermediate system has just learned of the baron's capture. The PCs' group should be pressed to continue its trip immediately. Shortly after arriving at Roup, three more x-boat messages are broadcast (see sidebar).

Roup 2007/Spinward Marches

Date: 017-1120

¶ It was announced today by the Starport Security office that cargo loaded on the yacht of Baron Urnst von Alksburg was admitted with a forged bill of lading. Five large containers allegedly holding food and other consumables were placed in the yacht's cargo hold early in the morning of 015-1120. Several hours later the craft was hijacked. Baron von Alksburg has apparently been kidnapped.

Roup 2007/Spinward Marches

Date: 017-1120

¶ The Scout Service stationed at Roup has called for a subsectorwide alert. All Scout bases in Regina Subsector have been asked to assist in a complete sweep of all systems. It is hoped this sweep will locate Baron von Alksburg's yacht hijacked on 015-1120.

Efate 1705/Spinward Marches

Date: 025-1120

¶ The family of Urnst von Alksburg today announced a reward for the recovery of the baron. Upon his safe return from captivity, a reward of MCr2 will be awarded to the person or group who effects his recovery. The baron was abducted from Roup this past Monday and a ransom message was delivered to the family estate. The demands and any other details of the message were not released.

Regina 1910/Spinward Marches

Date: 032-1120

¶ In a statement released today, the Imperial Navy reported it is too early to tell if the search for Baron Urnst von Alksburg will be successful. Lieutenant Anthony Davies, public affairs officer for operations, stated, "The subsectorwide search was only initiated a week ago. Our ships have just reached their first destinations. Given the time required in jumpspace it could be weeks before we hear anything." The statement was given in response to continued questions and a public desire for an update.

Feri 2005/Spinward Marches

Date: 032-1120

¶ Count Everet de Saven stated in a press conference today, "The abduction of Baron Urnst von Alksburg is a prime example of the sorry state of our starport security forces. Certain organizations within our empire would do better to police our starports than engage in covert activities outside our realm. Today I leave for a council meeting on Regina and plan to address that very subject."

¶ The Sector Council of Regina is to meet on 066-1120.

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ENCOUNTER AT ROUP

Within minutes of landing in the Roup starport, the chief of starport security comes to the ship and requests permission to board for a routine check. Once aboard, he introduces himself as Gorden Bartikoff.

"My plan to conduct a security inspection was necessary to preserve your identity. I know you are working for IRIS. I came to invite you to my office where I can give you all the information I have."

Chief Bartikoff will ask some of the group to accompany him. He stops on his way to pick up a computer disc from an office worker.

The chief's office is plain but comfortable. The chief asks the party to sit and wait a moment while he reviews the disc. After a few minutes he turns his attention to his guests.

"I will not waste your time. The officer who approved the cargo for loading has been thoroughly questioned. Our lab took two hours to determine that the bill of lading was a forgery. I see no reason to expect him to have discovered any anomaly. With the description he provided, we have apprehended the man who presented the cargo that was loaded."

"I was just going over the report of my interrogators." He gestures toward the computer. "The man positively identified the four men who hired him to place the cargo on board. Those men are notorious mercenaries whose records are on file. None of the four have the skills required to reprogram a jump. Either they forced the crew to do so, or they obtained a prerecorded jump program. Jump programs are, of course, easily available at Flight Services. The problem is determining which program they obtained."

"That, I'm afraid, is the extent of our investigation. I was instructed to turn the case over to you when you arrived. Do you have any questions?"

After pausing briefly, Bartikoff exclaims, "Oh! I almost forgot!" He ruffles through a stack of papers on his desk. Pulling one out, he hands it to the closest person. "This is a copy of the *Venturi's* papers. It may be of some help."

Bartikoff will answer any questions asked of him to the best of his abilities. The chief appears somewhat embarrassed by the whole affair and only wants a speedy conclusion to the matter.

FLIGHT SERVICES

At Flight Services (if the party decides to investigate), a clerk will remember one of the men if shown a photograph. He will not immediately remember the system requested. While the clerk checks his terminal for the appropriate record, a coarse-looking starship captain saunters to the counter. Anyone asked will identify him as Captain Creel of the *Black Dragon*, Count de Saven's yacht. Someone in the group will notice that Captain Creel has a tattoo of a black dragon on his left hand.

The conversation between Creel and one of the other desk clerks seems to indicate that Creel is filing a flight plan for the following day, 040-1120. (According to the plan he is going to Yurst to pick up a shipment for the count and will return on 056 to take the count to Regina.) This clerk seems a little surprised at the plan but says nothing.

Shortly, the clerk checking on the program returns and tells the party that the man he identified purchased a computer disc flight plan to Grant in Jewell Subsector. All his papers seemed to be in

order to enter a red-zone system.

By this time the party should get the idea that the kidnappers jumped to Grant. It may be necessary to give them a nudge in that direction. Little further information can be gained on Roup. Also, if the group gets the idea that Captain Creel is leaving to pick up the ransom, it will be to their advantage to report this to their IRIS supervisors.

GRANT

Upon arriving in Grant's system, the group will easily find the *Venturi* orbiting around the mainworld. There is no reaction from the ship because the maneuver and jump programs have failed due to the SEE.

The power plant program will fail in 24 hours. The hijackers are unaware of their predicament; they failed to check the reason for the red zone.

The baron, his pilot, and the ship's engineer are no longer aboard. Within a day of arriving in orbit, the kidnappers placed them in the launch with enough fuel to make the planet surface.

According to the plan given to the kidnappers, a ship would arrive on 064-1120 to give word to return the baron to Forboldn. Count de Saven's real plan, however, is to leave the *Venturi* at Grant where it would be found some convenient time in the future. The kidnappers would die when the ship lost power, and Baron von Alksburg would be stranded on the planet surface—altogether a neat and tidy disposition of matters.

BOARDING THE VENTURI

Due to their ignorance of the real plot, the kidnappers (Ice, Boomer, Brute, and Weasel) will attempt to repel any boarding party. They will avoid damaging the ship because they believe it is their ticket home.

Since the *Venturi's* jump-4 capability is the only chance the player characters have to make it to Regina on time, they should try to avoid damaging the craft as well.

In order to repel boarders, Boomer and Brute will set up in the iris portals to the passenger lounge and engineering. If the firefight becomes too intense or one of the men is injured, they will fire a barrage and retreat through the two portals. As they do this, they will circle and lock the hatches behind them.

Brute and Ice will then set up in the iris portal to engineering, holding the corridor as long as possible. Boomer and Weasel will retreat through the passenger lounge and set up at the portal to the crew lounge.

If necessary, they will retreat to the bridge and attempt to power the drives and initiate the antihijack program. This program will open both doors of the main airlock and any iris portal determined by the bridge crew. All persons in the area of decompression must be in vacc suits or die.

All affected persons must make a Strength roll at -2 or be sucked out the airlock. (Optionally, the antihijack program could partially fail, or some other scenario occur, e.g., nerve gas could be expelled through the ventilation system.)

If the kidnappers are severely wounded and/or overwhelmed, they will surrender. Once Boomer and Weasel are on the bridge five minutes, they will realize the difficulty with the computer and surrender immediately.

Grant 1607 Spinward Marches X664100-0 Im Lo Ni R222 K6 V

This is a stone-age planet totally oblivious to heavenly activity. Scout survey teams have called it "unremarkable." Its only known ores are iron, nickel, copper, and bauxite. Development is pending further research. The red-zone designation is due to an unusual stellar electromagnetic effect (SEE) which wreaks havoc with computers. Over a period of time programs start to be erased. Any computer system with ECP is unaffected. This information is not widely known and will only be learned by making an inquiry into the reason for the red zone.

Horatio Creel

898745 Birthdate: 042-1073 Birthplace: Kinorb 2202 Spinward Marches UPP: A663659-8 Sex: Male Ht: 175 cm Wt: 90 kg Hair: Red Eyes: Green Marital Status: Never married Career: Pirate Branch: N/A Terms: 4 Final Rank: Leader Retired: N Discharge World: Feri 2005 Spinward Marches UPP: B384879-B Discharge Date: 154-1107 Awards and Decorations: None Special Assignments: None

Skills: Pilot-3, Bribery-2, Carousing-1, Intrusion-2, Laser Weapons-1, Zero-G Environ-1, Vacc Suit-1

History: Horatio Creel was born on Kinorb of unknown parentage and was raised in several institutions before running away at the age of 12. Within a month, a group of pirates picked him up to perform various menial tasks aboard their ship. Upon reaching the age of 18, Horatio was allowed to become a full member of the pirates and was trained to be a pilot. The attrition rate among pirates being very high, he rose through the ranks at a rapid pace. At 30, Horatio became the pirates' leader, a position he retained for four years. One day while checking out likely targets on Feri, he noticed a job posting for a "discreet" ship's captain. After 16 years as a pirate, the job looked tempting. The prospective employer, Count Everet de Saven, decided Horatio was perfect for the task.

Creel has been linked with several illegal operations, but never with sufficient evidence to attain a conviction. No connection has ever been established between Horatio's activities and the count. To all appearances, Creel has been acting on his own within the freedom granted by his employer.

Ivan Martin (a.k.a. Ice)

A9A674 Birthdate: 104-1081 Birthplace: Enope 2205 Ht: 185 cm Wt: 90 kg Hair: Sandy Eyes: Brown

Skills: Handgun-3, Heavy Weapons-2, Communications-1

History: Enlisted in army in 1099 in the infantry arm. Served two combat tours and received a dishonorable discharge on Feri on 147-1107. Held a final rank of corporal. Has had a postservice connection with organized crime throughout Regina Subsector. Four arrests for illegal possession of firearms and one arrest for assault. Has been held for questioning on five abductions. No convictions.

Considered armed and dangerous.

George March (a.k.a. Boomer)

9A8863 Birthdate: 072-1082 Birthplace: Yres 1802 Spinward Marches Ht: 183 cm Wt: 82 kg Hair: Brown Eyes: Brown

Skills: Demolition-3, Handgun-2, Zero-G Environ-2, Laser Weapons-2, Medical-1

History: Enlisted in marines in 1100 in the support arm. Transferred to commando arm after one term. Served four combat tours and received one Purple Heart. Was discharged on 324-1112 on Feri. Held a final rank of lance sergeant. Wanted for arson on Feri, Kinorb, Wochiers, and Regina.

Considered armed and dangerous.

Gregory Storth (a.k.a. Brute)

E8D542 Birthdate: 327-1084 Birthplace: Shionthy 2306 Ht: 198 cm Wt: 127 kg Hair: Blonde Eyes: Green

Skills: Brawling-3, Vacc Suit-3, Laser Weapons-3, Zero-G Combat-2, Sensor Ops-1, Ship's Boat-1

History: Hired as a belter by the Shionthy Mining Company in 1102. Separated from the company in 1114 under questionable circumstances, and departed for Feri in 1115. Wanted in connection with piracy in Efate System.

Considered armed and dangerous.

Manx Bolgar (a.k.a. Weasel)

7B9866 Birthdate: 224-1083 Birthplace: Yori Ht: 178 cm Wt: 72 kg Hair: Black Eyes: Brown

Skills: Forgery-3, Intrusion-2, Handgun-2, Liaison-2, Legal-1

History: Enlisted in the Regina police force in the patrol branch in 1101. Cross-trained and switched to customs on 1105. Was transferred to Feri customs in 1109. Separated from customs in 1117 under suspicion of smuggling. Seems to have an expensive lifestyle, but with no visible means of support.

Urnst von Alksburg

6789BC Birthdate: 156-1070 Birthplace: Efate 1705 Spinward Marches UPP: A646930-D Sex: Male Ht: 182 cm Wt: 90 kg Hair: Gray Eyes: Brown Marital Status: Currently married to Heidi (formerly) Horst; three children: Haans, Gertrude, and Erick Career: Bureau Branch: Legislative/Legal Terms: 3 Final Rank: Manager Retired: N Discharge World: Efate 1705 Spinward Marches UPP: A646930-D Discharge Date: 225-1101 Awards and Decorations: Special Act Award-1, Sustained Superior Performance-2 Special Assignments: Cross Training—Legal

Skills: Liaison-3, Persuasion-2, Computer-1, Legal-2, Handgun-1, Grav Vehicle-0

History: Urnst von Alksburg was born to one of the ruling families of Efate (1705 Spinward Marches). Since governmental positions pass to the hereditary heir of the noble houses of Efate, Urnst was destined to ascend to his father's place. At the age of 18, Urnst entered in the service of the planetary bureaucracy as a legislative assistant. Throughout his 12-year career, Urnst proved his ability to assume his father's position by receiving numerous awards and rapid promotions. In 1101, Ulfred von Alksburg, Urnst's father, suffered a massive heart attack and subsequently abdicated his position to Urnst. Over the past 17 years, Baron Urnst von Alksburg has proven his loyalty both to the Imperium and Efate. His orthodox views concerning the duties of the government have won him the respect of his people.

Everet de Saven

76699E Birthdate: 245-1061 Birthplace: Feri 2005 Spinward Marches UPP: B384879-B Sex: Male Ht: 175 cm Wt: 68 kg Hair: Black Eyes: Brown Marital Status: Currently unmarried, several illegitimate children known to exist Career: Noble Branch: N/A Terms: 5 Final Rank: Count Retired: N Discharge World: Feri 2005 Spinward Marches UPP: B384879-B Discharge Date: 206-1099 Awards and Decorations: None Special Assignments: None

Skills: Streetwise-3, Gambling-2, Handgun-1, Broker-2, Legal-1, Computer-0, Grav Vehicle-0

History: Everet de Saven was born to a noble family on Feri which controlled one of the major land areas of this balkanized planet. Seemingly lacking any real direction, he embarked on the noble's usual career of spontaneity. In other words, he did whatever he felt like doing.

Considered to be something of a playboy, Everet has been asked to leave many reputable hotels, and fathers have been known to ask their daughters to stay away from parties at which he is a guest.

For several years, Everet disappeared and rumor has it that he fell in with a group of pirates. Upon his reappearance, a shadow seemed to fall over his family. Everet's father, never a well man, became violently ill and died. Since Everet was third in line for succession, his oldest brother took his father's place in the government. Over the subsequent three years, Everet's two older siblings sickened and died also. Both deaths were apparently caused by a disease heretofore unknown on Feri. Everet was off-world during the course of both tragic deaths.

As the sole remaining heir, Count Everet de Saven has directed the state which he governs with an eye toward its predominance on Feri. Among his counterparts, he is known to be devious and unethical. Through inexplicable means, he has multiplied the family fortune by a factor of five. Everet de Saven's political viewpoint is extremely liberal and seems to be motivated by personal gain.

Venturi

The *Venturi* is a 200-ton, TL13 yacht. The two forward crew quarters and the bridge are situated midway between the two decks due to the tapering of the exterior hull. Following the corridor aft from the bridge you come to a short flight of stairs leading to the upper deck. Continuing aft you will pass the remainder of the crew quarters and enter the galley.

Through the iris portal from the galley is the passenger lounge and the passenger staterooms. Another iris portal separates the passenger lounge from the entrance corridor and airlock. Facing the portal to the passenger lounge is another iris portal leading aft to the two-level engineering section.

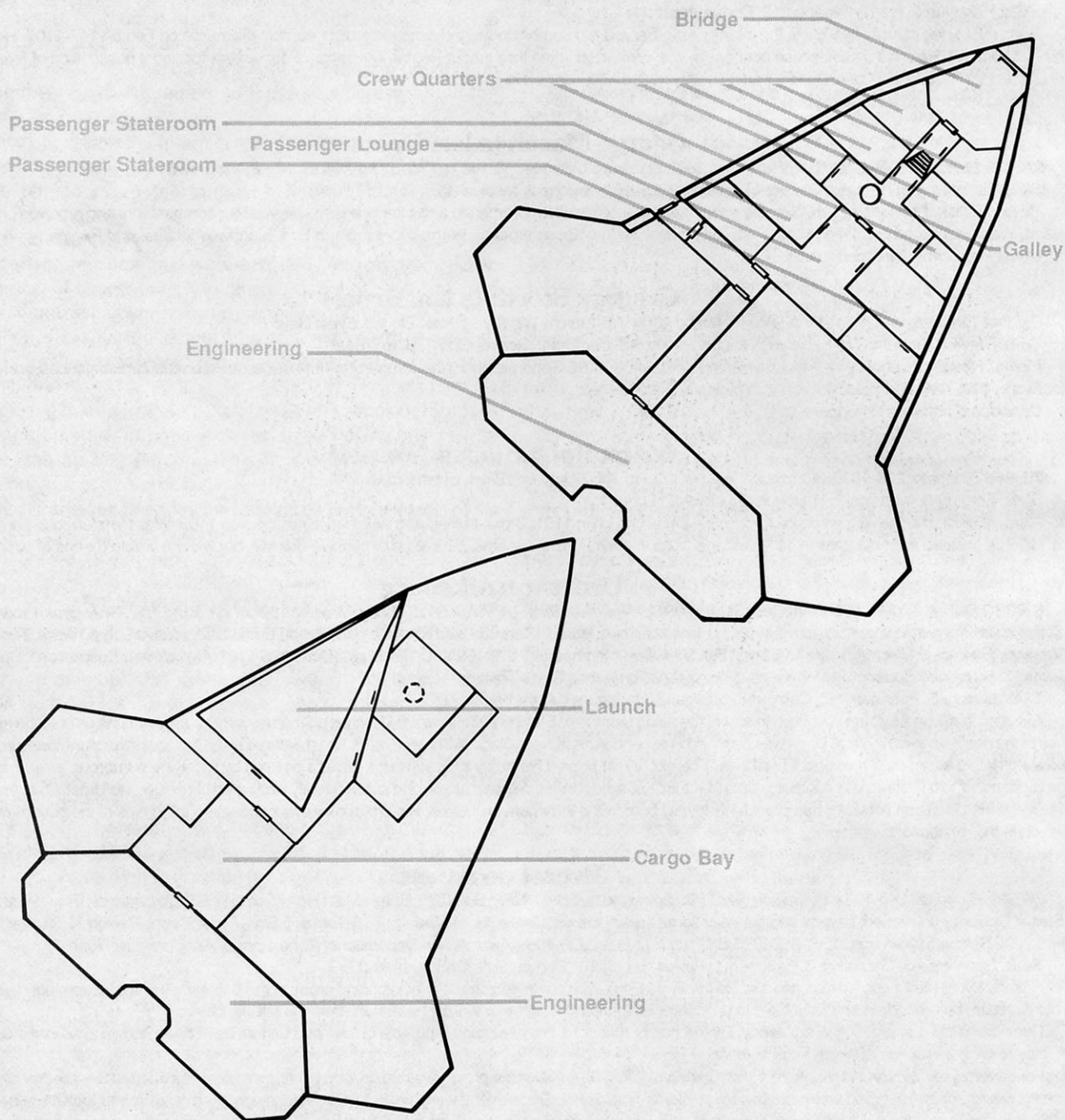
Forward of the lower-level engineering section is the cargo bay,

which further connects to the launch hanger area. Adjacent to the launch hanger is the ship's locker, utility room, and crew lounge. A hatch overhead leads up to the galley.

The cargo hold contains the usual provisions as well as the five containers loaded in Roup. Four of the containers are open. In the remaining container is the kidnappers' payment, Cr250,000 in gold. (The count planned to retrieve this on his return from Regina.)

WE SHOULD...DISCUSS...THIS

When interrogated, the four men will state that a roguish-looking man came to them and laid out the whole plan. If hard-pressed for any description of their contact, they will remember he had a tattoo of a black dragon on his left hand. Otherwise, their knowledge of the plot is as above.



Venturi (TL13 Yacht)

If, at any time, someone makes a surface scan of the planet, a high concentration of refined metal will be detected. This metal is the launch in which Baron von Alksburg and his remaining crew are living. Full cooperation from these three will be difficult without showing IRIS identification.

WRAPPING UP THE LOOSE ENDS

All that remains at this point is to return the baron to Regina on schedule.

Repairs to the *Venturi* could take several days. Determine necessary intervals by task rolls.

To reprogram maneuver, jump, or navigation programs:

Routine, Computer or Pilot or Navigation (as applicable), Edu, 2 hours (uncertain)

To reprogram power plant program:

Routine, average of Computer and Engineering, Edu, 2 hours (uncertain)

Referee: Different skills from two people can be combined to use as die modifiers in any manner that you see reasonable. For instance, a pilot and programmer could collaborate on a task roll.

The craft will need to be taken to the planet surface to regain any atmosphere lost during the boarding attempt. After the *Venturi* is repaired, some of the player characters will need to return to Regina with the baron to ensure his safe arrival at the council chambers. The IRIS office will also need to be notified to arrest Captain Creel. The ransom payment for the baron will be found in the Black Dragon's cargo hold.

Regardless of the desire of the players and their knowledge of the count's involvement in this affair, there is no evidence available to connect him directly with the actions of his captain. Captain Creel will testify that he acted independently of his employer. Upon investigation, it will be determined that the captain had access to all necessary information to coordinate the hijacking without Count de Saven's involvement. For his part, Count Everet de Saven will be suitably shocked to hear of Creel's involvement in the whole affair. He will welcome the baron with apparent relief (after a brief moment of surprise).

Two weeks after the return of the baron, MCr2 will be credited to the player's account. This is the reward from the von Alksburg family. There is also a 0.1% finder's fee for the ransom money. Within a week of finding the ransom, MCr0.4 will be credited to the group's account.

CAMPAIGN DIRECTION NOTES

In order to keep the adventure fast-paced, referees are advised to keep the timetable just as tight as it is. If your group has access to a starship of greater than jump-2, the timetable will definitely need to be adjusted to shorten the duration of the adventure.

The PCs must not be given any time to make mistakes. If a wrong jump is made, the mission cannot be accomplished. This aspect should be stressed to the players in order to keep the tension high. However, sometimes the players are set on a course of action no matter how many warnings or hints a referee tries to give them. Soft-hearted referees, in this case, can allow a misjump to take the PCs to where they are supposed to be without their cooperation, but such tactics should not be used often.

Count Everet de Saven will most certainly take note of those responsible for spoiling his plans. It is quite possible that he may plan some other mischief to discredit or eliminate the group. He has many resources and is devious. At some point during the next year, the group will learn that Captain Creel escaped from his prison colony and is still at large.

Venturi

CraftID: Yacht, Type: YP, TL13, MCr130.185
Hull: 180/450, Disp=200, Config=1SL, Armor=40F
 Unloaded=3068 tons, Loaded=3599 tons
Power: 14/28, Fusion=1800 Mw, Duration=30/90 days
Loco: 20/40, Maneuver=4; 9/18, Jump=4, NOE=170, Cruise=750kph, Top=1000kph, Agility=0
Commo: Radio Comm=System
Sensors: Passive EMS=Interplanetary, Active EMS=Far Orbit
 ActObjScan=Routine, ActObjPin=Routine
 PasEngScan=Routine
Off/Def: Hardpoints=2, Def DM=+8
Control: Computer=Model 7/fib-2000x3, Panel=Holo-linkedx140 Special=HoldsUpDisplayx2, Environment=Basic Environment, Basic Life Support, Extended Life Support, Grav Plates, Inertial Compensators
Accomm: Crew=6 (Bridge=2, Engineering=1, Flight=2, Steward=1), Staterooms=Smallx6, Doublex2, Sub Craft=Launch with Grav Flier
Other: Cargo=7.085 tons, Fuel=754.2 kl, ObjSize=Average, EmLevel=Moderate

Venturi's Launch

CraftID: Launch, Type: YB, TL 13, MCr16.016
Hull: 18/45, Disp=20, Config=1SL, Armor=40F
 Unloaded=334.5, Loaded=383.25
Power: 4/8, Fusion=450 Mw, Duration=30/90 days
Loco: 2/4, Maneuver=3, NOE=170, Cruise=750 kph, Top=1000kph, Agility=5
Commo: Radio Comm=System
Sensors: Passive EMS=Interplanetary, Active EMS=Far Orbit
 ActObjScan=Routine, ActObjPin=Routine
 PasEngScan=Routine
Off/Def: Hardpoints=1, Def DM=+14
Control: Computer=Model 7/fib-100x3, Panel=Holo-linkedx20, Environ=Basic Environment, Basic Life Support, Grav Plates, Inertial Compensators
Accomm: Crew=2 (Pilot=1, Command=1), Roomy Crew Positions=20, SubCraft=Grav Flier
Other: Cargo=33.59 kl, Fuel=19.8 kl, ObjSize=Average, EmLevel=Faint

The Launch's Grav Flier

CraftID: Grav Flier, Type: YV, TL 13, MCr .549
Hull: 2/5, Disp=2, Config=1AF, Armor=6 F
 Unloaded=5.69 tons, Loaded=13.78 tons
Power: 1/2, Fusion=3 Mw, Durations=30/90
Loco: 1/2, LPL Grav=20 tons, NOE=170, Cruise=365 kph, Top=540 kph
Commo: Radio Comm=Regional
Sensors: Passive EMS=Continental, Active EMS=Very Distant, ActObjScan=Difficult, ActObjPin=Difficult, PasEngScan=Formidable
Off/Def: No weapons installed
Control: Computer=Model 7/fib-2x3, Panel=Holo-linkedx1, Environment=Basic Environ, Grav Plates, Inertial Compensators
Accomm: Crew=1 (Operator=1), Roomy Crew Positionx4
Other: Cargo=8.064 kl, Fuel=.396 kl, ObjSize=Small, EmLevel=Moderate

TRAVELLER *News Service*

Capital/Core (2118 A586A98-F)

Date: 142-1121

¶ In a dramatic throne room scene, Emperor Lucan expelled senior Vilani emissary Seled Urkirjii today.

¶ This event was precipitated when Ambassador Pleni-potentiary Urkirjii greeted Lucan in Vilani, rather than High Sylean.

¶ This flagrant disregard of Lucan's decree of 090-1121, which mandates the exclusive use of High Sylean in Imperial chambers, shocked onlookers and elicited rage from the emperor himself.

¶ It is reported that Lucan's chancellor, Dore A'Kenji, barely managed to prevent the emperor from resorting to personal violence.

¶ Ambassador Urkirjii and the entirety of his embassy were expelled from Capital the same day. This comes as a sharp blow to many of the remaining Moot members, who had hoped that the recently arrived Vilani delegation might signal the beginning of some level of cooperation between Lucan's Imperium and at least one of the other factions currently striving for the Iridium Throne.

Strat/Old Expanses (0318 A9BA8A8-F)

Date: 149-1121

¶ A single unconfirmed report claims that two ships of the missing 22nd Imperial Fleet were detected in-system earlier today.

¶ Alder Henriot, second pilot aboard the Free Liner *Sojourner*, insists that he became aware of the two vessels while conducting routine maintenance testing of his ship's densitometers.

¶ The two ships were tentatively identified as an ED-15 destroyer escort and an EM-13 missile escort. A fragmentary reception of the latter's transponder signal suggests that the identification is accurate, since the vessel's call code matches that assigned to the INS *Zuni*, an EM-13 that is listed as being in service with the 22nd Imperial Fleet.

¶ Upon becoming aware of their detection, both vessels maneuvered away at high speed. Subsequent scans suggested that they jumped out-system soon after.

¶ Local naval authorities could not be reached for comment.

Zhanora/Vland (3035 D651754-8)

Date: 155-1121

¶ Suspicion of a "cyborg plot" continues to run high in this system and has resulted in 23 separate executions (referred to by many as "machine terminations") this past week.

¶ The reputed cyborg plot, while still not proven to exist, is said to be a conspiracy run by Stephonist supporters who are entering the Kakadan Subsector from Dagudashaag.

¶ According to Lucan's local spokespeople, the false Strephon has begun to create an army of cyborg terrorists, built for the express purpose of wreaking ruin and havoc within Lucan's Imperium. It is claimed that this army's ultimate goal is the assassination of Lucan himself.

¶ Whether or not such allegations are true, a current wave of precautionary detentions and "machine terminations" has been mounted by urban law enforcement agencies. Many locals suggest that this crackdown is merely a pretext whereby the strongly pro-Lucan police forces can easily eliminate "political dissidents."

¶ In the most inflammatory event thus far, retired Imperial Army Major Adskir Shormakov was apprehended on the grounds that he was a "cyborg of treasonous origins." Such a charge is unprecedented, both in terms of its generality and lack of jurisprudential basis.

¶ This did not prevent Lucan's local authorities from charging and trying Shormakov, resulting in a verdict of treason. The death sentence was carried out immediately after the closed trial.

¶ Major Shormakov's cybernetic replacement elements were limited to a pseudogastric processing system and his lower left leg.

Culdee/Kukulcan (3235 A68A998-9)

Date: 168-1121

¶ A prerecorded pro-Reformist holocaust was presented on Culdee's airwaves today, galvanizing the local population into sharply polarized camps that are divided over the issue of pan-sophontic policy reform.

¶ The holocaust featured an address by the Secretariat's former minister of economics, Joshua Dahvin.

¶ Dahvin presented a forceful case against the Secretariat's increased drift toward the centrist policies of absolute racial purity and mandatory membership in the Society for the Sovereignty of Man over Machine (SSMM). In addition, Dahvin's words created a whirlwind of public and media debate over the Secretariat's current "one state, one race" policy.

¶ Dahvin, who recently resigned from the Secretariat along with a dozen close supporters, is now rumored to be living in Spica Sector, where he is said to be devoting his full efforts to the growth of the Reform movement and its desire to encourage recognition of "the inalienable and equal rights of all sophonts in all places at all times."

¶ Andreanna Sarqaba, a spokesperson for the local Solsec office, dismissed Dahvin's remarks as "desperate ravings" that were only to be taken seriously because they represented "a clear dalliance with seditious intent." Ms. Sarqaba declined to comment on whether the Secretariat was likely to take any action against Mr. Dahvin.

ALERT!

RED ZONE DECLARED!

Preserve/Zarushagar (2329 E449895-A)

Date: 179-1121

¶ Independent testing teams have confirmed the use of biological weapons in the current struggle for the Amavor continent of Preserve.

¶ Local insurgents supporting the Isolationist cause are reported to have insinuated a rapidly mutating strain of parainfluenza into local water supplies and foodstores.

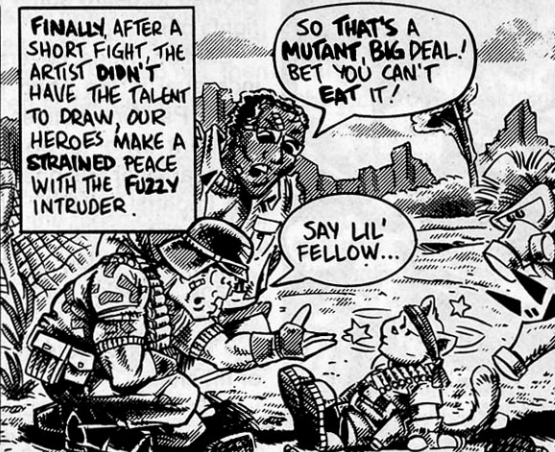
¶ The pseudovirus, dubbed by locals as Reaper's Flu, is a rapidly invasive organism that is capable of killing victims within 12 hours of onset. However, the virus may remain completely dormant for as long as two weeks, during which time carriers can spread the disease.

¶ Appeals to the local Imperial authorities for enforcement of the Imperial Rules of War against the use of biological weaponry are complicated by current power struggles between Brzk and Lucan supporters within the bureaucracy. Unfortunately, most of the former Imperial forces on-planet are engaged on both sides of this struggle for local dominance.

¶ Ironically, the ineffectiveness of the remaining Imperial administration has bolstered support for the Isolationist cause.



Ned Versus Th' Mutants



Law in the Imperium

By George William Herbert



"Look, they have you straight on three Imperial crimes and who knows how many counts of recognized crimes from here to Regina."

The group looked glumly at the lawyer. "What's our best option?" asked the ex-scout.

"Do you prefer Imperial or local prisons?"

Even in the current chaos of the Imperium, it is critical for travelers to understand the theory and application of Imperial law; most areas are still enforcing it as best they can, as they do not want to degenerate into anarchy. This article is a quick introduction and overview of the subject. While the above example hopefully won't happen to most adventuring groups, it's important to understand what can and will happen to those who break the law at an interstellar level.

UNDERLYING PRINCIPLES

The principles underlying Imperial law are mostly found in a single document, *Rights*, an edict issued by Emperor Cleon II in year 54 (his only act of note while emperor). The document was the culmination of an analysis of previous systems of civil rights predating the Third Imperium that had been instituted by Cleon I upon the beginning of the Third Imperium.

Section One covers the rights of the emperor and his government, simply stating that all rights are derived from the emperor, etc. It also defines nobles as those who have been delegated the authority of the emperor by hereditary title and the government as composed of those who have been delegated authority by employment position. In addition, nobles have some special rights—the right to a trial by jury of peers being one.

Section Two is an overview of local governments and their rights and responsibilities. The most fundamental assumption present here is that local governments are allowed to usurp some (but not all) of the rights of individuals.

Section Three covers the rights of the individual in the Third Imperium. Section Three, Part One, defines *citizen* as being any sentient who is born within Imperial boundaries or has one or both parents that are Imperial citizens. Section Three, Part Two, is the crucial list:

The rights below are allowed all citizens, in any situation not detrimental to the Imperium:

- To communicate freely, in any situation or manner.
- To be safe, secure, and free in life, profession, possessions, and travel.
- In criminal proceedings, to have a fair and expedient trial, to have counsel, to

present evidence and witnesses as desired in one's own defense, to fair time considerations for distance, to appeal to the emperor or his representatives in matters of fact and law, to freedom from prosecutorial appeal of decisions of fact, and to freedom from unreasonable or overly cruel punishments.

- To take reasonable actions in defense of one's own or other's life, health, or property.

What does all this mean? Criminal prosecution in the Third Imperium takes place at a trial, presided over by a judge (nobles are allowed, but not required, to have a jury of six to 12 equal or higher ranking nobles). The defendant(s) must be allowed to have a lawyer, though they can choose not to. Unlike contemporary American law, there is no concept of "suppressing evidence." Defendants may appeal decisions on both factual and legal grounds to Imperial nobility or the designated judiciary.

LEVELS AND JURISDICTION OF LAWS

Imperial law is the law that is in effect throughout the Imperium. It applies everywhere, from deep space to the middle of a jungle, and in some cases to areas outside the Imperium proper. Imperial laws are determined by the emperor through his bureaucracy.

Local laws are any laws enacted by recognized planetary-level governments. Local laws are only enforceable on the planet's surface (or within a country's boundaries on balkanized worlds) and up to the edge of the atmosphere (below close orbit).

They also don't apply on recognized extraterrestrial areas, including starports of rating C and above, embassies of other worlds, and Imperial government property and installations.

The status of orbital and off-planet installations depends on the exact situation. In general, the parent planet/country's laws apply, except to areas that are parts of a starport. Some installations are legally independent. All off-planet installations that do follow local laws are required by Imperial law to transmit their legal status as part of their signal ID beacon. If they do not, then they are considered to fall under Imperial law only.

Also, all ships in flight beyond close orbit or in jumpspace are subject to Imperial law only, and fall under the jurisdiction of their destination if in jump. Ships in flight are the only instances where Imperial authorities will commonly enforce the Imperial crime of murder, for example. The jurisdiction is with the subsector courts in these cases (see below).

There are four categories of law in the Imperium. They are high justice, Imperial, recognized and local.

High Justice

The highest level of law is high justice criminal laws. High justice covers the most serious crimes—those that are serious infractions against interstellar society as a whole. Travellers who violate high justice laws have to expect long and intense prosecution by all Imperial authorities, and most often by the Ministry of Justice, though all Imperial agencies are responsible for assisting in the apprehension of high justice law violators. Large monetary rewards are offered for the capture and/or killing of violators, and large amounts of agency and other resources will be dedicated to apprehending them. Local law enforcement agencies may well become involved also.

In several high justice crimes, the convicted person can be sentenced to death. Ministry of Justice agents may use lethal force against resisting or fleeing high justice law violation suspects, whether or not the suspects are armed at the time or have allegedly committed a technically "violent" high justice crime. Anyone, including average citizens, is authorized to apprehend a high justice violator. In such a case, the suspect must, however, be immediately transferred to Imperial authorities (or local authorities, if necessary).

Imperial Law

Next highest are the Imperial laws. These crimes are less serious, but still of interstellar scope, and include piracy, interfering with the x-boat network, etc. Crimes aboard a starship in space are covered by Imperial law.

Recognized Law

Below Imperial laws are recognized laws. These are crimes that the Imperial government feels are best handled by local standards, but that are serious enough to warrant interstellar enforcement. In other words, suspects in recognized crimes can be extradited back to the planet or locality of the crime to serve trial, whereas local crimes (see below) are mild enough that extradition is not allowed. Note that no recognized crimes are illegal by Imperial law—the local government has to make the law. The Imperial government merely allows extradition if the locals do choose to make laws covering the crime. Courts in the Imperial Court System (the planetary courts) do have jurisdiction over recognized crimes (see Imperial Trial Procedure, below).

Laws against manslaughter, rape, and smuggling are among recognized laws.

Local Law

Finally, there are local laws. These are anything that local governments wish to enact. Local laws are not enforceable beyond a planet's boundaries, according to the Imperial government.

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IMPERIAL LAW ENFORCEMENT

The primary agents of Imperial law enforcement are the Imperial Ministry of Justice field agents. Alongside them are the Imperial courts.

The Imperial Ministry of Justice (MOJ) is charged with enforcing Imperial law within the Imperium. Its field agents investigate and prosecute high justice and Imperial crimes. One additional government agency, the Imperial Regency of Intelligence and Security (IRIS), will become involved in investigations concerning the high justice crimes of espionage and treason (it will involve itself in the latter only if there is strong evidence pointing toward collusion with a foreign power). Similarly, IRIS may also become involved in investigations concerning conspiracy to commit these crimes.

MOJ Field Agents: The MOJ usually places a minimum of one field agent per planet, with one additional agent per 100,000 population. On balkanized, low-population worlds, some agents are responsible for multiple "countries."

The Ministry of Justice rank system closely approximates that of the law enforcement service (from the **MegaTraveller** basic set character generation rules).

The authority of field agents extends over the whole Imperium, regardless of where they are posted. Few travel extensively, however. (Most investigations off-planet are handled by the other location's field agents.) They are authorized, in extreme cases, to pursue an investigation away from their field posting area (usually the one planet) without consulting their superiors.

MOJ Officers: There is also a rank below field agent: the Ministry of Justice officer. Officers are empowered to enforce Imperial law in one specific area only, such as on one planet, or perhaps only at one starport. MOJ officers are found in varying numbers at starports and installations around the Imperium. A starport might have one officer per million population on-planet; the ratio would be appropriately reduced for smaller starports. Not all starports have MOJ officers assigned.

Powers and Responsibilities: Both field agents and officers have the following powers and responsibilities:

- They may arrest persons suspected of violating Imperial law. Often a local planet will also allow them to arrest those violating local laws.

- They may use deadly force in self-defense or to stop a fleeing violent crime suspect, and may carry weapons at all times. (Weapons are usually limited to handguns or the like, though in extreme circumstances, MOJ high justice arrest teams may be equipped with FGMPs and battle dress.)

- They may question individuals to gain information about a case. They can gather evidence and obtain records that may have relevant information to crimes. (Note that failing to assist a MOJ agent in his investigations is an Imperial crime, though it is usually only prosecuted in intentional and serious cases.)

- They may indict persons whom they have evidence have committed Imperial or high justice crimes. MOJ agents also may legally prosecute those indictments, but usually will let a specialized MOJ prosecutor handle an important case. (There is about one MOJ prosecutor per 10 agents in the field; if one is not on-planet, then he is located at the subsector capital MOJ headquarters.)

INVESTIGATION OF CRIMES

By far the best way to run the portion of an adventure involving the investigation or commission of a crime is to roleplay the whole event. In the event that you want or need to abbreviate such an event, here are some tasks that might be appropriate:

To avoid leaving evidence of a criminal's identity:

Routine; (single most appropriate vice skill), Int, -Enforcement index (see ULP section below). Instantaneous.

Referee: This is one task level more difficult if the characters didn't take basic precautions, or if the Imperial Ministry of Justice is investigating. If the characters take extraordinary precautions it is one level easier. Note that this applies for each individual event that occurs; a crime spree leads to multiple rolls, but a single complex heist that violates 10 laws only requires one roll. Critical success indicates that law enforcement has no clue what happened; critical failure indicates that the criminals are identified immediately, and law enforcement authorities will attempt to arrest them immediately.

To avoid arrest by fleeing off-planet:

Difficult, Int, [+Special DM].

Referee: Roll once per week. This is a routine task if the crime was only recognized, but it is Formidable if the crime was a high justice crime. The special DM is calculated as follows: -1 per week for the first six weeks, +1 per month after the first two, +1 per jump in communications path between current location and site of crime.

THE IMPERIAL JUDICIARY AND TRIAL SYSTEM

The court system in the Imperium closely follows its political organization. All legal judicial authority is derived from the emperor. He has delegated it to his nobles, and they have the right to delegate it to courts of their choosing. (Almost all do; occasionally one may handle a case personally.) The court system is exactly derived from the rank nobles—those serving in governmental positions.

Local Courts: The lowest level is the local court. Local courts are empowered by the local planetary government, and have initial jurisdiction over all local laws. As they differ in nature and procedure from planet to planet, no details will be provided.

Planetary Courts: Above the local courts are the planetary courts. Planetary courts are the lowest level of "Imperial" judiciary; they have appellate jurisdiction over all local law decisions when the appeal is of an Imperial justice nature. They also have initial jurisdiction over recognized crimes. Appeals of recognized crime decisions are appealed up to the subsector courts. Larger planets with multiple levels of rank nobles present may have complex planetary courts; regardless of individual variation, they have the characteristics of planetary courts.

Subsector Courts: The subsector courts are responsible for appeals of recognized crime prosecutions, and have initial jurisdiction over Imperial crimes. They are located at the subsector capital, and have significant Ministry of Justice administrative support, though the justices themselves are chosen by the subsector nobility.

Sector Courts: Above these are the sector courts. Sector courts have appellate jurisdiction over Imperial crimes, and initial jurisdiction for high justice crimes. They are organized similar to subsector courts. Above them, theoretically, are domain courts and the Imperial Supreme Court, but few cases proceed to those levels.

IMPERIAL COURT PROCEDURE

Imperial court doctrine is considerably different than that of the modern-day United States. The defendant has a right to a fair trial, a trial by his peers if he is a noble, and to have legal representation. Present-day concepts such as suppression of evidence and admissibility are not followed.

There are three phases to any trial of recognized, Imperial, or high justice crimes. First is the verification phase. The verification phase serves to ensure that persons are not held for a crime when there is no evidence against them. Next comes the main trial, and if the defendants are found guilty, sentencing follows.

During the verification phase, a defen-

dant may apply for release on bail.

To be released on bail:

(Difficulty as given below), defendant's Social Standing, Int, Legal, 1 hour (confrontation)

Referee: The task is Difficult for recognized crimes, Formidable for Imperial crimes, and Impossible for high justice crimes. In addition, it is one level higher for violent crimes. The confrontation is between the defense lawyer and the prosecutor.

On exceptional success, the accused is released on his personal word. On normal success, the accused must post a bond, cash, or property assessed at the maximum fine that may be imposed for the crime. Accused persons are then free to move about on the planet where the court is located, or about that system with MOJ escort. Referee's discretion may allow movement, with MOJ escort, to other systems.

VERIFICATION

The investigating authorities have a week (recognized crime), month (Imperial crime), or six months (high justice crime) after the arrest, plus travel time if the court is at a different star system than the arresting site, to show to the satisfaction of an appropriate jurisdiction judge that there is enough evidence to try the accused. The authorities may petition for more time where an investigation can be shown to require more time and that it has a reasonable chance of success.

To gain additional investigation time for the prosecution:

Routine, Legal, Forensics, 1 hour (confrontation)

Referee: Success gives 1D weeks; exceptional success gives 1D months. This is only a confrontation if the defense wishes a speedy trial. This task may be repeated if initially successful.

The main body of the trial comes next, usually within 1D weeks. The defense counsel may lengthen this delay time if preparing the defense will take longer.

To gain additional preparation time for the defense:

Routine, Legal, Forensics, 1 hour (confrontation)

Referee: Success gives 1D weeks; exceptional success gives 1D months. This is only a confrontation if the prosecution wants to proceed immediately. This task may be repeated if initially successful.

MAIN TRIAL

If the accused pleads not guilty, then the main trial proceeds. The eventual winner of a trial is determined by a number of factors;

to simulate this, at various stages, there will be possibilities for the prosecution and defense to earn "trial points." A task roll of some sort is made, and the results are recorded as "points" for the defense or prosecution. When the final verdict is being determined, these points are used as DMs to the result. Note that in any of these tasks an exceptional success is worth two trial points; exceptional failure loses one trial point.

In cases with multiple defendants, the trial will proceed in a single prosecution, but each individual gets a separate roll for determination of guilt or innocence. Nobles, allowed trial by a jury of other nobles, are tried in an identical manner. While there are complexities regarding the exact selection of the juries, they have essentially no game effects.

The trial begins with opening arguments—first the prosecution, then the defense. They both present their views of the events surrounding the crime.

To present a successful opening argument:

Difficult, Legal, Int, Persuasion, 1 hour

Referee: This same task applies to both the prosecution and the defense.

Following this, the prosecution presents evidence. Then the defense may present its evidence. Each item of evidence is presented, and both the defense and prosecution argue its value or accuracy. An "item of evidence" is a single piece of physical evidence, testimony of a witness, or testimony of an expert. In an extreme case, a person's testimony may count as more than one piece of evidence in cases where such a person viewed separate criminal events (*referee's* discretion). Note that no evidence is prohibited, no matter how it was collected. Defense and prosecution must both keep in mind, however, that presenting evidence of questionable origin may well backfire—a Formidable task may well result in an exceptional failure.

To successfully present an item of evidence:

Difficult, Legal, Persuasion, 1 hour (confrontation)

Referee: This task may be Routine or Formidable, *referee's* discretion, depending on the nature of the evidence.

Following the end of the evidence presentation, the prosecution and defense offer closing arguments.

To give a successful closing argument:
Difficult, Legal, Int, 1.5 hours

Referee: This same task applies to both the prosecution and the defense.

Finally, the judge (or jury of nobles) makes his decision.

To be found not guilty:

Difficult, Legal, Int, [Trial Points], 1 day (confrontation)

Referee: One roll is made per defendant.

SENTENCING

If the defendant is found guilty, then the proceedings continue to the sentencing phase. Defendants found guilty together are sentenced individually.

During the first stage in this phase, the defense may attempt to reduce the severity of the sentence by arguing with the judge (or jury of nobles).

To reduce the effective sentence index for a crime:

Routine, Legal, Persuasion, Int, 1 day (confrontation)

Referee: This is only a confrontation task if the prosecution wants the full sentence. A pretrial plea bargain or agreement to plead guilty is counted as the prosecution not being confrontational.

Success reduces the sentence index by one; exceptional success reduces it by two. This task is one task level harder for each of the following (cumulative): violent crime, Imperial crime, high justice crime.

Next comes the actual sentencing. The convicted defendants will receive $0.5 + (1D \times 0.1)$ times the maximum listed sentence (treat rolling a 6 as a 5). Jail time will be served at a local (recognized) or Imperial (Imperial and high justice) prison.

APPEALS

Appeals are made to higher courts to reverse some aspect of the trial. The prosecution is allowed to appeal on legal grounds, but the defendant may appeal on legal or factual grounds. In any case, the appeal is made to the court listed in the Imperial Judiciary and Trials System section as having appellate jurisdiction in the case. An appeal of an appeal continues up the ladder, and so on.

An appeal is a two-step process. First, a higher court must agree to hear the appeal, then the appeal must be heard.

To get an appeal heard:

Formidable, Legal, Int, 1 week

Referee: Plus travel time if the attorney is not co-located on the appellate court's planet.

After success at the above task, the appeal is heard. Evidence is reviewed, sometimes the defendants are transported to the court for a hearing, etc.

To gain transfer of convicts for deposi-

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tions at an appeal hearing:

Difficult, Legal, Persuasion, 1 day

To win an appeal, freeing the convicted person(s):

Formidable, Legal, Persuasion, Int, 1 week (confrontation)

Referee: This is a confrontation task only if the prosecutor wants the conviction upheld.

LAW IN THE SHATTERED IMPERIUM

Following the beginning of the current civil war, the central authority of the Ministry of Justice and of the Imperial Judiciary both factionalized. While all of the factions have kept the previous legal systems, the range of jurisdiction has fallen from Imperiumwide to often only sectorwide. Some persons being hunted as criminals on one side of a border are being lionized as patriots on the other side. For these reasons, IRIS has ceased involving itself in espionage and treason investigations. Until such time as the Regency can determine who is the rightful successor to the Iridium Throne, it is impossible to know which acts are treasonous and which are patriotic.

Basically, all laws are being enforced, but less rigorously. Major factions in the civil war are generally treated as combatants, not criminals.

UNIVERSAL LAW PROFILE AND EXPLANATIONS

The following section details the Universal Law Profile (ULP).

ULP Format

Name. (Type) (Enforcement) (Sentence)- (Modifiers). (Notes.)

For example:

Piracy. I8C-V. Usually violent.

Severity Index

The first character in the ULP is the severity level of the law: R for recognized, I for Imperial, and H for high justice.

Enforcement Index

The second character is the enforcement index. The following table is a set of guidelines describing the persistence and effort of law enforcement authorities in investigating the matter. These are used if the referee wants to add more detail to his police investigations.

Sentence Index

The third character in the ULP is the maximum sentence index—in other words, what type of sentence will be imposed upon those found guilty.

The following are the sentences associated with the various sentence index values. The jail term is required.

The judge (referee) has discretion over the fines. Fines as low as Cr10 are common as "wrist slaps."

More characters descriptive of the crime or sentence may be appended with a hyphen.

These tags are -V (violent crime), -(V) (may be a violent crime, depending on the circumstances), -M (military crime; Imperial military agencies will become involved in the investigation and cleanup), -S (manda-

tory sentence of maximum jail time, but not fine, in S1 range, and the sentence cannot be reduced by a task roll).

CRIMES LIST

The crimes list is as follows.

High Justice Crimes

Treason. HAF-MS. Special case—initial jurisdiction at sector court level.

Manufacture of Prohibited Weapons. HAF-M. Nuclear weapons, biologicals, etc. Some exceptions for licensed companies.

Possession of Prohibited Weapons. HAD-M. Possession permits available for very rare exceptions.

Use of Prohibited Weapons. HAF-MV. Calls for death penalty if intentional, or if mass homicide resulted.

Espionage. HAF-M. Only relating to "foreign powers."

Waging Illegal War. HAF-VM. Violating the Imperial Rules of War.

Obstructing an Imperial Warrant Holder. HAD-M. He is acting in the emperor's name....

Imperial Crimes

The Imperial crimes of murder, kidnapping, etc. are usually prosecuted as a recognized crime instead of being prosecuted as Imperial crimes. However, the Imperial government has sole jurisdiction over outer space. In such cases, the Imperial government is responsible for the prosecutions of those who are involved in the crimes.

Piracy. I8C-(V). This is usually a violent crime.

Space Vessel Theft. I7B. A lesser version of piracy.

Great Assault. I8C-VM. Indiscriminate, intentional large-scale attacks, especially with starship weapons, or the attempting thereof.

There is a fuzzy boundary between waging illegal war and great assault, usually distinguished on the basis of intent (but not always).

The referee should use his discretion in this instance.

Kidnapping. I6B-(V). Usually treated as a recognized crime.

Murder. I8C-V. Premeditated killing of any sentient.

Counterfeiting. I8B. Imperial documents or currency only.

Obstructing Imperial Justice. I6A. Imperial investigations.

Killing an Imperial Agent. I9D-V.

Assaulting an Imperial Agent. I8B-V.

Interfering with the ISS Mail Service. I9D. This involves attacking or obstructing or intentional disruption of interstellar communications.

Possession/Transport of Prohibited Biologicals. I8B. Can be more serious if the perpetrators cause damage.

Conspiracy to Commit an Imperial Crime. I8A. This crime applies to persons who were knowingly, but not directly, involved in the crime.

Recognized Crimes

Murder. R7C-V. More often prosecuted than the Imperial crime level of murder.

Manslaughter. R7A-(V). Intentional, but unintended, homicide.

Rape. R6A-V. This is forced non-consensual, not statutory.

Counterfeiting. R7A. Counterfeiting local government documents.

Great Theft. R7B. In excess of KCr100.
Smuggling. R8B. Q

Sentence Index

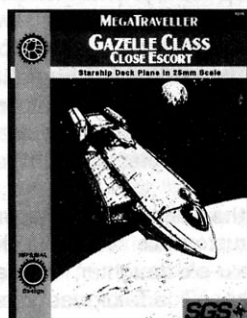
PL	Jail Term	Fine
0	No jail time	Trivial fine (up to Cr100)
1	1 day	Trivial fine
2	1D days	Small fine (up to Cr500; often below Cr100)
3	1 week+1D days	Small fine
4	1D3 weeks	Medium fine (Cr1000 max)
5	1D6 weeks	Medium fine
6	1D3 months	Medium fine
7	1D6 months	Medium fine
8	6+1D6 months	Large fine (KCr10 max)
9	12+2D6 months	Large fine
A	3+1D3 years	Large fine
B	6+1D3 years	Large fine
C	10+2D6 years	Large fine
D	Life; parole possible	
E	Life; no parole possible	
F	Life; death penalty possible	

Enforcement Index

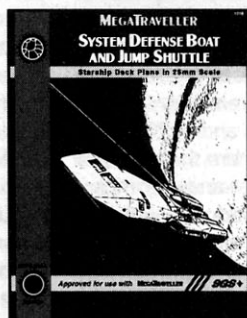
EL	Investigate?	Manpower	Persistence
0	12	1	Low
1	11	1	Low
2	10	1-2	Low
3	9	1-2	Mid
4	8	1-2	Mid
5	7	1-3	Mid
6	6	1-6	Mid
7	5	2-12	High
8	4	5+2-12	High
9	3	10+3-18	High
A	Yes	15+4-24	VHigh

Notes: *Investigate?* is the minimum result needed on 2D6 for the police to actively investigate the crime. *Manpower* is how many officers will be assigned full-time to the investigation. *Persistence* is a qualitative estimate of how much continuing effort is likely to be expended. For variation, the referee might modify the E1 value by 1D-3 to account for variation in effort due to different situations. These are only guidelines.

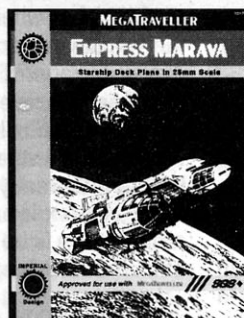
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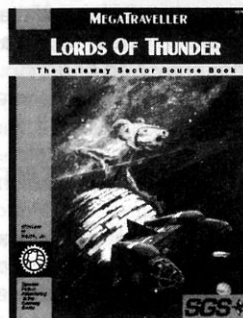
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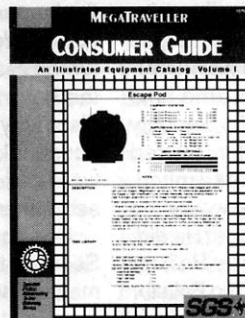
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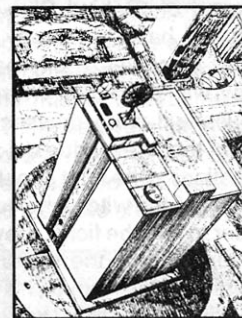


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Behind Blue Eyes

By Charles E. Gannon

After witnessing the assassination of Olec Cirtas on Tiffany, the group accepted a job offer from Elam Taangard to look into the murder (in which the Nullian League was implicated). After receiving some documents and information, the group journeyed to the Riies system.

Due to travel restrictions, the characters were dropped off in the planetoid belt of Revere, where they rescued a Stalker (an Outcast of the Whispering Skies) from a grisly fate at the hands of the league. The grateful Stalker gave them a ride in-system to Riies, where they learned that Cirtas had indeed been connected with the antileague underground on that world. He—and one of Taangard's agents (Caine Sharpic)—had become aware of a highly confidential fiche that had been stolen from the league which could greatly jeopardize its future operations if it reached the right hands. Cirtas had acquired the fiche, and then apparently passed it off to a visiting relative (Avared Werres), a noble from Riies' primitive sister-world, Essex. When the league moved against his relative, Cirtas fled Riies—only to die in Tiffany's spaceport.

Caine Sharpic had apparently been able to piece together enough of this information to deduce that the fiche was on Essex, not Riies. He departed Riies to pursue the fiche, leaving an information packet behind him for any follow-up units that Elam Taangard might send. This packet caused the characters to realize that Sharpic had gone to Essex and that travelling to this primitive planet was the next logical step in their investigation.

OVERVIEW

In this part of "Behind Blue Eyes," the characters will have to journey to Werres' former seat of power, a city named Ular. There they will learn that Werres and his entire household were massacred by the league—but that the league did *not* find the fiche. Questioning the right people may lead them to Tembré the witch who can tell them that in order to find the fiche, they must now seek a young girl by the name of Nianna Talor. Werres trusted Nianna, his illegitimate daughter, with the secret of where the fiche was hidden. And now she too has been hidden—and the trail leads to the city of Nintair on the opposite side of the continent.

The mystery is only half of this part of the adventure, however. The real focal point in this episode is the world of Essex itself, which is a peculiar combination of the familiar and the strange. In keeping with one of the classic

themes of science fiction, how do the hotshot starfarers fare when they're forced to return to their evolutionary roots, so to speak, to a medieval-style planet? Trading lasers for lances can be refreshing, revealing—a reminder that beyond the realm of high ports and high adventure, there are still worlds where the tools are basic and the reality is simple—and uncompromising. Essex is such a world. But with the arrival of the fiche has come brutal interference from the league.

MYSTERY OF THE FICHE

Upon returning to Essex from Riies, Lord Avared Werres could no longer accept the freeman persecutions and the oppression of independent tradesmen. His policies and judgments quickly reflected his new insight and caused a great deal of consternation among his peers. However, he became singularly popular with the people of his province and his city, Ular. This popularity began to worry the other lords, who began to shun anyone connected with Lord Werres.

Fruit of Treachery: It was at this time that the traitor Darshak told the Essexan High Lord Sarkan Urdor's agents of Avared's sympathies for—and apparent contact with—members of the Riies underground. Just as this focused attention upon Olec Cirtas on Riies, it also earned Avared a high position on the League Explorers' list of suspects. Appropriately, the Explorers inundated Ular with local agents, who began to spread rumors regarding Avared. These lies evolved into assertions that Werres was a traitor and was involved in covert activities against the best interests of Essex.

Hiding the Fiche: Avared Werres realized that his days were numbered. The other lords banned him from the council, and a number of unsubstantiated treason charges against him began cropping up. This muttering mysteriously ceased at the same time that "starmen" (Explorers from the Security Branch) began appearing in Ular. Avared knew that his remaining time was limited. Rather than take preparations, however, he did nothing to betray his awareness. He did, however, send a trusted lieutenant to Polistar Down to further "betray" him. While in Polistar Down, however, this lieutenant was able to carry out the real mission that Avared had assigned him: He stole a small newsfiche. (Werres had witnessed their use on board the ships he had travelled to other worlds on.) When this fiche arrived at Avared's stronghold, Werreskeep, Avared cut the newsfiche down to the size of the secret microfiche and tinted it a deep blue color. He

then had the real fiche placed inside a paste reproduction of a large sapphire that was the great treasure (and symbol) of the house of Werres—the Star of Ilarir (or "Eagle's Eye"). He removed the real Star of Ilarir from the eagle's head crest on the house's formal battle-standard and replaced it with the paste reproduction.

Keeper of the Secret: The only person to whom he entrusted this secret was his illegitimate 12-year-old daughter, Nianna Talor. Nianna's mother, Ylina Talor, was governess to Avared's two legal daughters. Nianna was Avared's favorite child, however. She was bright, elfin and blue-eyed like her father. After Avared had switched the reproduction for the real Star of Ilarir, he sent Nianna away. He entrusted the task of accompanying her not to any members of his own household, but to two of the downtrodden merchants of Ular that he had befriended. And with her went *his* most priceless possession—the real Star of Ilarir.

Werreskeep Massacre: Two nights later, Werreskeep was infiltrated by two platoons of Explorer Security troops. Coordinating their attack with the forces of Olfar (High Lord Sarkan's half-son), they quickly overcame the keep's resistance. They killed Avared and found the "fiche" hidden in his quarters. Having no way to check the authenticity of the apparent microfiche (and, frankly, never thinking to do so—the league considers "low-tech" people too ignorant to be able to even conceive of such a ruse), the troops proceeded to massacre the rest of Werreskeep's inhabitants and left.

Ploy is Discovered: Within six hours, the "fiche" was discovered to be false. Disgraced at having been outsmarted by a "low tech," the league forces returned immediately and turned Werreskeep upside down searching for the real fiche. They also began to check the body count, and made the unpleasant discovery that their intelligence lists of the household and staff were incomplete—there were several *extra* bodies that could not be accounted for.

Postmassacre Confusion: The Explorer Security troops spent the next three days making inquiries in Ular and discovered that most of these "extra" victims were semi-regular housemembers and their children (who were also amongst the unidentified victims) often lived at the keep full time. It wasn't until a week later that the troops made enough sense out of their correlated interview results to conclusively prove that Ylina had a daughter who was not amongst the bodies or able to be located in Ular.

Nianna's identity was particularly difficult to dig up, because Nianna (being illegitimate) was not exactly well-advertised by the Werres household. She was a "house secret" to some degree, and the rest of the house staff who could have told of her were dead. None of the townspeople could even recall the child's name. Avared had chosen Nianna wisely, as well as fondly.

And What of the Child?: Nianna was taken immediately to Tembré the witch (a psionic), who is fronted for by Pultro the shoemaker. She suppressed the child's memory with extensive psionic conditioning over a three-day period. Nianna, renamed Tura, "came to" in a sickbed, the signs of prolonged illness all around her. Tembré explained to her that she had been in a very high fever for two weeks and that memory loss was indeed possible. She then sent the girl with the couple that Avared had used to spirit her away. These people (her "aunt" and "uncle") were minor merchants, and they left for the distant city of Nintair the very next day.

In conditioning Nianna's memory, Tembré also used the Star of Ilarir as a mnemonic unlocking cue. Should Nianna see the Star, she would remember everything that Tembré has suppressed. Tembré gave the child to the merchant couple and told them to surrender her only to starmen who are anti-league and spoke a proper code word: *blue eye*. She told the couple that such men would be coming to take Nianna/Tura to safety and restore her memory (which must happen if anyone is to learn where the real microfiche is hidden—Tembré herself carefully avoided learning the details of the girl's recent memories).

Finally, Tembré sent a telepathic message to Sroarc, a powerful freeman leader of a freeholding north of Nintair. Through this communication, Tembré arranged for Nianna/Tura to be picked up by Sroarc's operatives and transferred to safety.

Caine Sharpic Arrives: Some time later, Caine Sharpic and his fellow agents followed the trail of the fiche to Ular. They met with Tembré, who discerned that they were to be trusted. Accordingly, she gave them the Star of Ilarir and told them to journey to Nintair, where they could pick up Nianna's trail. They departed the next day.

ARRIVING ON ESSEX

Recounted below is the information that is highly relevant to the PCs as they move from place to place in pursuit of the fiche's trail. However, the world of Essex is rich in cultural and natural variety. The sections on Essex will help add depth to the PCs' journey, and also offers the referee customized encounter tables and profiles of some notable fauna (including the local humans).

For the PCs, however, the first glimpse of Essex *they* get is the one that greets all visitors....

STARPORT

Arriving on Essex, the group finds that the

starport is separated from the planet's main city, Polistar Down. The starport itself is virtually without a "startown." The starport is situated on a low bluff overlooking the reef-strewn sea to the north. Startown (such as it is) has only one bar and less than 30 buildings in all—just enough to house the workers and provide for the entertainment needs of crews on liberty and the security forces.

The port itself has been structured for bulk cargo lifting, with plenty of room for huge, lumbering grain lighters (usually hypertrophied shuttles). There are relatively few facilities for starships, because not many of the smaller interstellar hulls have any sound commercial reason to carry grain—it's not cost-efficient for them. There is a Nullian League Explorer base here, however, with a fair-sized staff and a full-time security platoon (equipped to TL10/11 standards). These Explorer personnel are all fairly new recruits from Sigam who are on their first major tour of duty in a possibly hostile zone.

The starport inner perimeter is defended by a company of second-rank troops from Meadow (1123 Bruia subsector/Hinters). It is equipped with outdated material (TL6, whereas Meadow's current standard is TL7), but given its potential local opponents (TL1-2), this hardly matters.

There is only one gate in the starport fence, which is located at the southern end of the starport perimeter. It is always manned by three men from the Meadow security force, who are carrying 9mm revolvers. Their main weapons (7mm semiautomatic rifles) are always nearby. Prior to reaching this point of departure, however, all travellers will be processed through control/customs. Here they will be informed of the TL2 restriction currently in effect on Essex, and will be asked if they have anything to check. Such items may be held in starport lockers.

Tech Ban: Travellers will be informed that their ship is not insured against theft should someone break in past the starport patrols. However, the Explorers will insure any material submitted to them for safe storage. They proudly inform travellers that this is a free service (which also serves to help the Explorers keep their hands on almost every traveller's weapons). A very thorough search for technological contraband (especially weapons) will be conducted.

Currency: After this, travellers are advised of the Essex's currency situation. Paper money is recognized at or near full value in Polistar Down, but elsewhere coins are the planet's standard. Most areas will accept credits at only 50% of their face value, and some areas will not recognize them at all. The standard rates of exchange are listed in the Essexan Rates of Exchange Table.

Marking: Lastly, each traveller will be marked with a depilatory/dye treatment. Travellers will be told that the treatment lasts for one year and is necessary in order to help local law enforcement officials to distinguish law-abiding citizens (and visitors) from the

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rebellious, so-called "freemen," who are antisocial and therefore, remain unmarked. The mark only lasts for one year, so if an individual plans on staying longer, he must make sure to return to this installation in order to be appropriately marked. Being discovered without a mark is very likely to result in death, the border personnel warn.

POLISTAR DOWN

Polistar Down is located one kilometer east of the starport. Formerly named Dasfora, it was renamed just this year during the opening ceremonies of a festival which celebrated High Lord Sarkan Urdor's alliance with the league and the first harvest of the new prosperity. The starmen's agricultural techniques and technology (mostly chemical rather than mechanical) increased that one harvest by nearly 20%.

Already a major seaport, the sudden influx of grain for shipment off-world has caused Polistar Down to burgeon. Shipping and overland trade has boomed in the past two years. The result is inflation, a great deal of wealth, a growing middle class, and an increasingly impoverished lower class. Also evident is extensive new construction, and a population influx that has swelled Polistar Down into a teeming and confused semiurban mass of nearly 3 million. Crime is rampant in this once-peaceful city, as are the entrepreneurs who roam the streets in pursuit of their own desperate little get-rich-quick schemes.

While only 700,000 of the population of Polistar Down are truly "urban" in the Industrial Era-sense of the world, the city is still suffering from the compounded crises brought on by sudden crowding. Good water is scarce, food shortages are common, and sewage is omnipresent. The rapidly changing trade and market environment makes and breaks fortunes overnight, resulting in an economic churning that dislocates families, turns established businessmen into beggars, and elevates shrewd opportunists

Essexan Rates of Exchange

Coin	Credits/Each	Mass (in Grams)
Deki	0.5	5
Copper	5	50
Silver	65	30
Gold	210	30

A deki is a one-tenth pie-piece section of a full copper. All these coins are available at the customs currency counter and are supplied at a 2% exchange surcharge.

into positions of power. The overriding social attitude in Polistar Down is that of optimism tinged with desperation and more than a little fear. The slums are growing, being the place where those who topple from economic security fall. Yet living in the slums means yet another horrible descent—the endless plummet into a netherworld of crime, hunger, and death. A chiefly rural, peasant people until recently, the Essexans fear this fate greatly. And when they do indeed fail that far, they become embittered and malicious criminals.

Unfortunately for the traveller, these underworld types have no love of outworlders, and often have a decided hatred for them. However, the more cunning individuals in the criminal subculture will use outworlders in pursuit of their own ends rather than (or at least before) killing them.

Polistar Down is under the direct dominion of High Lord Sarkan Urdor, whose personal household (or *liveried*) forces account for as much as 20% of all the liveried soldiers on Essex. Although Sarkan has a reputation for ruthlessness, he has been very lax concerning Polistar Down—he is letting the fruits of a laissez-faire economy fall into his lap. He has however, taken great care to exterminate every sign of freeman activity or sympathy in the area. A freeman underground exists in Polistar Down, but it is not overtly active; the odds are too strong against it.

TRAVEL TO ULAR

In talking to locals and inquiring after the seat (or former seat) of Avared Werres' power, the PCs will be told that they must head south to the city of Ular. Unlike on the high-tech worlds that the characters are probably accustomed to, this does not mean a swift—or safe—journey. They have nearly 1000 kilometers of terrain to cover, and although most of it is inhabited (to some degree, at least), the only constant "road" is the riverbank (but tracking the river means a longer trip). Alternately, the characters could opt for riverine transport, but this is simply enhancing safety at the expense of speed: Upriver travel is not very swift at TL1-2. If the group has credits to burn, they could possibly engage the services of a river galley, but this is *expensive* (three silvers/Cr180 per day), and the trip is not short.

If the group decides to purchase horses and gear, it will have more mobility, more visible prestige, and something to show for its money. However, whatever method of transportation the group decides upon, the referee should consult the appropriate encounter tables (see the following pages) to determine what (if any) events occur during the course of their journey.

ULAR

Ular is located to the south, in a mild, windy climate. The terrain is rolling and verdant, ideal for horses, grain, and fruit. It is

also the site of what is now known as the Traitor's Keep—formerly, Werreskeep. Avared's castle overlooks Ular and is now the seat of power for Olfar, half-son of High Lord Sarkan. Although technically a bastard, Olfar is presently heir to his father's position, since Sarkan has produced no sons by his legal wife. (Inheritance is without exception patrilineal on Essex.) Olfar and Sarkan are friendly, but not strongly bonded. Olfar—while competent—is nowhere near his father's equal in shrewdness, intelligence, and clever diplomatic maneuvering. However, Olfar does know how to pick good lieutenants and how to keep them loyal. He would be able to cope with the position of high lord.

Citizen Attitude: Ular is glum under Olfar's hand. The citizens remember Lord Avared's liberality and kindness and chafe under Olfar's hard-handed and hard-hearted rule. Freeman spirit is quite alive just below the surface in Ular, although open action is very rare.

Memories of Avared: Many artisans and part-time servants to Avared remember him and his household quite well. Just before the massacre, Avared broke his contact with them, but they now realize that this was foresight on his part, sparing them from inclusion in the bloodbath. They can tell of the attack and one or two of them (who are now beggars, harlots, and menials) claim to have seen a starman machine that flew with a hum sweep down and land atop the main keep at the same time Olfar's men were crashing the gates. Some sharp blasts of thunder were heard, sometimes in rapid succession, and there were a few flashes and explosions. However, the commotion didn't last more than 10 minutes (some claim as little as five minutes, which is a more accurate estimate).

What the People Know: Most people in the city know something of this attack, and nearly everyone knows that starmen came back soon after it. Upon returning, they landed in a larger and glowing (from a fast reentry) ship that floated in the air with a buzz like a great angry bee (the gravitic drives). The men that got out wore uniforms, which, when described, will be a close match to those worn by Explorer Security. These starmen questioned anyone who had been vaguely connected with Werreskeep. They were somewhat brutal about it. A number of people claim to have been tortured or otherwise abused during the course of their interrogation.

As far as anyone can tell, the starmen were looking for someone from the tower. The people more directly connected with the Werreskeep can tell the group that they were looking for a little girl, Avared's illegitimate daughter by the governess Ylina (most of the people still can't recall her name). They weren't able to tell the Explorers anything useful, because she was not a high-profile member of the household, and hadn't been seen for days before the attack.

The appearance of the starmen (landing in broad daylight and carrying their arcane-looking devices) and their harsh, contemptuous treatment of the natives startled many of Ular's citizens, who now have strong doubts about the magnanimity of their extraplanetary benefactors.

Go See Tembré: Some of the underworld types may suggest that the group consult Tembré the witch. If something unusual is happening—or has happened—she's likely to know a bit about it. The individuals interviewed only know that she can be found if you make inquiries along Guild Row (a craftsman's street in the heart of town). There, Pultro the shoemaker (if contacted) will let Tembré know of the characters' interest. Tembré will observe the group via clairvoyance (*skrying* to the locals) and will contact it through one of her three large henchmen. This fellow will lead the group to a meeting in a comfortable room located in an otherwise burned-out ruin.

MEETING WITH TEMBRÉ

Before going free-lance and leaving the wreckage of the Imperium behind, I worked for IRIS as a covert operative—yeah, a 20-year spook. So I've been party to a lot of strange meetings in a lot of strange locales. But in some ways, this one was the most eerie. The muscle sent by Tembré led us into a burned-out building. It seemed conventional enough, as surreptitious meeting places go. We wound in and around the black, charred bones of the house, quickly getting lost in that musty-smelling maze. And then we emerged into a room. I don't mean a burnt-out room. I don't mean a room that was still somewhat intact. I mean a room that was furnished in a style that would put most luxury liners to shame. It was like walking out of a blast zone into paradise.

She was in there, behind a candelabra of sorts. All I could see over the predatory wink of the tapers were her black eyes. She looked at me for a long time, her gaze meeting mine, but still slightly unfocused. I think I felt a bit of a tingle someplace in the back of my head.

"So you are the leader." Her voice was a purr with a dangerous buzz behind it.

"Uh, yes ma'am. We've come about..."

"Yes, yes, Nianna." She grew meditative, looked away. "Lovely eyes, that girl. Blue—like her father's. So blue." She looked back at me. "Blue like yours." She smiled. "That's how you'll find her, my friend."

I almost stammered. "By her blue eyes? Ma'am, do you mean do say that we're supposed to be able to find her just because of blue eyes?"

Tembré's smile broadened just a bit. "In a manner of speaking."

Tembré (who is a well-preserved 41 years of age) is somewhat aloof, but appreciates a sense of humor. If treated deferentially and respectfully, she will relax her attitude toward the characters. She will tell them that the child

was briefly in her care, but was quickly taken away. She will describe the "aunt" and "uncle" who took the child to Nintair, and tell the PCs that they must find these two people and give them the password *blue eye* if they are to progress further in their search for Nianna. She will also tell them they are not the first to come in search of the child. Three other good starmen came as well, but she knows nothing of how they fared. If given a description, she will be able to identify the leader as Caine Sharpic. Lastly, she will impart a telepathic image of Nianna/Tura to each of the group members, so that they can recognize the child when they see her (photographs are not exactly plentiful on Essex).

Tembré will not reveal any more and will claim that she has nothing more to reveal (but she obviously knows that the child's memories have been altered, that the girl has been renamed, and that she may very well be in the Adasina freeholding with Sroarc). Her motivations for helping the PCs are twofold. First, the witches and warlocks of Essex were discredited by the league, and then actively hunted for awhile (since the Explorers did not want to leave a cadre of psi-talented individuals in the land with nothing better to do than support and/or incite a general rebellion). Consequently, Tembré loathes the league and everything connected with it. Second, she is an old friend of Werres, who always treated her with deference and respect. Some even mutter that Tembré's bastard child (who was sent into safety years ago) may have some blood of the Werres line in him.

Should the group grow suspicious of—or angry with—Tembré, they'll find that she is an elusive and dangerous opponent. She dwells in a sealed off complex that can be accessed through Pultro's cellar, his storage room's rear wall, or through the unused and apparently sealed chimney of an adjacent building. She possesses the psionic talents of clairvoyance, telepathy, and body control. She has a Psi Strength of 11, and while she does not like to use psionic attack, she will if she must. Unknown to any off-worlders, there is a local root which may be turned into a "potion of magic" that is actually a psi drug. Tembré's skill in brewing this is renowned, as are her other magic concoctions (which include anagathics, truth drugs, and several hallucinogens that make a subject more susceptible to various telepathic suggestions). However, Tembré *prefers* to achieve her objectives through good planning, foresight, favors owed, and her erstwhile retainers (who are extremely well paid).

WHAT NEXT?

The group's next move should be fairly obvious: journey to Nintair. That means a voyage of at least 3000 kilometers overland. While it is possible to continue farther down the Calbir River to the coastal city of Sharn and search for ocean passage, the group should be discouraged from this. Any local will think the PCs a little crazy if they suggest

it. Sailing from Sharn to Nintair will take the PCs right through the gale corridor to the south of Essex—a journey which would only be undertaken by one of the nobility's massive ships, or by a desperate (and probably insane) captain of a smaller vessel. The expense of renting one of the larger vessels is out of the question.

In considering the overland routes to Nintair, a quick look at the map of Essex should suggest the only sensible option is to go east to Harvor and then cut south or southeast into the desert and on to the Nintair road. This is a long journey, but it is over good horse country.

And if the players are starting to wonder if it might not be wise to break down and recruit some local help, they're likely to meet Turon and Sered, who come seeking employment.

Turon: Turon is a 55-year-old retired huscarle. His UPP is AA9796. His skills are Recon-3, Large Blade-3, Equestrian-2, Main-Gauche-2, Leader-2, Crossbow-1, Shield-1, Instructor-1, Tactics-1, Small Blade-1.

Sered: Sered is a 30-year-old retired huscarle. His UPP is C6A3B9. His skills are Large Blade-5, Equestrian-1, Shield-1, Recon-1, Axe-1.

If the NPCs are questioned, the PCs will discover that they learned of the "opportunity" from one of Tembré's guards. These NPCs allow the referee to inject some of the local perspective and knowledge into the PCs' encounters. It also gives the referee a little leeway if the party takes casualties. After all, a player without a character is not going to enjoy an adventure very much.

The Trek: The rest of this episode involves the journey to Nintair. As the PCs complete that trek, they'll be a bit disappointed, for the weather is foggy on the day they first expect to be able to make out the spires of the desert city. But before they spend their last day journeying toward Nintair, they may have more reasons to dislike the fog—and what's waiting within it—which is just the first surprise contained in Part III of "Behind Blue Eyes."

Essex

After its original colonization, Essex was almost completely cut off from extraplanetary contact for nearly 18 centuries. Two centuries into this period of isolation, natural disasters resulting from tectonic activity ruined Essex's civilization, which had atrophied and then stabilized at TL6. These disasters, coming in rapid succession, killed millions and shattered the governments and service organizations which could have provided assistance. The civil agencies were located in or near Essex's major population centers, all of which were on the continent that was hardest hit—Hedestor. As a result, Essex dropped all the way back to a population level numbering (barely) in the tens of thousands and a Tech Level of 0.

A Slow Climb From Savagery: In the

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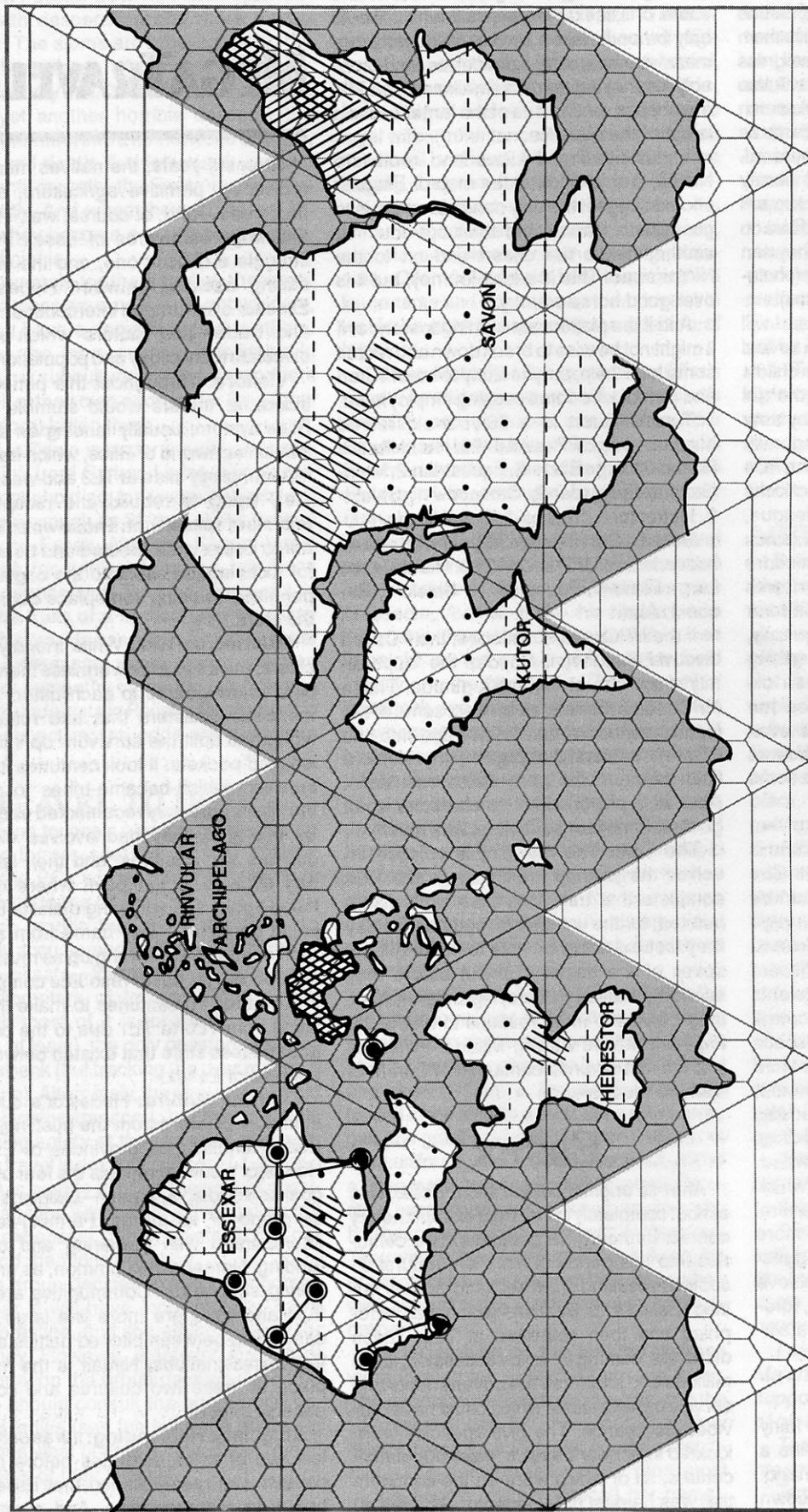
intervening years, the natives managed to rediscover primitive agriculture, construction, trade—and, of course, war. The fierce and large carnivores of Essex made the struggle a difficult one, and the inclement sailing weather between Hedestor and Essex discouraged intercontinental travel and trade—two factors which normally stimulate technology and population growth.

Visitors: Throughout this period, occasional far traders would stumble into the Riies system, usually landing on the more stable mainworld of Riies, which had halted its technology slide at TL3 and was desperately trying to rebuild and recapture the secrets of spaceflight. Those which did wander to Essex were greeted and treated well, for local legend ascribed the origins of the populace as being someplace out amongst the stars.

Interneine War: While friendly to outsiders, the Essexans were less than beneficent when it came to each other. The tremendous disasters that had ruined their world had split the survivors up into small, isolated pockets. It took centuries for these survivors—which-became-tribes to grow to the size where they recontacted each other. By this time, they had evolved disparate cultures and customs, and their language had evolved to the point where different tribes spoke such differing dialects that one could barely see they came from a single root tongue. Wars sprung up as much out of xenophobia as out of resource competition. It took a full 10 centuries to make the slow climb from TL0 to TL1 due to the constant and ruthless strife that existed between the peoples of Essex.

Current Culture: Hedestor's culture is markedly different from the bustling, quasi-Early Renaissance provinces of Essex. Hedestor's culture reflects the fear of earthquakes and displacement—buildings are not so grand or so sturdy. Farming is more interspersed with gathering and orchard tending. Nomads are common, as are wandering shepherds. Communities are more fluid and wars are more like large feuds, alternating between pitched battles and select assassinations. Nintair is the meeting place of these two cultures and contains aspects of both.

Linguistic Reblending: It was only in the last two or three centuries before regular contact was reestablished that Essex had begun to rehomogenize. And even as of 1120, that process is far from completed. The Wild Tribes speak a variety of nearly unintelligible dialects, some of which are based upon pre-Galanglic Solomani lan-



720 km per hex

Key

- Road
- City
- //// Mountain
- - - Field or woods
- Desert or wastes
- \\\\\\ Thick forest or jungle.

ESSEX

guages (Spanish, Indonesian, Scandinavian, and Magyar influences are still detectable).

The languages of Essex began to return to a common thread when extraplanetary contact resumed. The Galanglic that was constantly heard in the mouths of travellers from many different suns was a close linguistic kin to the tribes' own dialects, and the scholars began to study it. Merchants followed suit, as did the ruling class. As a result, the High Tongue of Essex is an archaized version of Galanglic, full of honorifics and formal/informal pronoun distinctions that strike the modern Imperial ear as superfluous and even a bit awkward (much the way Shakespeare's English sounds to us). However, these "archaic" linguistic elements are not a product of Essex's "quaint" level of advancement, but are present because they serve an important function: They provide a reminder and enforcer of the four generally recognizable class distinctions which are integral to Essexan society—nobles, gentry, craftsmen, and laborers (serfs).

Freeman Movement: The freeman movement boiled up out of the craftsmen and quickly infected the lower levels of the gentry, who organized it and caused it to spread like wildfire amongst the laborers. The nobles, however, controlled the soldiers, and between their punitive measures and the economic pressures they were able to place upon the mercantile segment of the craftsmen, the freeman bid for power was stamped out.

ESSEX TODAY

Essex is a member of the Nullian League. A dependable agricultural producer, it was contacted by the league shortly after the league's forces achieved uncontested control of Riies' close orbital space. At this time, the feudal system on Essex was rapidly eroding, with large numbers of serfs/workers moving into towns, fleeing the landowners, and even setting up independent cooperatives. The league took advantage of this chaotic situation by siding with the feudal lords. It supplied them with superior farming techniques, fertilizers, trading monopolies with off-world food buyers, and extended credit. This, combined with slightly more liberal treatment of workers, swung the momentum back in the lords' direction.

However, the league also used its economic leverage to slightly alter the feudal system. It managed to turn the loose Parliament of Dasfora into the Essex Trading Council, and to create a more autocratic position with which to guide the council—the high lordship. The current high lord—Sarkan Urdor—is known for his intelligence and ruthlessness. He is perhaps one of the most enlightened Essexans, insofar as knowing the realities of his planet's place in the interstellar community is concerned. Given his firm hand, and the profit that now derives from cooperation between the lords (instead of endless bickering), the feudal power cen-

ters now act in concert, making them far more formidable.

Feudalism and farming is the goal. Yet, in the outback lands, freemen and their cooperatives (or freeholdings) still exist, despite unrelenting persecution. The merchants and townspeople are also kept on a tight, firmly disciplined leash; Sarkan knows that towns are the hotbeds of revolt. The lords now operate in concert (more or less) to hunt down the last freeman colonies and to exterminate any urban sympathizers that are aiding their cause.

Trade and the Tech Level: The league has imposed a trade restriction on Essex: TL2 items are the most advanced that are permitted. This trade restriction also applies to personal possessions; they are perused and cleared for TL2 sensitivity. The Explorers keep a watch to "protect" the culture—and thereby ensure its extreme vulnerability to high-tech military control. On two uninhabited continents, sportsmen are permitted firearms and other TL2+ equipment, but only after a four-month application and interview process. And now that rumors suggest that freemen are fleeing to these areas, travel restrictions are expected to spread to these continents as well. The actual tech level of Essex is really much closer to 1 than it is to 2. Gunpowder is still extremely rare (only Sarkan has it), and there are fewer than 100 printing presses on the whole planet. Sarkan is also receiving help in his efforts to build a hot-air balloon (he understands the value of reconnaissance and observation).

Seafaring and Colonization: However, the one seemingly logical technological advancement that the league will not help Sarkan with is the science of superior shipbuilding. This is largely because Sarkan has shown a keen interest in exploring and colonizing Savon, the western continent. The league not only feels that this should wait until Essex (the main continent) is firmly under the high lord's control, but that it could also make him too powerful. Also, the league is interested in reserving some of Essex's landmass for eventual projects of its own. However, this sort of exploitation is contingent upon the quelling of various problems elsewhere in the Nullian District of league space (such as the ongoing invasion of Angerhelm, and the occupations of Riies and Uga).

Sarkan is more or less aware of the league's true motivations, but is not about to bite the hand that feeds him; the league could remove him almost as easily as it made him. Sarkan contents himself by sending occasional exploratory ships over to Savon.

Witches and Warlocks: The witches and warlocks of Essex (reportedly psionics, but there are a great number of unique talents observed) held great power on Essex until the arrival of Riies' explorers, and then the occasional visits of blockade-running smugglers. The population's increased fa-

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miliarity with the wonders of technology made individuals vastly more skeptical regarding the reality (and limitations) of what the witches and warlocks had termed *magic*. Nonetheless, these people have continued on as a major, if less visible, part of Essex's political scene. However, the league attack and subsequent backing of Sarkan resulted in the death of many of the mystics (who resisted). The rest have gone deeper underground than ever before.

Freeman Migration: Another seafaring issue stems from Sarkan's concern with the freemen's move to leave Essex and settle the Rinvular Archipelago instead. Sarkan recently saw to it that the lord nearest to that area (Folcor of Turobar) had the good fortune of attracting over 2500 mercenaries to quell the freeman rebellion on his island. Sarkan hopes to use Turobar and the city of Nintair as staging areas from which to prosecute a campaign against the freemen who are escaping to the islands. Although the league is usually supportive of Sarkan's antifreeman activities, it has been less than sanguine about this idea. Its reluctance stems from a mix of practicality (it could be a very costly operation, which would be best deferred until full control of Essex is realized) and self-interest. (The league would prefer that Sarkan has something to worry about in the years to come; unobstructed, he could prove to be a formidable adversary.) Sarkan, while not making plans for a full campaign, has already begun to train marine Compactor units. He is (quite rightfully) worried about the increasingly solid toehold the freemen are establishing in the archipelago.

"Branding" the Natives: In order to identify freemen, Sarkan has instituted a league-provided identification system. The method is a combination depilatory/dyeing procedure applied to the nape of the neck. The effects last for about a year, at which time the hair begins to reassert itself. The depilatory effect is maintained by temporarily impairing the follicles, which either cease to grow hair or grow very weak hair that falls out. The impairment is accomplished by the accompanying dye, which is implanted in a one-centimeter circle via a swift, tattoo-type device.

Almost invisible to the naked eye, the "dye" is actually a pattern of lines, which function like a bar-code for purposes of identification. Therefore, even if a freeman tries to pass in Essexan society by shaving and dying the appropriate spot, conclusive identification can be made by the hand-held readers or "wands of truth" held by all Explorer personnel and Compactor captains.

All of Essex's citizens must report annually for their marks of loyalty. Any off-worlder who travels beyond the extrality zone must submit to the process as well. To be found without the mark of loyalty indicates that the individual is a freeman/outlaw and carries a one silver piece bounty upon his head.

Quarantine Accord: Essex dimly recalls its own technological past, but it has been isolated for so many years that this has all but disappeared from memory. During the Long Night, Essex's population and technology were devastated. 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 to restrict contact with the planet as part of the landmark Quarantine Accord of 721.

Not wanting to swallow this callow world whole—which is the effect that Riies' tremendous edge in population and technology would have had—the nations of Riies agreed instead to let the Essexans get to space in their own time and own way. In the meantime, they put aside one small gas giant and two planetoid belts to be held in trust for Essex. However, enterprising out-system merchants were often able to slip past the Riiesan patrols and make contact with the people of Essex. In keeping with its general policy of aggressive mercantilism, the league has removed these restrictions and swept Essex into full membership.

Essex's Attitudes Toward Foreigners: Although Essexans' contact with offworlders has therefore been rather limited, they are not in awe of starmen (as Essexans call offworld visitors), although they do accord them considerable respect. However, as the new age of prosperity promised by the league begins to look more and more like a new age of exploitation, some of the shrewder Essexans—particularly the freemen and their sympathizers—are beginning to see that their worst enemies are not from on-planet, but from off-planet.

This is also perplexing to Essexans, who had previously regarded starmen as very decent, interesting, beneficial (and altogether too infrequent) visitors. Most of these simple people are not aware of the political divisions and maneuverings that dominate the space around them, and therefore are not always aware of the distinction between league starmen, nonleague starmen, and Riiesans (or that there is a distinction to be made!).

Climate: 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, Kutor, 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 Rinular Archipelago by the noble houses of Essexar.

LORDS OF ESSEX

The Overlords of Essex Table defines the membership roster of the sovereign lords who sit on the Essex Trade Council and their general areas of influence. Note that some larger areas may support two lords (who are usually rivals).

In addition to the overlords and barons that owe them allegiance is a minor lordship of the island of Turobar, held by the House of Folcor. Turobar is not a voting member of the council, largely because it has been in turmoil for years, the result of an open freeman rebellion there. Folcor is laboring to crush this movement, but his poorly disciplined forces have been unable to win a decisive victory against their foes.

DEMOGRAPHICS

The population of Essex is 44 million.

Population Breakdown

Population (in Millions)	Location/Division
35	Essexar
4	Hedestor
2	Rinular Archipelago (includes Turobar)
1.5	Southern Wild Tribes
1	Scattered freemen
0.5	Northern Wild Tribes

Essexar: The inhabitants of Essexar are generally clustered about the cities, fords, farm-lands, rivers, and coasts of that continent.

Hedestor: The population of Hedestor is very dispersed, and consequently the largest towns there are barely one-tenth the size of the cities on Essexar. Most Hedestorians dwell on the fertile (if tectonically turbulent) west coast.

Rinular Archipelago: The inhabitants of the Rinular Archipelago are almost all located on Turobar. There, most of them are part of the greater semiurban area of Indigar. Most of the others live in fishing villages along the southwestern coast of that island.

Northern Wild Tribes: The so-called Wild Tribes are island dwellers throughout the Rinular Archipelago. The northern tribes, fewer in number, are fiercer and more adventuresome. They are organized into mutually hostile steadings, and depend on fishing and raiding for livelihood. They are sailors first and foremost, preferring a small form of longboat with a stepsail. They have little access to metals, so have few smiths, but are expert at maintaining and adapting captured steel weapons, which they prize highly. Bowmen are quite common.

Southern Wild Tribes: The southern tribes are generally more peaceful, insofar as they very rarely raid. A year-round growing season makes raiding unnecessary. However, they are very territorial and both distrust and resent the incursions of people from Essexar (the settling of Turobar some 14 centuries ago is still a sore point with them). They have an uneasy truce with the

freemen who have landed on their shores. They use almost no metals.

Freemen: The freemen are one of the smallest minorities on Essex, living in out of the way places and in the constant fear of detection and destruction. They can be found mostly in the northeastern regions of Essexar, throughout the Rinular Archipelago, and in the thorny uplands of Hedestor.

Cities: The major urban centers of Essex are semiurban agricultural centers that dominate roughly circular areas up to 150 kilometers in diameter. Of all these cities only Polistar Down (at 700,000) is truly an urban environment, and as such is an odd mix of planning (like old Byzantium) and chaos (like 20th-century London). These urban centers are listed on the table below, along with their aggregate populations. The number preceding the community name indicates its ranking in terms of size and influence, and can be used to locate the city on the map of Essexar and its surrounding areas.

Urban Centers of Essex

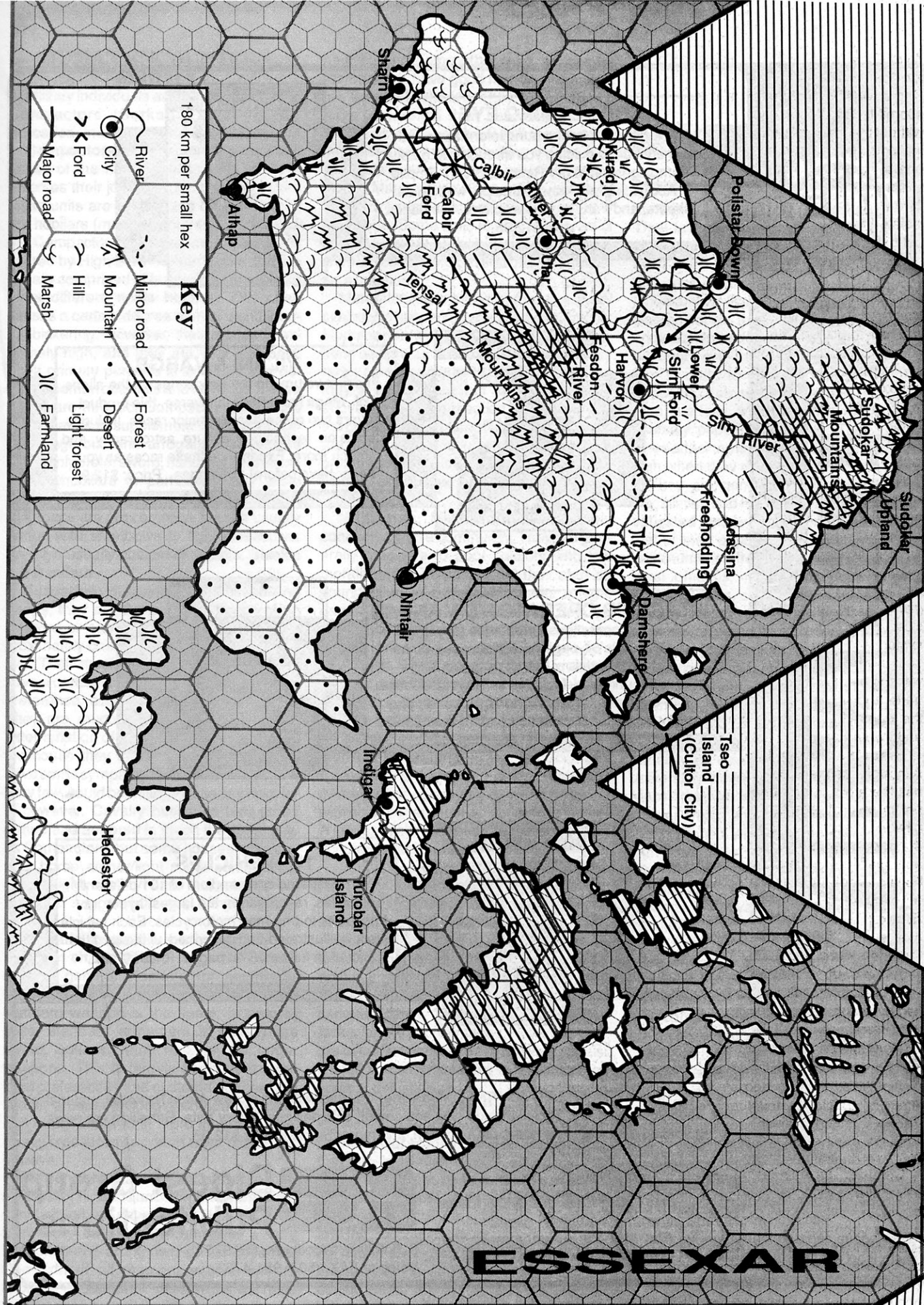
City	Aggregate Population (in Millions)
Polistar Down	2.9
Harvor	1.8
Damshere	1.8
Kirad	1.5
Nintair	1.5
Ular	1.2
Sharn	1.2
Indigar	1.2
Alhap	1.1

Overlords of Essex

Name	Area of Influence
Urdor, Sarkan	Polistar Down
Urdor, Olfar	Ular
Perel	Harvor
Dostur	Kirad
Mradort	Sharn
Thalon*	Damshere
Karres	Alhap
Jadam	Nintair
Bancos	Polistar Down
Sherent	Ular
Cosvir*	Harvor
Damost†	Polistar Down
Narkilt†	Kirad
Brayton	Ular
Kodasbar	Damshere
Srettos	Sharn
Ladom	Polistar Down
Madak	Alhap
Vang	Kirad
Wareth	Lower Sirn Ford
Pirtom	Calbir Ford
Adbur	Harvor
Gensel	Sudokar Upland
Ergon	Hedestor
Halast*	Hedestor
Jaerkan	Hedestor
Posark	Hedestor

*Either has strong sympathy for or secretly supports the freeman movement.

†Willing to tolerate the freeman movement and does little against them.



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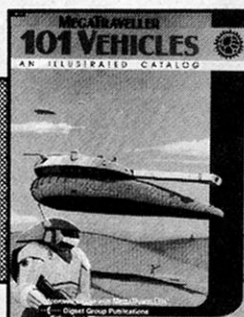


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HUMAN ENCOUNTERS

Military

Military individuals are of four basic types: Compactors (Sarkan's elite troops), huscarles, mercenaries, and militiamen.

Compactors: Compactors are the allied forces of the noble houses (the arm that enforces their joint compact). Two-thirds of these units are cavalry, the other one-third are hobilar (mounted infantry, Equestrian-0). Compactor units are most frequently cadred by High Lord Sarkan's men and are usually comprised of huscarles from at least three different noble houses. This often causes a certain degree of rivalry and internal bickering. However, their morale is extremely high, and they are very well paid. Their primary purpose is to locate and destroy freeman outposts and holdings. If extra forces are needed, Compactors often hire mercenaries to supplement their ranks. Often dangerous and arrogant, Compactors commonly prefer sword, hand axe, and lance. Some (hobilar in particular) may wield broadswords, battleaxes, or halberds. Missile troops are not common, but are usually armed with shortbows or light crossbows. Armor is usually chainmail or plate. Shields are standard.

Huscarles: Huscarles are householding troops; they are the personal troops of an overlord or one of his vassal barons. Approximately one-sixth of such units are cavalry. Their morale is also quite high. They have a certain amount of resentment for the preference accorded Compactor troops. They are much less concerned with the extermination of freemen. Depending upon the house they serve, some may actually have some sympathy for the freeman cause. Very few would be willing to take any risks for it, however. Cavalry huscarles tend to be armed and armored in much the same way as Compactors, but some houses have sizable horse archer/light scout contingents. These light cavalry units are usually armored in ring mail or even simple leather jack.

Huscarle footsoldiers are primarily armored in chainmail and ring mail. Shields are the general standard for nonmissile troops. For more lightly armored units, the standard weapon is the spear. In heavier units, standard armament is usually the sword, cutlass, hand axe, or the larger weapons. This is largely dependent upon local preferences and customs. Archers are usually armed with long or composite bows, and rarely armored in more than ring mail. Heavy crossbowmen often wear chainmail, however.

Mercenaries: Mercenaries are, of course, soldiers for hire. It is uncommon for a mercenary unit to be a cavalry unit (12+ on 2D6). Mercenary cavalymen command a very high price and are known as *condotierres*. One-sixth of all mercenary units will be hobilar, and another three-sixths will have light wagons to travel with (since a merce-

nary has no home other than his camp). Mercenaries have good morale and are often extremely shrewd. They frequently are more foresightful than huscarles—there's no stronghold to run back to if they make a mistake. They are often willing to take considerable losses if a high payoff is anticipated. Mercenaries have a high sense of honor in regard to each other—that is part of their code. Some units extend this sense of honor to include all their dealings, but theirs is a hard code: A broken troth merits death—no exceptions.

Mercenaries are armed and armored very similarly to huscarles, with a few exceptions: Mercenaries will almost never wear anything as light as a leather jack, but will very rarely be encountered in plate. Not only can they ill afford plate, but they prize speed above excessive protection. Crossbowmen are occasionally encountered, while archers are almost never encountered. A mercenary's preferred weapon is likely to be sword, spear, halberd, or broadsword. Shields are the rule, not the exception.

Militiamen: Militiamen are invariably connected with a community. They are generally mediocre to poor soldiers with low morale. Many militiamen get their start as young rakes who decide to make a legal career out of sporadic violence. They are usually bribable and of average or lower education and social class, but very streetwise. They are always foot soldiers and are responsible for both civic defense and urban peacekeeping patrols (the watch). Overall, they tend to have a combination of outlaw skills and military ones. Most militiamen will be armored in leather jacks and armed with a spear or a blade. Some extremely poor communities might make do with no armor and just a club, but this is rare. A leader might carry a shield, but this is not common practice.

Outlaws

Outlaws are of four basic types: nomen, freemen, bandits, and thieves.

Nomen: Nomen are refugees from shattered freeholds (usually the work of Compactor units). Nomen have relatively high morale and can be considered to be berserkers against Compactors (+1 to all attacks, and +1 to damage). However, they are usually clever and often use very sophisticated and shrewd tactics to minimize their combat deficiencies.

Many nomen bands are beyond reasoning with, however. These bands have been on the run for so long, living off the land, that they are blind with hatred toward anyone else. Such groups often evince harsh social customs and mores. Other groups are more approachable, but are still extremely wary of anyone, particularly nonfreemen.

Nomen are extremely loyal to each other and are loath to leave any of their wounded behind. Most are armed and armored as bandits, but their groups have a significant

MEGATRAVELLER

number of longbowmen/composite bowmen. They favor lighter armor because they depend on speed and maneuverability. However, they may employ heavier weapons and arms if they can seize horses.

Freemen: Freemen are soldiers by necessity, rather than choice. Most freemen originally came from a civilian background, but they have had to learn the craft of warfare in order to survive. They now live in freeholds: defensible communities of freemen, usually well-hidden or located in sparsely populated regions. Their morale when attacking is average, but it is *extremely* high when they defend.

They are generally well-organized and disciplined, and have a highly intelligent and educated cadre—usually more astute than that of their opponents. This is because a large number of freemen were scribes, lower-level officials, renegades from "traitor" householdings, etc. They are therefore frequently well-educated, clever, and accustomed to being in positions that carry considerable responsibility.

Freeman armor is usually at least leather, with a strong desire present for ring mail and chainmail (but availability is another issue). Spear is the standard armament, but sword is common. Those not armed with sword will certainly be carrying a blade. Shields are universally carried, except by missile troops. Many freemen also hail from wilderness/frontier areas, and these freemen are quite accomplished with the longbow and have high expertise in Stealth and Hunting. Horses are used whenever they are available.

Bandits: Bandits are basically highway robbers. They vary as to where they are encountered, but generally they prefer to strike from ambush, have clear numerical superiority, and will flee any confrontation that seems to be going against them. They have medium to low morale, depending upon their confidence in their leaders. They operate on both land and sea.

Bandits tend not to use heavier weapons such as halberd, battleaxe, and broadsword. Similarly, they will generally not be found with foils or knives. Spear, sword, and particularly blade are their most common weapons. There will always be some archers (usually shortbows or light crossbows) in a bandit group, but larger missile weapons are extremely rare. Some desert bands are known for their deadly slingers. Armor is usually leather jack or nothing, although some leaders may have ring or (very rare!) chainmail. Shields are uncommon.

Thieves: Thieves are generally urban dwellers. They are from a lower class back-

Clear

Roll	Type	Size	Hits	Wounds	Weapons	Armor	Tendencies
2	Reducer	200	5D/3D	+1D	Teeth	Jack	A7, F4, S1
3	Gatherer (F)	1	1D/0	-2D	Claws, teeth	—	A6, F3, S1
4	Intermittent 1D	100	5D/2D	—	Thrasher	—	A8, F6, S1
5	Hunter 1D	200	5D/3D	+1D	Claws	—	A4, F8, S1
6	Grazer 2D (F)	50	4D/2D	—	Horn, teeth	—	F1, A7, S2
7	Grazer 6D	200	5D/2D	+1D	Hooves, teeth	—	F4, A8, S2
8	Grazer 5D	3	1D/1D	-2D	Hooves, horn	Mesh+1	F5, A5, S2
9	Siren	12	2D/2D	-2D	Blade	—	A0, F4, S2
A	Event	Roll 1D for specific event: 1-3: Human Outland encounter 4: Brush-fire 5: Torrential rain with flooding 6: Battle ongoing.					
B	Chaser 2D	400	6D/3D	+2D	C+1/T+1	—	A0, F8, S3, 1
C	Pounce (F)	6	1D/2D	-1D	Teeth+1	—	A0, F0, S2, 2

Mountain

Roll	Type	Size	Hits	Wounds	Weapons	Armor	Tendencies
2	Reducer	200	5D/3D	+1D	Thrasher	—	A9, F8, S1
3	Gatherer	25	3D/2D	—	Claws+1	—	A5, F4, S2
4	Carion 1D	100	5D/2D	—	Claws	Jack	A8, F5, S2
5	Gatherer	800	7D/3D	+3D	Thrasher	—	A7, F3, S1
6	Grazer	50	4D/2D	—	Hooves	—	F3, A5, S4
7	Grazer 3D	6	1D/2D	-1D	Hooves, horn	—	F1, A7, S2
8	Grazer 2D (F)	6	1D/2D	-1D	Hooves, horn	—	F2, A7, S2
9	Pouncer	3200	8D/4D	+5D	C+1/T+1	Jack	A0, F0, S1, 3
A	Event	Roll 1D for specific event: 1-2: Human Outland encounter 3: Landslide 4: Hunting party of nobles 5: Moderate rain which produces flash flood 6: Group is charged by a rabid Leviarmor					
B	Pouncer (F)	50	4D/2D	—	Broadsword	—	A0, F0, S2, 2
C	Chaser	400	6D/3D	+2D	C+1/T+1	—	A0, F8, S3, 1

Forest

Roll	Type	Size	Hits	Wounds	Weapons	Armor	Tendencies
2	Hijacker 1D	100	5D/23D	—	Claws	Mesh+1	A4, F6, S2
3	Eater 2D	6	1D/2D	-1D	Claws	Jack	A4, F4, S2
4	Reducer 1D	25	3D/2D	—	Claws, teeth	—	A8, F7, S1
5	Gatherer	3	1D/1D	-2D	Claws+1	—	A6, F7, S1
6	Filter 1D	25	3D/2D	—	Horns, teeth	—	F4, A0, S1, 4
7	Filter (as above, but a single specimen)						
8	Intermittent (F)	1	1D/0	-2D	Thrasher	—	F6, A4, S1
9	Pouncer (F)	25	3D/2D	—	Teeth+1	—	A0, F0, S2, 2
A	Event	Roll 1D for specific event: 1-2: Outland encounter 3: Hunting party of nobles 4: Violent electrical storm which starts fire 5: Hallucinogenic mold spores 6: Group wanders through mating grounds of hijackers (see result 2 above); the animals are temperamental and almost sure to attack en masse.					
B	Pouncer	3200	8D/4D	+5D	C+1/T+1	Jack	A0, F0, S1, 3
C	Siren	100	5D/3D	—	Pike	Jack	A0, F7, S1

River

Roll	Type	Size	Hits	Wounds	Weapons	Armor	Tendencies
2	Reducer 3D	100	5D/2D	—	Thrasher	Jack	A6, F4, S1
3	Gatherer	25	3D/2D	—	Claws	—	A8, F6, S1
4	Reducer 3D (F)	100	5D/2D	—	Claws	—	A4, F5, S1
5	Hunter	1600	8D/3D	+4D	Claws, teeth	—	A1, F4, S1
6	Intermittent (F)	1	1D/0	-2D	Hooves, horns	—	F9, A8, S1
7	Grazer	25	3D/2D	—	Hooves, teeth	—	F0 A8, S2
8	Intermittent	1600	8D/3D	+4D	Hooves, teeth	—	F8, A9, S1
9	Chaser	200	5D/3D	+1D	Teeth+1	—	A0, F7, S4
A	Event	Roll 1D for specific event: 1-2: Outland encounter 3: Swamps; they are the lair of amphibian chasers as per Sea Surface Table 4: Small river pirate base which is well concealed 5: Flooding 6: Work camp of freeman sympathizers who are constructing a dam for irrigation system. They are overseen by Compactors and Sarkan's officials. One Explorer is present as supervisor. (A pack of animals as under result 9.)					
B	Chaser	3D					
C	Chaser 3D (F)	50	4D/2D	—	Teeth+1	—	A0, F7, S1

ground (Social Standing 6 or less), tend to be thin or small in stature, and are relatively intelligent. Like bandits, thieves prefer to strike from ambush. However, thieves prefer to avoid combat if possible. They attempt to circumvent confrontation through planning and intelligence gathering or trickery (like a diversion that calls guards away from the treasure they're guarding).

Although of average morale, thieves do not like to take casualties and will beat a hasty retreat if a fight promises to be costly. They will occasionally hire mercenaries if combat is anticipated and deemed unavoidable. However, not many mercenaries will work for thieves, in that the average mercenary has nothing but contempt for them. A mercenary unit that is working for a thief can be assumed to be both desperate and essentially unscrupulous.

Thieves generally armor themselves in leather jack or nothing; heavy armor is anathema to them. They prefer light weapons, such as daggers, blades, and foils. Swords and cutlasses are extremely rare, as are shields. Thieves favor hand-held missile weapons (knives, javelins), but some use the short bow or light crossbow. The latter is a favorite guild hall defense/patrol weapon. Many thieves learn main-gauche (left or two-handed fighting), preferring the flexibility afforded by this style of combat. (Main-gauche and Shield skills are covered in the article in **Challenge 49** which covers combat on Essex and planets like it, "When It's Lances, Not Lasers.") Thieves make frequent use of various poisons, some which simply disable the individual (similar to a very extreme dose of fast drug), some of which are quite lethal.

Explorers

Explorers on Essex are mostly from the Intelligence branch (except for the security troops at the starbase). They are generated according to the Scouts in **MegaTraveller** with the following exception: Starting with their first term, they take their skills from the Army tables (excluding Army Life) every third term. This reflects the paramilitary bent of the Explorer service.

Explorer teams are small groups (three to five individuals) from the Intelligence division. They will always possess at least one level of Liaison skill and will be very familiar with Essex's geography, weather, various dialects, customs, and current politics. They are very uncommonly encountered and are almost always on a mission of considerable importance. When the PCs arrive, there are a fair number in the field, trying to turn up a clue as to where Nianna could be.

The Explorer teams have full authorization to kill at need—no targets excepted. They are ruthless, clever and efficient. They are apparently armored in chain, but under that armor, they wear tailored cloth armor (giving them a total resistance to missile penetration of 6). They invariably have ex-

cellent horses, plenty of provisions, plenty of local currency, a sword, a knife, and a horse bow or (more commonly) a TL7 auto-loading crossbow made to look like a local version. They are also equipped with a 7mm autopistol, a silencer, and three clips.

Each team member also carries two primitive, but safe, hand grenades. They are activated by an ignition device like a flintlock and are similar in performance to a TL5 HE hand grenade. General equipment for the whole team to share includes a flare gun with the following rounds (two of each): Illumination "starburst" flares for signaling aerial units, "grenades" equal to a TL7 hand grenade, small napalm bomblets (diameter of effect is five meters—consult COACC for damage), and tear gas rounds.

Firing the flare gun is similar to firing a grenade launcher in that the difficulty is as per indirect fire and Heavy Weapons skill is used as a die modifier on the to hit task. However, the maximum range is Medium and the characteristics of the warheads are as indicated above. A direct hit has a penetration of 0.

The team also has a transponder/transmitter with Planetary range (for satellite uplink in emergencies). It is a small (two liter) box in a brown, native-made leather case. Controls can be accessed for manipulation by lifting a small flap. Using the transmitter without a bypass code, or any attempt to remove the case, will detonate a self-destruct device (the equivalent of a TL7 HE hand grenade). This self-destruct device is relatively simple and is disarmed by the code entry. However, a person could conceivably cut through the case, pry open the metal casing and disarm the self-destruct (Routine, Demolitions, 2 minutes, fateful). Quite obviously, this trap was only intended to prevent locals from examining the transmitter's circuitry and technology.

Although the teams could have been given far more sophisticated weapons/gear, the Intelligence division wanted to keep the teams as low-profile and unburdened as possible. Thus they were given smaller, more primitive weapons. This equipping policy also serves to limit the degree of technological contamination that might result should one of the teams be ambushed and its equipment seized by natives.

CREATURES OF ESSEX

Essex is most remarkable for the similarity of its flora and fauna to that of Terra. As a result, there is consistent speculation that most of the "evolved" species are in fact the results of biogeneering efforts by the Ancients. However, no artifactual trace of the Ancients has yet been discovered on Essex. Further speculation runs that the similarity to Terran life forms may have been caused by human biogeneering efforts prior to the Long Night. If so, these projects were extraordinarily successful.

Most of the fauna of Essex is quadrupedal and biocular. Besides a few unusual

Jungle

Roll	Type	Size	Hits	Wounds	Weapons	Armor	Tendencies
2	Carrier 2D	25	3D/2D	—	Thrasher	—	A5, F8, S1
3	Eater 2D	100	5D/2D	—	Teeth	—	A3, F9, S2
4	Reducer 1D (F)	100	5D/2D	—	Claws	—	A4, F5, S1
5	Hunter 1D	6	1D/2D	-1D	Claws+1	—	A4, F4, S1
6	Intermittent	25	3D/2D	—	Horns, teeth	Jack	F7, A5, S2
7	Intermittent	12	2D/2D	—	Thrasher	Mesh+1	F6, A8, S1
8	Intermittent	1	1D/0	-2D	Claws, teeth	—	F9, A5, S1
9	Siren	12	2D/2D	—	Pike	—	A0, F7, S1
A	Event				Roll 1D for specific event: 1: Outland encounter 2: Badly wrecked scout. Upper deck has retained integrity. Some usable equipment. 3: Mad tribe of insane outcasts from Wild Tribes 4: Rain forest density cuts movement 25% per day 5-6: Monsoon with high winds.		
B	Chaser	50	4D/2D	—	Blade	—	A0, F6, S1
C	Pouncer	1600	8D/3D	+4D	C+1/T+1	—	A0, F0, S1

Desert

Roll	Type	Size	Hits	Wounds	Weapons	Armor	Tendencies
2	Hijacker	1	1D/0	-2D	Horns, teeth	—	A4, F3, S1
3	Gatherer	6	1D/2D	-1D	Teeth +1	—	A8, F7, S1
4	Intermittent 1D	100	5D/2D	—	Claws, teeth	—	A8, F6, S1
5	Hunter 1D	3	1D/1D	-2D	Thrasher	—	A1, F6, S1
6	Grazer 2D (F)	1	1D/0	-2D	Hooves, horns	—	F4, A8, S1
7	Grazer	1	1D/0	-2D	Teeth	—	F4, A3, S1
8	Grazer 3D	25	3D/2D	—	Horns	—	F2, A8, S3
9	Chaser	50	4D/2D	—	C+1/T+1	Jack	A0, F0, S1
A	Event				Roll 1D for specific event: 1: Outland encounter 2: Bandits 3: Grassy area with some low-grade radiation. Near the center of this area, a slight depression conceals an entrance to an underground complex from Essex's past. 4: Oasis 5-6: Sandstorm.		
B	Pouncer	1	1D/0	-2D	Stngr	—	A0, F0, S1
C	Chaser 2D	100	5D/2D	—	Claws+1	—	A0, F6, S1

Sea Surface

Roll	Type	Size	Hits	Wounds	Weapons	Armor	Tendencies
2	Intermittent 2D (F)	25	3D/2D	—	Claws, teeth	—	A8, F3, S1
3	Gatherer (S)	100	5D/2D	—	Claws+1	—	A7, F3, S1
4	Hijacker (T)	1	1D/0	-2D	Claws, teeth	—	A3, F7, S1
5	Gatherer (T)	3	1D/1D	-2D	Thrasher	—	A4, F7, S3
6	Grazer 4D (S)	6000	9D/4D	x2	Hooves, teeth	—	F2, A8, S1
7	Grazer (F)	100	5D/2D	—	Hooves, horns	—	F3, A6, S3
8	Grazer 5D (A)	3200	8D/4D	+5D	Hooves	Cloth+1	F0, A3, S1
9	Chaser 2D (T)	100	5D/2D	—	Stinger	—	A0, F8, S2, 5
A	Event				Roll 1D for specific event: 1: Outland encounter 2: Wild tribe (TL0-1) 3: Migration of grazers—see 6 above (20D) 4: Rough seas or small tidal wave 5-6: Hurricane—ships on open water may capsize.		
B	Chaser 2D (S)	100	5D/2D	—	Stngr	—	A0, F4, S3, 5
C	Chaser (A)	50	4D/2D	—	Claws, teeth	Jack	A0, F5, S4, 6

Outland Encounters: Humans

Roll	Type	Number Encountered
2	Freemen/freehold	10/5Dx10
3	Freemen	3D
4	Nomen	5D
5	Mercenaries (if with caravan)	4D (3D)
6	Compactors	2D=#D to roll
7	Bandits	2D
8	Bandits	1D=#D to roll
9	Mercenaries	4D
10	Huscarles (1/2 with caravan)	6D (x3 with caravan)
11	Explorers	1/2 D+2
12	Explorers	1/2 D+2

Other Groups Encountered

Group	Number Encountered
Thieves	2D
Militia	1/2D=#D to roll

creatures, the difference from Terran wildlife is primarily in the number of larger (50+ kilograms) predator species are present.

Warbeast

The warbeast is so named because of the domesticated version of this animal, which has often been used in war. This practice has begun to fade out, although freemen and the Wild Tribes still count on these animals heavily. They are akin to large, cat-like wolverines, but are somewhat dog-like in temperament. Their claws are retractable, but usually short and heavy—they are primarily used to aid in climbing rocks, not trees. Fearless hunters, they are sometimes dangerous to humans, but often not. There are accounts of them playing with humans in a friendly fashion and then leaving.

Springs, Swoops, Plummetts

These three dangerous birds are actually the same species at different periods of development. The spring (encountered in clear terrain) is the young form. Its wings are not fully developed, nor is its beak structure. It attacks from a concealed area at ground level by leaping/flying into its quarry. This odd mix of jumping and flying gives it its name in this stage.

The swoop is the middle stage of development. In this form, the creature is found in forests and makes short, high-speed flying attacks. Its beak is heavier in this stage, and the animal uses it to impale now, rather than bite.

The plummet is the adult form and is only encountered in or near mountains. The plummet is not only much larger, but its beak has

increased in size. The plummet spots its prey from extremely high altitude and dives, driving its beak into the prey. As a consequence, increase the penetration of any initial (diving) attack by 2. These animals are dangerous not only because of their attack method, but also the rather pronounced stupidity of the species. High-speed impact attacks are not conducive to complex brain development.

Leviamort

The leviamort is a huge, shaggy carnivore. It is slow-witted, but extremely patient. While generally slow, the leviamort has the ability to mount a short, quick charge (twice listed speed) as it attacks from hiding. It usually hides in a blind of its own making, most often a shallow excavation which is overhung by tree branches or some other form of natural concealment. Leviamorts are generally fearless and have no regard for their number of adversaries. They do fear fire greatly, however. The jungle variety of this creature is somewhat smaller and faster than its temperate cousin.

Groundmouth

An odd and dangerous creature, the groundmouth dwells underground. It is a squat, almost radially symmetric animal. Its mouth is located at the "top" of its body. It has no real head. It hunts by tunneling underground to a clear area. It tunnels up to within an inch of the surface, and when something (or someone) puts sufficient weight on this area, the ground breaks and whatever was exerting the weight falls into the groundmouth's considerable maw.

Chrysalot

This fish/reptile starts as a fish-like creature, but after a three-month hibernation in tidal flats during its third winter, it metamorphoses into a full triphibian. It is an aggressive hunter and has been known to venture up to 250 kilometers inland.

Sleek

As an early Terran visitor once remarked, "A sleek is like a marine otter that got very long, very fast, grew very sharp teeth, and got very nasty." These ocean-going quadrupedal mammals are renowned both for their intelligence and their beautiful fur, which many of the Northern Wild Tribes prize highly. Sleeks make good and useful pets, but only if they are separated from their mother at birth and are kept from contact with wild sleeks.

Springboks

Even more aptly named than a similar Terran species, this timid grazer is a tiny, spindly legged creature. However, when grazing or sleeping, several of the young males will wander the perimeter of the herd. If they encounter a threat at close range, they will jump straight up (jumps of three meters have been recorded) and set up a piercing "yip-yip-yip." Upon landing, they will freeze in place until their herd has darted off—thereby becoming a meal for the threatening creature. However, given the staggering fecundity of this species, the two-month gestation period, and the litters of three to four young, the average springbok herd can easily afford these losses. Springboks are the crucial first link on the Essexan carnivores' food chain. Ω

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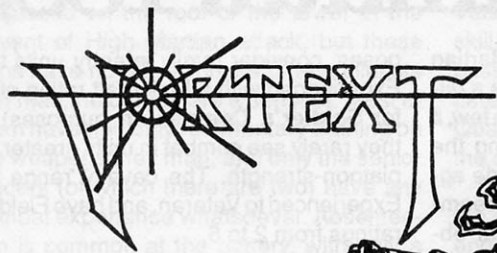
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Thymiamata: 1889

Each armed force in the Martian city of Thymiamata serves a different special interest, with few, if any, combatants protecting the city as a whole from outside aggression. These forces coexist in a seemingly peaceful manner to the casual observer, but are in a state of constant low-level bickering as to each one's rights over the other, and it makes for confusing politics.

Private Armies

THE MERCHANT FAMILIES that are prosperous enough hire guards to protect their lives and property, and the most powerful of the merchant clans have what can be best described as small armies at their disposal. Though hired and tailored to fit each clan's needs on an individual basis (no mercenaries are hired in any groups greater than three for fear of a large unit turning on the clans), most of these larger forces have the equivalent of one infantry company and at least one company of cavalry. The infantry units are usually divided between guarding the family manor, workshops (if the clan has any), and warehouses (as a deterrent to crime). It is highly likely that the practice of private armies developed in response to the interclan fighting that was so common hundreds of years ago, as the number of guards posted to such assignments even now are far more than needed for the relatively calm streets of modern Thymiamata. Nonetheless, a good show of force seems to be a status symbol among some powerful merchants, so the practice is maintained.

The cavalry units are the ones that warrant their excessive numbers. It is these units that accompany the caravans into the dangerous deserts and ward off High Martian and brigand alike. As a result, cavalry units tend to be more experienced, though the tactics they employ are defensive in nature.

Equipment for these private armies is as varied as their organizations, but families find it advantageous to arm their men with the best weapons available, which usually means American weapons, though French, British, German and even Belgian weapons are used by the private armies. Obviously, the richer the family the more powerful the weapons, but few if any heavy weapons (i.e., Gatlings, Hotchkisses, Nordenfelts, etc.) are in service. Those that are in service usually are mounted in guarded gates or held in storage as someone's ace in the hole. Uniforms consist of family colors and crest, and make for easy identification in practically any condition. For combat pur-

poses, consider family infantry units to be Experienced with a Fieldcraft rating of 2 (1 for **Soldier's Companion** purposes), but they rarely see combat in units greater than platoon-strength. The cavalry range from Experienced to Veteran, and have Fieldcraft ratings from 2 to 5.

Defense Force

THYMIAMATA'S MERCHANTS were never very fond of the idea of a centralized army (an understandable feeling when the only city army they ever knew came knocking at their houses to collect taxes or impose new laws), but the new government recognized the need for some armed body to keep the peace. The result was the Thymiamata Defense Force, an army which serves more as a police force than anything else.

Infantry: The TDF consists of four companies of infantry, two of cavalry, and two batteries of artillery. Infantry units are broken up into platoon- and squad-strength units and are stationed at or near important civic structures, such as the high docks, the canal junction's custom house, the guild house, the Grand Palace and the bazaar. There are several stations throughout the city that house platoons in what can best be described in Earth terms as a police precinct system, though the areas of the city each station administers seem to be loosely defined. These stations send patrols of two to five soldiers through the city streets, which can report to any TDF post. As the infantry's duties consist mostly of breaking up crowds, clearing traffic (especially during a livestock drive) and apprehending petty thieves, its combat experience is minimal. Infantry units are Trained and have no Fieldcraft skill.

Cavalry: The cavalry tends to be more seasoned than its infantry counterpart. Cavalry units are the only TDF units to see duty outside the city. They are charged with patrolling the dry beds for High Martians and robbers, but also send units into the Chryse Badlands and along the wet canals. The cavalry is stationed centrally in the lower west wing of the Grand Palace, and one company is kept on call for riot duty in the event infantry posts need backup. All units are Experienced and have a Fieldcraft of 2 (1 in **Soldier's Companion** rules).

Artillery: The artillery batteries see little, if any, use at all, and are kept in the unlikely event of a major siege, something that has never occurred in Thymiamata's history. Artillery consists of two batteries, the high battery and the mobile battery.

High Battery: The high battery, as its name would imply, is stationed near the high docks,

Encounters, Personalities and Groups

By Neil V. Young

and consists of a large tower fitted with four rod guns positioned to cover all approaches to the port by air. A pair of sweeper guns is emplaced on the roof of the tower in the advent of High Martian attack, but these guns have no official crews. The artilleryists that man the battery are a sorry lot. Most of them have had only rudimentary training on the weapons they man, and only the senior officers (of which there are two) have any combat experience whatsoever. Absenteeism is common at the battery, with only a quarter of the men on station at any given time. With things the way they are, an attack on the High Port could be devastating. The artillerymen are all Green soldiers, and their depleted ranks allow for only one gun to be fired at a time.

Mobile Battery: The mobile battery is more of a battery in storage than a functional part of the TDF. These four carriage-mounted light guns were originally intended to accompany the infantry units into the field—a place the infantry has never gone. Because of this, the battery was placed in an obscure part of the yard where it has sat for the past few decades. There are no crews for the guns anymore, and the carriages are rotted and pitted with rust from lack of care. The guns themselves are still in fair shape, but there is nothing left in the way of ammunition for them in the armory.

Limitations on the TDF: The TDF is limited in many ways by the government. For one thing, the property of the ranking merchant houses is effectively off-limits to any TDF personnel. Property, in this case, refers to guards, warehouses, family members, family estates or even interfamily quarrels. The size of the TDF is also strictly limited, as the families still fear the military, and new soldiers are recruited literally as old ones are killed. This makes replacements all but impossible to get in a crisis situation, as witnessed by the limited patrols and new recruiting announcements after a major fire or riot. Pay is not the best, and most seasoned mercenaries hire out to the family guard forces, leaving the TDF to pick through the inexperienced leftovers.

US Army

THE US ARMY arrived in early 1889 and was given permission to occupy an old fortress-villa that overlooked the city. The Army's Corps of Engineers renovated the structure into a very defensible fort and renamed it Fort McClellon, in honor of Colonel Forrester's Civil War hero and mentor. The fort now holds three companies of infantry, the company of engineers, a cavalry troop, and an artillery battery. A company of Hill Martian warriors was hired by the colonel as scouts, and serves as translators and guides for the fort. The crew and marines for the USS *Ranger* are sta-

tioned at the high docks with the ship, but are under the colonel's command as well.

Infantry: The infantry companies are all Veteran units with an effective Fieldcraft skill of 3 (2 for **Soldier's Companion** purposes) and are armed with bolt-action rifles. One company is assigned to the American Quarter and State Department offices, while the other two are kept on station at the fort.

Engineers: The engineers have been on the planet the longest. They are currently engaged in a project to link the fort to the city's sewer system, but can fight effectively if called upon to do so. Engineers are Experienced NPCs armed with breech-loading carbines. They have no Fieldcraft, but have Engineering (structural engineering) skill, which may come in handy in a combat situation.

Cavalry: The cavalry unit consists mostly of men Colonel Forrester had under his command at one time or another. Its members have seen combat in the Civil War and/or the Indian Wars. As a result, they are the most experienced the army has currently, with a Veteran troop rating and Fieldcraft skill of 5 (4 in **Soldier's Companion**). The cavalry is used in conjunction with the scouts to perform long-range patrols and mapping expeditions, but has been sent to search for and destroy rogue bands of desperadoes and brigands many a time. Like many of its counterpart units in Syrtis Lapis, the US Cavalry insisted on bringing its horses to the Red Planet. This gives US Cavalry units a distinct advantage in speed over most Martian units (horses, while not as tough as gashants, are faster in short-run sprints and pursuits) and has earned them a role as a reaction force.

Artillery: The artillery battery consists of three 12-pound breech-loading cannons emplaced to cover all approaches to the fort, and a seven-pound mountain howitzer positioned to provide indirect cover fire for the American Quarter. Colonel Forrester felt this original battery would be inadequate to serve his needs completely, and took the liberty of requisitioning two additional seven-pounders and five Maxim guns. The howitzers are kept in storage until needed (such as for the profoundly effective strike on



Kurge's kraag) and two of the Maxims are emplaced in the fort's guard tower. Mounts at many points in the fort allow the remaining guns to be brought to bear where needed, taking advantage of the guns' portability. All infantrymen have had at least basic training in the use of these new pieces, and the guns are manned by those on duty at the time.

Scouts: As was the case in the American Southwest, the US Army has brought into service natives to act as guides and translators. The scout unit attached to Fort McClellon is actually the remains of a Hill Martian tribe that was slaughtered in a violent blood feud some years ago, and subsequently hired on before the fort was completed. These warriors have been surviving for some time on the open plains and are a Veteran unit with a Fieldcraft skill of 5. Their armament consists of US-issued breech-loaders and repeaters, though pole arms and bows are still used for close combat.

Encounter Descriptions

NOTE THAT the table assumes daytime activity. For night encounters, all merchant encounters become thug.

Thug: 1D6+3 ruffians confront the players. If this is an open area they will try to coerce the group into an alleyway, where the cutthroats will shake the player characters down for money and goods. If the group is already in an alley or deserted area of town, the thugs will attack, out of ambush if they can. Such undesirables are armed with knives and clubs, but may pull a gun or two if things get hot. They will avoid any group that is not easy pickings.

Thief: One of the PCs is the victim of a pickpocket (determine the target randomly). If the player character succeeds in a difficult Observation roll, he will catch the thief in the process; otherwise, the PC will notice later on that a personal possession is gone

ENCOUNTERS IN THYMIAMATA

Terrain	Canal	High	American			City
Encounter #	Docks	Docks	Quarter	Bazaar	Ruins	Proper
Die Roll	4	3	2	4	2	3
Encounter Type						
1	Thug	Crew	Thug	Thief	Brigands	Patrol
2	Brawl	Merchant	Brawl	Merchant	Thief	Merchant
3	Crew	Patrol	US Army	Merchant	Collapse	Beggar
4	Patrol	Thief	Marshal	Merchant	Rubble	Patrol
5	Beggar	Crew	Merchant	Brawl	Animal	Brawl
6	Thief	Brawl	NPC	Patrol	Rubble	Thief

(watch, passport, derringer, etc.). If caught, the criminal will flee into the crowd or down a busy street.

Brawl: A disagreement gets out of hand. The incident could be a barroom brawl that spills into the street, a stiffed merchant, or even rival ship crews, but in 1D6 rounds the TDF will disperse the fight.

The exception will be if members of the ranking merchant families are going at it, in which case no one will interfere. Weapons are usually confined to knives, bottles, chairs and other makeshift melee weapons, but large fights may see swords or even firearms used.

Patrol: A random sweep of two to five TDF troops is encountered. These individuals are armed with swords and shields, and will most likely ignore the PCs unless the group does something outwardly violent or illegal.

Merchant: The group comes upon either an open-air stall (in the bazaar), a pushcart, or a store.

What the merchant has, as well as his price, is up to the referee.

Beggar: The PCs run into 1D6 beggars, who accost them asking for a handout. In the poorer sections of town, the party could run across a small camp of these destitutes in a vacant lot or living in a building. Such a group would number 3D6 and literally swarm the PCs with pleas for charity.

Marshal: The party encounters either the marshal or one of his men. The player characters will most likely not be bothered by the man, unless of course they are doing something suspicious.

NPC: A major NPC is encountered. Depending on what the referee wants, the NPC could be in trouble, looking for trouble, or this could be just a chance meeting. This encounter is a good way to make friends or enemies.

US Army: 1D6+1 of the colonel's men are met. They can be either off duty having fun or actively patrolling the quarter. Should any large fighting break out in the American Quarter, this automatically becomes the next encounter, as the men arrive to break up the fight and disperse bystanders. They will be armed as described above, and will most likely be infantrymen (1-4 on a D6), but could be cavalry (5-6).

Crew: The party runs across crewmembers of one of the canal or cloud vessels that frequent Thymiamata.

Most of these individuals will be from merchant ships, but a fair number of American Red Captains call at the city as well, so the choice of who the party runs across is up to the referee.

Rubble: Found in the ruined quarter only, the PCs come across a mountain of fallen stones and other debris that makes passage down the street literally impossible.

The PCs will have to find another way around.

Collapse: Either the floor of a building or a section of street gives way under the weight of one or more of the party members (roll 1D6 to determine which of the first six are in trouble) causing a fall that will result in 1D6+2 wounds. Characters successfully rolling against their Dexterity will be able to grab hold of something and avert the fall, but all equipment in their hands will have to be dumped.

PROMINENT NPCS OF THYMIAMATA

HERE ARE A FEW OF Thymiamata's more interesting and colorful personalities.

King Kurge (Veteran NPC)

Att.	Skills
Str: 4	Fisticuffs 3, Throwing 3, Close Combat 2 (pole arm)
Agl: 1	Marksmanship 2 (bow)
End: 4	Wilderness Travel 4 (foraging)
Int: 3	Observation 3
Chr: 2	Eloquence 1, Linguistics 2 (Koline, Na-Gaaryani)
Soc: 6	Leadership 2

Kurge is the king of the largest of the Chryse kraags, though he may not be for long. Kurge was humiliated in the eyes of most of his followers when the US Army successfully shelled his mountain fortress. To avoid the conflicts that come with a weak leader, Kurge stupidly tried to redeem himself by attacking the other kings, who for years were a source of rivalry. This resulted in the current war that depletes his forces daily. To make matters worse (for Kurge anyway), Thymiamata has ceased paying tribute and hordes of Americans are poaching his liftwood groves and mining his silver veins. With the war, the brute lacks the manpower to stop these incursions. His is not an enviable position.

Kurge no longer leads the attack waves personally for what he claims are reasons of age. He is, in effect, not that old, but is secretly very afraid he will be assassinated by one or more discontented subjects. He keeps a small army of bodyguards in attendance at all times, as well as several slaves to taste his food first. Kurge is now very paranoid. He speaks his region's dialect of High Martian as a native tongue.

Motives: Hatred (for the world), mad.

Appearance: Kurge looks bad, even for a High Martian. His face has very baggy eyes from lack of sleep, and he rarely has enough energy to lift his great bulk from his throne. His hair is knotted and far too long (he will not let anyone cut it), and he keeps with him at all times a rusting double-barreled shotgun, a weapon he will not hesitate to use on his own mother if he feels she is conspiring against him.

Kyle Wilkes (Experienced NPC)

Att.	Skills
Str: 5	Fisticuffs 5, Throwing 2, Close Combat 3 (edged weapon)
Agl: 4	Stealth 3, Marksmanship 5 (pistol)
End: 4	Wilderness Travel 3 (foraging), Fieldcraft 2
Int: 2	Observation 2
Chr: 1	
Soc: 1	Riding 3 (horse)

With the many wonderful goodies the Americans have brought, along came the not-so-wonderful goodies, and of these, Kyle Wilkes is typical. Claiming to have killed more than a dozen men and about a quarter as many Martians, Kyle does little more than look for trouble with his band of toughs. He carefully avoids military patrols (too much firepower) but scoffs at the marshal and his men.

Just what Wilkes' background is, nobody knows (or cares). It is assumed he fled to Mars to escape the hangman's noose, or perhaps the closing of the frontier made it too hard for him to maintain his lifestyle; either way, Thymiamata is stuck with him.

Wilkes' native tongue is English.

Motives: Sadistic, boastful.

Appearance: Wilkes wears clothing befitting a slime bag: greasy and dirty, with dark colors prevailing. He looks like he has not bathed in a year. Kyle wears his bowie knife and six-gun proudly, but has an arsenal of concealed weapons, including a garrote, two derringers, a throwing knife, and a razor blade.

Shazjuk (Veteran NPC)

Att.	Skills
Str: 3	Fisticuffs 2, Throwing 1, Close Combat 4 (pole arm)
Agl: 4	Stealth 3, Marksmanship 3 (bow)
End: 4	Wilderness Travel 3 (foraging), Fieldcraft 4, Tracking 3
Int: 3	Observation 2
Chr: 4	Eloquence 3, Linguistics 2 (English, Koline)
Soc: 5	Riding 4 (gashant)

Shazjuk is the commander of the band of Hill Martians employed by the US Army, a group that serves the fort as translators and guides. The warrior and his group are the surviving remnants of a tribe that was wiped out some years ago in a blood feud. They wandered the deserts for awhile until they came upon the construction site of the fort and were hired on almost immediately.

Like many Indians who serve in similar functions in the southwestern US, Shazjuk hopes to one day avenge himself upon the tribe that nearly wiped him out. He sees the weapons the army gives him as the key to this plan, but feels bound by honor (and, though he won't admit it, loyalty) to fulfill his

duties to the army. He makes no secret of his plans, and has discussed them with the colonel on several occasions, but does not believe he will move on the rival tribe for quite awhile yet, mostly because he feels it will give the colonel problems with antihuman activities. In the meantime, he is content to wait. After all, the longer he waits, the more proficient his men get with their new guns.

Shazjuk speaks Edenti as his native language.

Motives: Driven (to avenge his people), loyal (to his tribe and the fort).

Appearance: Shazjuk wears his long hair in braids for battle and has a long scar on his left cheek, a constant reminder of his ordeal on the plains. He dresses in what American clothes fit him, including a leather belt and holster for his Colt army revolver. In combat, the warrior uses a breech-loading carbine, but still feels more comfortable with his traditional bow.

Marshal William T. Porter (Trained NPC)

Att.	Skills
Str: 5	Fisticuffs 4, Throwing 2, Close Combat 2 (edged weapon)
Agl: 2	Marksmanship 2 (pistol), Stealth 1
End: 3	Wilderness Travel 3 (foraging), Tracking 1, Fieldcraft 1
Int: 4	Observation 3
Chr: 1	Bargaining 2
Soc: 2	Riding 1 (horse)

While Colonel Forrester is charged with keeping the American Quarter safe, Billy Porter is responsible for upholding its laws. Unlike his military counterpart, however, Porter does little to see that his job is carried out.

Porter, of English descent, has a largely unknown background. He has his job primarily because no one else wanted it. To be sure, bringing law and order to such a wild place is an uphill battle (if you consider a cliff "uphill"), but Porter does not fight in the first skirmishes, and accepts bribes for looking the other way from resident brothel madams and saloon keepers. His force of a dozen men runs the gamut from honest to corrupt, but everyone arrested is brought before Porter anyway.

Anyone in such a position stands to lose his weapons and valuables, but a large bribe will always get him released and cleared of all charges. English characters brought before Porter can expect no special treatment, as the man has no great love for his former country (or his present one, for that matter). Only a large amount of money will get a positive response from the man. So ineffective is he in his job that the army is forced to send troops in to do his job for him.

William plans on skipping town when he

socks away enough money, which at his current rate of acquisition will not be too much longer.

When this happens, his naive but otherwise honest deputy will take over; a definite improvement for Thymiamatan law enforcement.

William's native language is English.

Motives: Greedy, liar.

Appearance: Any British subjects that see Porter will be glad he left the Crown. The man is overweight, greasy, and has an almost continuous 5 o'clock shadow.

He carries a very visible desperado-style scattergun in an oversized holster on his belt, and has a Remington derringer hidden in his boot.

Governor Charles White (Trained NPC)

Att.	Skills
Str: 2	Fisticuffs 1, Throwing 1, Close Combat 2 (edged weapon)
Agl: 3	Stealth 2, Marksmanship 1 (pistol)
End: 1	Wilderness Travel 1 (mountain climbing)
Int: 4	Observation 4
Chr: 6	Eloquence 5, Bargaining 3, Linguistics 4 (Na-Gaaryani, Koline, French, German)
Soc: 6	Riding 5 (horse)

Governor White is actually more of a mayor. He is most concerned with the administration of an American Quarter that is growing by leaps and bounds from his office in the Grand Palace. As the ranking government official, White is also pressed into the roles of host, ambassador, and inspector general, all of which he performs quite well.

Charles began his career in government in an obscure position in the State Department, and his proficiency with paperwork earned him better assignments as the years went by. When he was offered the Mars position, he snapped it up with dreams of exotic adventure running through his mind. So far, however, the job has been nothing more than a trip to a faraway records office, with an occasional formal dinner or ball to break the monotony.

Charles' spirits are dimmed now, but his hope remains that one day he will have an opportunity to wander the Red Planet in search of adventure. White has never been in combat, but has practiced hard with his small revolver and is proficient with it. He took up mountain climbing back on Earth, but knows the mountains here are too dangerous to allow him to further participate in mountaineering as a recreational activity.

Charles' native language is English.

Motives: Responsible, adventuresome.

Appearance: Charles is a model bureaucrat, always clean and well kept. His clothing is of the finest makes, and he is



well-known for the gold pocket watch and chain that he strings from his right pocket. He keeps a light revolver in his vest pocket in the advent of an attack, but will probably never get a chance to use it because a contingent of army soldiers is always nearby.

Colonel Robert E. Forrester (Elite NPC)

Att.	Skills
Str: 3	Fisticuffs 2, Throwing 1, Close Combat 5 (edged weapon)
Agl: 3	Stealth 2, Marksmanship 3 (pistol)
End: 5	Wilderness Travel 4 (mapping), Fieldcraft 2
Int: 4	Observation 4
Chr: 4	Eloquence 3
Soc: 5	Riding 4 (horse), Leadership 3

An exceptional soldier, Forrester served brilliantly in the Civil War and in subsequent campaigns against the Apache in the Arizona and New Mexico territories.

Because of this sterling record and his experience with frontier warfare, the colonel was the logical choice to head up the Thymiamata force when it shipped out earlier this year.

Robert Forrester has been a soldier pretty much all of his adult life, and he has witnessed many acts of cruelty. He knows it is one thing to defeat an enemy, but quite another to rape and pillage. During the Apache campaign he saw wanton acts of cruelty as his men fell about burning and murdering Indian villages in a hyped anger the government only seemed to encourage.

He did his best to stop the actions, and he swore he would never allow such a thing to happen again.

On Mars he intends to make good on this promise, especially with the threat of antihuman riots that seems to loom over so many city-states these days.

The colonel's mission on Mars is simple: protect Thymiamata's American Quarter from antihuman movements (at least that is what he was told in Washington). Upon his arrival, he determined that the real threat came from the High Martians, not some underground network of Canal Martians, and immediately set about relieving the city of this menace.

In his now famous mountain howitzer raid, the colonel was able to turn the beast kings on one another and take the pressure off Thymiamata. This was a far cry from actually eradicating the menace, but it is more than the Canal Martians have been able to do in several

hundred years. Robert knows High Martian paranoia did most of the work, but still enjoys his popularity among the people as a savior.

Robert's native language is English.

Motives: Ambitious, just.

Appearance: The colonel is now in his late 40s, but still boasts a lean body and full head of dark hair. His piercing blue eyes seem to see right through people, and he has a very direct manner not given to small talk. Forrester keeps his Colt Peacemaker (heavy revolver) at his side day and night, and has a customized Henry rifle (treat as a lever-action rifle) prominently displayed in his quarters.

Barelaan Ashtaak (Trained NPC)

Att.	Skills
Str: 1	Close Combat 2 (bashing weapon)
Agl: 3	Stealth 2, Marksmanship 2 (pistol), Crime 3 (forgery)
End: 4	Wilderness Travel 3 (mapping)
Int: 5	Observation 4, Pilot 3 (sailing vessel—canal barge)
Chr: 6	Eloquence 6, Bargaining 5, Linguistics 3 (English, Koline, Parhooni)
Soc: 5	Riding 4 (gashant), Leadership 5

Barelaan is the patriarch of the Astaak Clan, one of the most powerful and influen-

tial families in Thymiamata. From his office high in the family tower, he issues orders, makes appropriations, and runs every aspect of the family holdings. From payroll and petty cash to fruit stands and barge traffic, there is not a thing the family does that doesn't get sent through Barelaan first.

The merchant king was raised for his position practically from the time he could walk. He spent the bulk of his early years commanding the family barges as they journeyed all over the Red Planet, but assumed his position as head of the family when his father died several years ago. Despite the fact he rarely leaves the tower for any reason nowadays, Barelaan knows the ways of the street well from his years on the barges.

Barelaan has been discussing a deal with Wells Fargo to obtain the capital necessary to outfit his barges with steam engines in a manner not unlike the paddlewheel steamers plying the Mississippi he saw in an edition of *Harper's Weekly*. This deal will cost a pretty penny, but he feels that the extra speed of his barges will enable his family to get a corner on Malaan fruits from the Mare Erythraeum area, a fruit that is in big demand on Earth but spoils quickly. Barelaan's mind works incredibly quick, and is always coming up with innovative ideas

like this. He reads many American magazines for relaxation, which serve as spurs for his new ideas.

Inventors or scientists in a party meeting the patriarch will be treated like royalty and asked a volley of questions about how certain inventions can be used for his mercantile needs.

Barelaan's native tongue is Na-Gaaryani.

Motives: Mercantile, knowledge (for inventions that improve business).

Appearance: Barelaan dresses in the finest clothing available when he goes out, but at home can be found in any old garment that was lying in his dresser drawers. His energy and enthusiasm about business and science belie his old age, and he no more than finishes one discussion when he starts on another.

He is accompanied by two or more Elite guards at all times, but he carries a Remington Rolling Block Pistol on his person in the advent the guards are not enough. Ω

*Fierce attacks by High Martians and an untimely labor dispute threaten a small mining community in the conclusion of the three-part Thymiamata adventure in **Challenge 51**. And for more on Thymiamata's history and geography, refer to the first segment in **Challenge 49**.*

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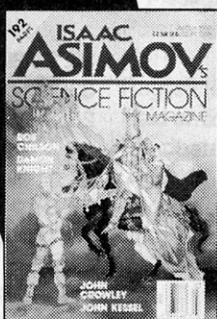
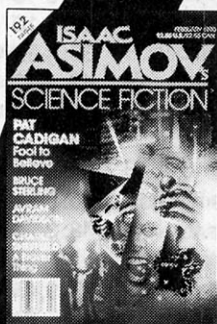
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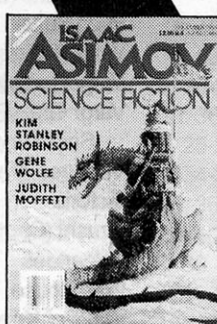
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OPERATION BACK DOOR

Episode 2: First Contact

In the first episode of Operation Back Door (**Challenge 49**), the characters signed on to lead the operation. The objectives sounded simple: explore the unknown systems leading to the brown dwarf known as Back Door, take a quick peek into what may be Kafer space, keep an eye out for a "mystery race" that might be enslaved by the Kafers, and return. After accepting the mission, the characters got acquainted with their ship and crew and left to blaze a trail through unknown space. Now they are journeying toward the last stop on their agenda: system SS-27 6854. Uppermost on everyone's mind is that this might be Kafer territory

ACROSS THE THRESHOLD

Where: System SS-27 6854 (-8.8, -47.7, -11.7).

What: Arrival and spaceside discoveries in the Ylii home system.

Upon entering the SS-27 6854 system, the PCs will immediately be aware that the system is inhabited. Radio signals—unintelligible binary coding—can be found jumping up and down the dial, never staying in one place long enough to be jammed. Similarly, radiation emissions from active sensors and deep system scanners seem to be emanating from the general vicinity of the third and fifth planets in the system.

The signals begin to taper off as the *Cat's Feet* moves deeper into the system. However, since the signals are only traveling at the speed of light, a little basic math will reveal that the ship must have been detected just after it crossed the heliopause, causing the locals to cease their transmissions.

It is of course possible that the crew of the *Cat's Feet* will instead become the crew of the *Cold Feet* and decide to turn tail and run. However, two of the NPC crewmembers are fairly sure that these signals are not indicative of a Kafer presence in-system. Hannah, who served as a part-time comms officer in the Kafer conflict, and Dumaine, who has as good a knowledge of Kafer communication styles and methods as just about anyone, both conclude that these signals are not of Kafer origin. Everything is wrong, from the band widths being used to the sophistication of the channel-switching. These signals, asserts Dumaine with a highly excited gleam in his eyes, are being made by someone else—some intelligence that humanity has not yet encountered.

Since this will (should!) get the PCs eager to see what this system holds, they will begin to head in-system. Note that the great majority of the history of the garden planet cannot be attained in this scene, but must wait until actual contact with the inhabitants of the world (the Ylii).

As the teammembers head deeper in-system, they will note a few spherical crafts orbiting the outermost planet, and a few more around the next. As they approach what appears to be a garden world just *outside* the life zone, they will detect *hundreds* of such craft in a bewildering variety of orbits. Some seem to be travelling in clusters, and others are off on eccentric trajectories of their own.

A study of the planet's two innermost natural satellites will reveal *huge* solar energy collection complexes, plus beamdown facilities aimed at either the garden world *or* orbital relays with relay/

beamdown capabilities of their own. Any attempt to land on these two moons will be foiled by a blockade of more than a dozen of the smallish, silvery spheres which are travelling at a respectable rate. However, no communication will be initiated, or responded to.

If, despite the daunting silence, the characters decide to move into orbit around the planet, about 50 of the spheres—ranging from one to 14 meters in diameter—will gather around *Cat's Feet* and match vector. Surrounded by a cloud of drifting, silver bubbles, high above a mist-enshrouded green world, even hard-nosed Hannah Spitzmacher will spend a moment contemplating the silent and eerie beauty of the tableau.

It will be Franchot Dumaine who finally shatters the moment, "Mon dieu! What are we waiting for? Let's *land*!"

SS-27 6854

Stellar Type: K6 V **Absolute Magnitude:** 8.3 **Radius:** 0.556 **Mass:** 0.552 **Luminosity:** 0.062 **Temp. in Degrees K:** 3980 **Number of Orbits:** 6

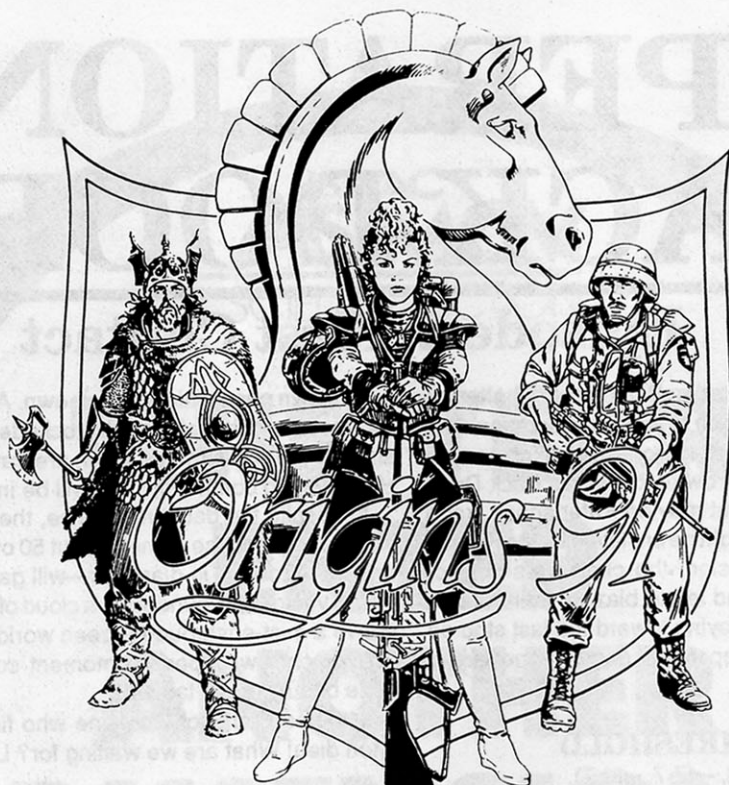
Planetary Data

Orbit	World & Core Type	Diameter	Density
1, 0.121	Hothouse, rocky	5934	0.8
2, 0.162	Hothouse, rocky	15,870	0.8
3, 0.256	Cool garden, rocky	17,123	0.7
4, 0.358	Empty		
5, 0.502	Failed core, rocky	9989	0.9
6, 0.754	Failed core, icy	17,120	0.3

System Overview: The Ylii home system is most notable for the fact that its "garden" world actually lies 0.006 AU beyond the parent star's life zone. The temperate environment on this planet is largely maintained by its very dense atmosphere and high greenhouse effect. Orbit four is not completely devoid of matter; a small attenuated cloud of debris is present. Long-term analysis may in fact reveal that there was once a small world here (1120 kilometers in diameter) that was apparently blasted apart over 100 millennia ago. This small world was a casualty of the Ylii War, a fact which the Ylii themselves lost track of, but have since rediscovered via their own research.

Planetary Overview: The Ylii homeworld, known to the Ylii as Ssuushni'a (which translates roughly as *mother-island*) is a large, misty world with extensive polar caps and deep oceans. Lying just beyond its smallish sun's life zone, it rotates through a very slow day/night cycle of just under 30 hours. The presence of three satellites creates significant tidal cross-currents, making the seas choppy, fickle, and pock-marked with storm generation centers. However, these same features tend to undercut the formation of tidal waves.

The land which is not icebound is lush with undergrowth, owing to the high average humidity of the atmosphere. In the slightly lower gravity, vegetation tends to grow taller and favors tapering forms. Given the enhanced power of Ssuushni'a's windstorms (and their frequency), these growths also tend to grow as networks that



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emulate a superstructure grid, or to display an almost elastic flexibility and resilience. Hence, the "trees" of Ssuushni'a may be either area or point producers.

The fauna of the world includes a great number of aviforms, some massing over 120 kilograms. Although their flight would be impossible on most other worlds, Ssuushni'a's low gravity and atmospheric density make these glider/fliers possible. Other common features in Ssuushni'a's fauna are either very large eyes or extensive echolocation/sonar development. Both of these sensory adaptations allow creatures to operate effectively in the murky, low-frequency light environment of Ssuushni'a.

An orbiting observer would be hard-pressed to gather much visual data on Ylii civilization unless he were able to remain on station for many weeks. Ssuushni'a's mean cloud cover approaches 90%. However, these are not "clouds" in the proper terrestrial sense of the word, but are more akin to diffuse mist. Indeed, if the cloud cover was of a thicker variety, the planet's albedo (light reflective) properties would increase and probably tip it into a permanent glacial age.

As a result of its peculiar atmospheric conditions, Ssuushni'a has a mysterious, murky appearance; it is a fuzzy smudge of greens, blues, and polar white. However, a patient observer would eventually be rewarded with spottings of buildings in deserts and wastelands.

Almost all of these would seem to be either spaceports, industrial complexes, and/or massive microwave rectennas. There is little sign of habitation in these areas, since the Ylii place such "environmentally troublesome" installations in comparatively inhospitable (and more resilient) biomes.

The two innermost natural satellites have been almost completely converted into huge solar energy reception and processing sites, which then beam the collected power down to the rectennas in the wastelands. In addition to its three natural satellites, Ssuushni'a is ringed by a dense swarm of artificial ones, ranging from satellites one-meter in diameter to gargantuan ones measuring almost 100 meters across. However, whereas humanity's spacecraft take on a bewildering array of shapes, the Ylii unfailingly construct theirs in the form of a perfect sphere. This gives Ssuushni'a the appearance of being ringed by drifting clouds of silver bubbles.

History: See the accompanying article entitled "The Ylii" for a complete history of the planet and its people.

A WALK IN THE FOREST

Where: On Ssuushni'a.

What: Exploring the Ylii homeworld.

Note: Before reading further, the referee should read the companion article, "The Ylii," in order to understand the Ylii, their behavior, and motivations.

In addition to the scientific and cultural wonders that await, it is also true that the planet below is by far the easiest refueling site in the system. And, judging from the spheres, there's probably some refined fuel available—that is, if the locals feel like sharing it.

Furthermore, this may be the "mystery race," a point which both Dumaine and Morgan will point out if the characters are thinking that this would be a good place to turn back.

As the courier begins to change course for a descent, the spheres will part in what almost looks like a gesture of invitation. One by one, they peel away from the path of the *Cat's Feet* and resume their previous orbits.

The team will be struck by the pervasive forests, which show hints of scattered, irregularly arranged construction. If the team-members manage to spot—and head for—one of the industrial complexes in the desert or wastelands, they will find it deserted (the inhabitants having fled underground pending the results of the first contact with the unknown visitors). The characters will eventually have to land near a forest and enter it; that is the only way that the



The Smith & Wesson ISP 106

First introduced in 2298, this pistol was fated from the first to be known almost exclusively by its nickname, the "Shoot and Whisper." The first AIA interdepartmental memo describing the gun contained a single typo (an omitted space) that rendered the gun's classification as the "S&WISP." Immediately, this was jokingly translated into "Shoot and Whisper." The weapon itself is anything but a joke, however.

With the exception of its barrel, the S&W ISP fits into the palm of a hand, and is almost completely constructed from advanced plastics. Those pieces which are not made of plastic are easily removable (making the gun quickly "invisible" to a great many security detection systems) and have been engineered to give the weapon optimal balance and recoil-absorption characteristics. The Shoot and Whisper uses a binary propellant system, rather than fixed cartridges. However, the nature of these binary propellants is quite uncommon. The gas molecules produced by the exothermic reaction are ionized with a weak positive charge. This makes it possible for the S&W ISP to incorporate the compact return-sleeve (or "U-turn") integral silencer design. As the bullet clears the barrel, an electromagnetic ring at the muzzle puts out a brief, high-power negative pulse. This slows the expanding, positively ionized gas via electromagnetic repulsion, redirecting much of it into baffles that travel "backward" toward the firer. The gas that maintains its forward direction (roughly 35%) is channeled through the forward-leading baffles that continue for approximately five centimeters beyond the muzzle. This results in a very silent weapon with a very short overall profile.

The S&W ISP also features an integrated laser sight with 100% coherence out to 15 meters. The numerical designation for the weapon—106—is shorthand that refers to the fact that it takes a 10-round clip of 6mm bullets. These bullets are another unusual feature in the Shoot and Whisper design. Comprised of a teflon-treated depleted uranium core (of approximately 3.5mm) and a simple lead overjacket, these rounds have excellent effectiveness against both armored and unarmored targets. In effect, the lead serves as a discarding sabot that discards only upon contact with a target, allowing the frictionless, armor-penetrating core to continue on. It also means that "soft" targets will not simply have a neat 6mm hole drilled in them; the expanding properties of the lead ensure that the weapon packs a significant wallop to targets which offer only light resistance to penetration. AIA agents refer to the ammunition (technically referred to as "target-shredding sabot" or TSS) as a "hammer and pancake" round.

Clearly, the Shoot and Whisper is not a particularly good multipurpose weapon, but then again, it is not intended to be. It is a highly concealable, silent and potent short-range weapon—ideal for the special requirements of field agents and/or undercover law enforcement personnel. The Shoot and Whisper is not available on the general market, and the only foreign nations which have been permitted to purchase the weapon are Australia, Germany, England, Canada, and Italy. Efforts are under way in France, Manchuria, and Austrovenia to duplicate the weapon.

Smith & Wesson ISP 106: Type: 6mm binary propellant automatic Country: USA Weight (Empty): 0.4 kg Length: 17 cm (Bulk=0) Action: Single-shot Ammunition: 6x14mm target shedding sabot Muzzle Velocity: 450 mps Magazine: 10-round box Magazine Weight (Including Filled, Disposable Propellant Cells): 0.1 kg ROF: 3 Aimed Fire Range: 30 Area Fire Burst: 3 rounds Area Fire Range: 15 meters DP Value: 0.4 Price: Lv390 (Lv25 per magazine, Lv10 for a box of 100 rounds)

Ylii will ever contact them.

When approaching its selected landing spot, the team will note two brief gleams of white light from deep in the forest. If it flies over to investigate, there will be nothing to be seen. There will also be no place to land; the nearest possible spot for the *Cat's Feet* is the landing site it had already decided upon. The first characters out of the ship will see the white light again, beaming up straight into the sky. Anyone with Reconnaissance skill will be able to tell at a glance that it's coming from precisely the same spot as before.

It will be an eight-hour march to reach the source of the light. During this time, the PCs will have three encounters with local fauna. A bestiary for the Ylii planet is not provided here; space does not permit its inclusion. However, the last of these encounters should occur only 30 minutes or so before the group expects to reach the source of the light. The creature should be a 100-kilogram flier/glider hunter that swoops down on the party while it's crossing a small glade. This final encounter will, in fact, involve a short fight. The attacking creature will attempt to flee as soon as it takes any damage.

The other encounters should be determined randomly. Referees should consider the forest to be teeming with life for purposes of determining the econiche of any creature confronted.

Consult the planetary description to determine some general traits of this world's flora and fauna. Some other interesting features that Dumaine or any interested and observant PCs may note are:

- Even the "leaves" of the pinnacle-like trees are long and thin in shape, appearing more like streamers. The branches tend to be whiplike, resembling willow-wands or thick vines. The root structures seem to be interlaced and exceptionally sturdy. All these features suggest the ability to resist high winds with minimum structural damage. This is a logical evolutionary trait on a large planet with a heavy atmosphere.

- Animals tend to be somewhat "spindly" in appearance. Even without dissection, observations of their movements suggest that many have cartilaginous, rather than bony skeletons. As noted earlier, eyes, ears, and even noses tend to be quite large—almost comically so by human standards. Marsupials seem to be quite prevalent, given the number of arboreal species in evidence. Ground carnivores are fast and lethal, although even the biggest is smaller than a black bear. Reptiles are not uncommon, although they show less adaptations for nocturnal activity; they are apparently almost uniformly diurnal.

- The variety of reproductive systems is one of the most unusual features of both the flora and fauna. There are several trisexual species (how that works is not exactly clear to the characters, who might merely assume that they are looking at unusual social structures), as well as egg-laying mammals. Plants seem to attract their necessary symbionts not only with scent and color, but light. The orange-gold glow that *Ssuushni'a* gets from its sun has very little green in it, and minimal amounts of any of the higher wavelengths of light. Consequently, nature's pastel is more limited. A large number of plants compensate for this limitation to their potential "attractor stimuli" by producing their own light. Green and blue bioluminescence is a pervasive botanical "sex" characteristic and attractor in the *Ssuushni'an* forest, lending it an almost Christmas-tree appearance in the areas where this kind of flora predominates.

There is one other factor that the characters may or may not note as they travel through the forest: They are being followed.

Task: To detect unseen observer: Formidable. Reconnaissance. +2 for either Exceptional Hearing or Sight. Immediate.

Only one attempt may be permitted per hour. If detected, the "unseen observer" will be glimpsed briefly. The glimpse will be only enough to discern that it is humanoid, a little smaller than a human,

and fur-covered. The observer will also gain an impression of *huge* eyes. This is the Ylii known as Vishzuss'zruhna'zhii (roughly: *self-knowing speaker of basic truths who is an Alpha-Alpha*), who has been assigned the task of watching the group as it makes its way through the forest.

Vish's (we'll use a nickname, whereas the Ylii *never* would) duty is to see how this new race of sophonts treats the environment. A respect for flora and fauna, a sense that one does not "own" nature but cooperates with it as an equal, is the key not only to the Ylii outlook on life, but their assessment of the level of a species' intelligence. If the characters smash around in the undergrowth, ripping up samples, casually dissecting creatures, etc., Vish—and the rest of the Ylii—will be appalled. If, on the other hand, the characters evince respectful interest in the environment without mangling or mistreating it, the Ylii will be readily coming to the conclusion that prolonged contact with these odd, small-eyed aliens might be a good idea and a "natural action."

The key test will be how the characters respond to the conflict with the avian hunter at the end of their journey. Once wounded, the creature will attempt to flee as fast and as far as it can. If the group lets it do so unmolested, or fires shots that are only meant to scare it, this will crystallize the Ylii attitude toward the humans as positive. If, on the other hand, the group decides to blast the hunter to tiny pieces even when it is retreating in a panic, Ylii attitudes will be decidedly negative.

There is one last crucial point having to do with the attack of this creature. Depending on initial range and whatever other weapon may be available for him, Morgan is likely to use his S&W ISP 106 handgun (see the sidebar) to dispatch/drive off the aerial hunter. If he does this, the characters are likely to notice that the Shoot and Whisper is no ordinary handgun; it is a very sophisticated, special-purpose weapon. If the PCs do not begin to voice suspicions about why a helmsman should have such a weapon, Dumaine will relentlessly pursue this line of inquiry. Clearly, it is to Dumaine's eventual advantage if he can make the rest of the group distrustful of Morgan.

SPEAKER FOR THE PEOPLE

Where: On Ssuushni'a.

What: First personal contact with a Ylii.

In the aftermath of the attack by the avian hunter—immediately afterward if there is a severely injured teammate—the characters are likely to note a stirring in the undergrowth, followed by a long breathy whistle that begins at a shrill pitch and slowly descends to a bass tone. The duration of the sound lasts more than 20 seconds. A few moments after it ends, a humanoid figure will arise out of the underbrush. This (of course) is Vish. The characters will notice that Vish is wearing a light harness to which various tools are attached. In addition, he is wearing some sort of mechanical/ornamental armguard.

After the initial contact, in which both sides will (presumably) try to make it clear to each other that they mean no harm and want to talk, they will have to go about determining exactly how to converse. If the characters have brought along a portacomp with *any* kind of language program at all, and they attempt to use it, Vish will become unusually animated and begin "typing" with one hand upon his arm ornament (apparently a portacomp also). A crude level of communication can be established with the aid of some kind of phonetic emulator in Vish's unit which converts his hums, whistles, and sibilants into human language equivalents. (Note: If anyone has taken along a Kafer language program and tries to communicate with *that*, immediate understanding will be established—the Ylii have been dealing with the Kafers for over 300 years. In turn, with access to a common language, the two races will be able to decode each other's language with extraordinary speed.)

Vish will explain in broken English that there is a place nearby where the process of translation can be vastly accelerated. He

would be grateful if the group would accompany him there. A 20-minute walk brings the group to the base of a large tree with a suspiciously ladder-like vine running up its side. Although later arboreal acrobatics will prove that he certainly does not require a ladder, Vish (as would any good host) will provide the example for his uncertain guests and begin climbing up.

Once in the mid-level of the foliage, the PCs will begin to learn the reasons why Ylii society is difficult to see from orbit. Almost all Ylii dwellings are shaped and colored much like the botanical structures around them. When he arrives at the structures at the foliage mid-level, Vish will access a much larger computer. If the PCs have a portacomp and language program, Vish will ask for permission to interface it directly with his system. The referee should design a few tasks for computer-skilled player characters to handle at this point. While these are being carried out, Vish will explain that he was assigned to watch and contact the *ut'so Ylii* (his word for humans, which translates as *small-eyed thinkers*).

Regardless of how well (or poorly) the humans present themselves in Vish's eyes, two things will immediately be clear to him; this species can be communicated with peacefully, and it seems to prefer cooperation over violence. This marks it as profoundly different from the Kafers, with whom the Ylii have been unable to establish even the smallest degree of conceptual common ground.

If the PCs are not bursting with questions, Dumaine will seem to be handling the situation with admirable calm, considering that he is living the ultimate dream of every xenosapientologist. In actuality, Dumaine is already calculating how he can get one of the Ylii to accompany him back to earth. One of Dumaine's first questions will be whether or not the Ylii have had contact with the Kafers, and if so, what the "context" of that interaction has been.

Clearly, the group is free to be as candid or covert as it wishes. The Ylii however, are open-handed and honest and Vish will rattle off a brief synopsis of Ylii-Kafer history. His comments will end with some hint of the moral/ethical/ecological dilemma this situation has thrust upon the Ylii. He will also ask what experience the humans have had with the Kafers, since they obviously knew enough about the species to inquire about its impact upon the Ylii.

Soon after these issues have been discussed, a high-toned chirp will emanate from Vish's decorative wrist-computer: The Deltas have decided to invite the humans to the Ylii capitol of Hnnsiithu, where they are to be made welcome while talks of greater length are held.

Special Notes

The Ylii are a truly alien race, whose different outlook is just as organic as is a Kafer's. This quality should come across very clearly in the referee's portrayal of Vish (and any other Ylii). Information in the article "The Ylii" should be carefully incorporated in the referee's portrayal.

Also, Vish is not really an Alpha-Alpha; he is a defender. Like all other defenders, he is not aware of this—or that there is even an ongoing reevolution of this "lost species." The same qualities that suited him for his role as a speaker for his people—courage, intense curiosity, decisiveness—will create in him an affinity for the humans.

THE YLII DILEMMA

Where: Hnnsiithu, the Ylii capital.

What: The Ylii reaction to human culture and Operation Back Door.

2300AD

Vish will guide the characters a short distance away from the tree complex they were in, skimming easily along branches that the characters must cross with great care and no small amount of wobbling. The end of their brief journey puts them at an entrance to a tapering building. Once inside, they take an elevator downward. This deposits them in an underground maglev station of simple but advanced design. After a two-hour maglev ride, the PCs are invited to disembark, and along with Vish, emerge into the Ylii city of Hnnsiithu.

The Ylii capital strongly resembles a forest itself. Without exception, the buildings are treelike spires joined by narrow walkways and sturdy guidewires. The Ylii can be seen using the wires to travel between the buildings with the arboreal ease of gibbons, swinging from one to the next. As it is built right next to a forest, it is difficult to tell where the city ends and the buildings begin.

This is the first glimpse that the PCs will have of some of the 33 species of Ylii that comprise this society. The almost bizarre diversity of the society is in odd contrast to the easy order and tranquility that pervades the place. While observing the area, the PCs also get the odd feeling that although this place *is* a city, its shape and concept defer to the land around it, not vice versa. Vehicles—usually hovercraft—are infrequent; almost all the Ylii are walking—or swinging—to wherever they're bound, and none of them seem to be in a rush. None of the Ylii are clothed, although a few (Betas and Alphas) are carrying tools of one sort or another. Lit by the golden glow of the K-type star, and seen against a backdrop of the green-blue bioluminescent foliage, the setting is a pastoral of unearthly beauty.

The Ylii will be equally interested in the humans, gazing at them and whistling their odd version of "hello." The Ylii seem to find nothing inherently rude in staring—often for prolonged periods of time—and also seem to have no modesty taboos. However, they emanate an air of having respect for *everything* they come into contact with.

The next item on the agenda is a meeting with a council of Deltas,

mostly comprised of the conceiver species. This is the rough equivalent of the heart of the Ylii government. This group of individuals will be very polite and glad to share any information it has—including its outlook on life, the universe, and everything—but will also try to get a few key questions of its own answered: Why did the humans come here? How did the humans get here? Do the humans have any message from their leaders? (Although in Ylii, the word for leader literally means *most-cautious great-thinker*).

The Ylii *hope* to learn that the humans came here because they discovered some Ylii in the course of fighting the Kafers and wanted to become friends with the entirety of the Ylii race. (Remember that, to most of the Ylii, "becoming friends" means that they will begin to widen their polytaxic society to include humans.) Although the Ylii will be less pleased (and less trusting) if the sole motivation for contact is presented as an alliance against the Kafers, the Ylii will still be receptive. After all, they *need* allies badly—and in a hurry.

As to how the humans got here, the Ylii are hoping to learn that the humans are now in control of the Kafer gateway system of HC +25 1902. This is the only way (known to the Ylii of this "Second Civilization") that they can travel to systems beyond the last three they have been restricted to. The characters will not be able to mislead the Ylii into thinking that they did come from this direction, however. The Ylii will ask questions regarding conditions in systems lying along that route. The player characters will not be able to "fake" answers to these queries.

Regarding a message from humanity's leaders, the Ylii will be grateful for any word of friendship or alliance. They will be alarmed if the characters' statements reveal (either directly or indirectly) that the humans, too, are sorely pressed by the Kafers and their vicious attacks. However, this will only strengthen the resolve of the Deltas to pursue some sort of alliance with the humans.

There is one last point that underlies Ylii thoughts about the Kafers: The Ylii want to prevent the Kafers from being wiped out. As deadly and destructive as the Kafer's are—the Ylii call them *ze'yli Ylii* (literally: *the unthinking thinkers*)—the Ylii simply cannot accept the notion that any race or species *must* be exterminated to preserve another. The concept of control and containment is difficult enough for them to accept. Consequently, any brusque, militaristic jingoism such as "it's us or them" will strike a decidedly sour note with the Ylii, who find such attitudes very similar to those evinced by the Kafers.

In the final analysis, the Ylii will wish to discuss things further with the small-eyed thinkers and will wish to send an envoy back with the group. (To no one's surprise, this envoy will be Vish.)

However, before the Deltas come to their momentous decisions regarding the humans, several days will pass. Over this time, Vish will be the group's constant (and extremely likable) companion. It is likely that during this time, the PCs hear some things which hint at the current ethical/ecological crises that the Ylii find themselves caught up in. Should the characters wish to pursue the matter with any of the Deltas, their comments will be welcomed, and in some cases, eagerly sought after. Despite their cultural orthodoxy, the Ylii are among the universe's most open-minded creatures, and consider the perspective of an outsider to be valuable.

These contacts and discussions—which the referee should present as being extremely casual, if interesting, affairs—may in fact be the most profound things the characters do while on Ssuushni'a. As Vish and the Deltas are stimulated by the human perspective, they will consider new viewpoints and new possibilities regarding the future of the Ylii and what it means to be a sophont. Ω

Detective work and fierce encounters with the minions of the treacherous Tricolor organizations enliven the third episode of "Operation Back Door," "Saboteurs and Skulduggery," in Challenge 51. Also, for a history of the planet and its people, refer to "The Ylii" in this issue.

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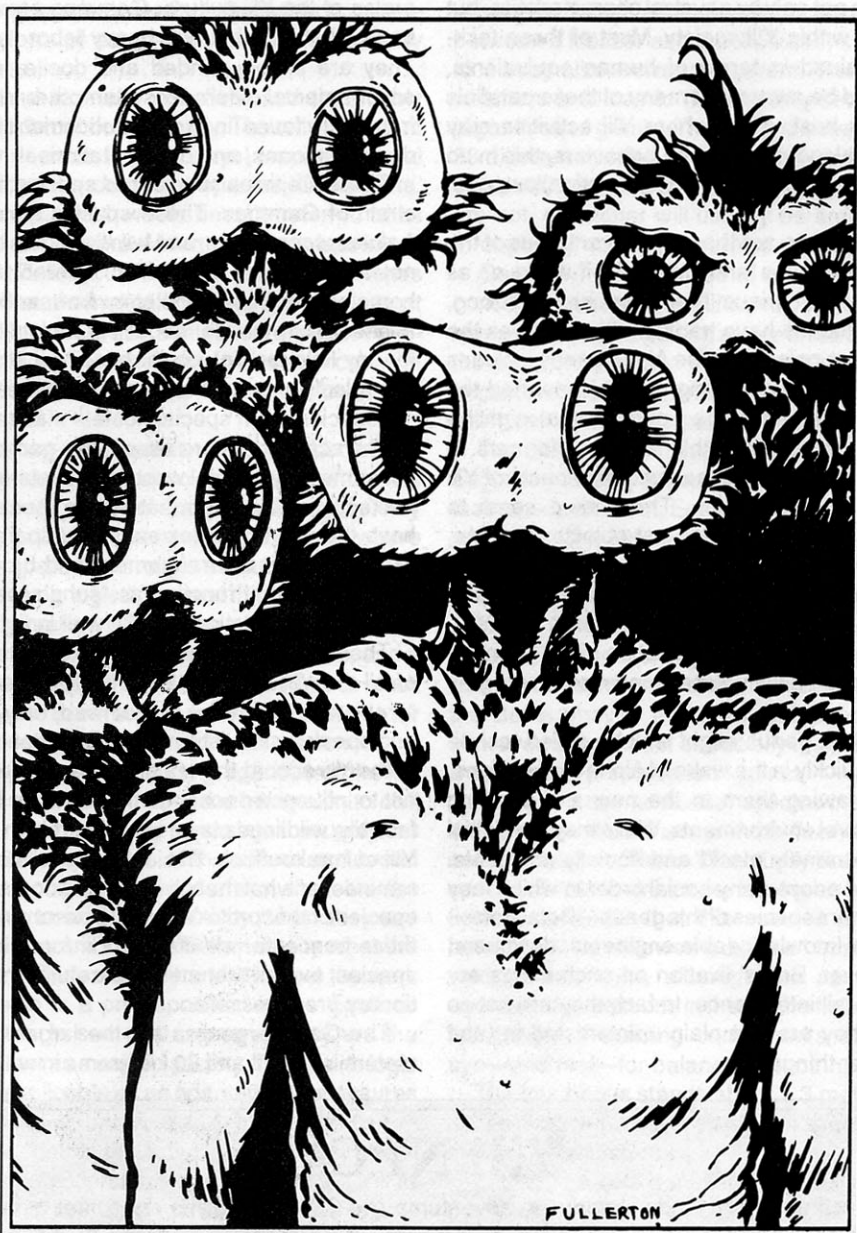
The Ylii

An alien race for 2300 AD

By Charles E. Gannon

The Ylii are endothermic, oxygen-breathing humanoids that evolved in an environment of diffuse, low-frequency light. They are polytaxic, which means that their "race" isn't a race at all, but is a sprawling amalgamation of sophonts belonging to (roughly) the same suborder or superfamily of creatures. To use a terrestrial example, the Ylii "race" would be equivalent to the entire superfamily of Hominidae (man and the manlike primates, or apes) operating as a single, integrated society.

Despite division into 33 separate species scattered across seven genera, all Ylii evince certain common characteristics. They are upright bipeds, although some can adopt a rolling, four-limbed gait. They have four-fingered hands and feet, with two fingers of each extremity being opposable digits (or thumbs). Almost all species are equally dextrous with their pedal digits as they are with their manual digits. Furthermore, they are polydextrous, meaning that they do not evince a right/left coordination bias in either their manual or pedal "hands." Ylii heads are actually "sensor" housings for their large eyes (binocular arrangement), small ears (two, located on the "cheeks" of the head), and a complex of hairlike sensory spindles dedicated to maintaining equilibrium and assessing air pressure (clustered in tufts around the ears). The Ylii eye is a large organ, designed to gather low-energy light. Consequently, Ylii can "see" body heat, vehicle emissions, and other infrared sources that are invisible to humans. However, Ylii cannot see blue



light and do not adjust well to high-intensity light conditions. Noon in the Sahara would be an intensely uncomfortable (and temporarily blinding) experience for a Ylii.

The Ylii brain is located in the center of the upper torso in a bony protective casing. A six-chambered sequential pump functions as the heart and is located in the upper abdomen. Four-lobed lungs overlay the braincase and acquire air through four slits located near where one would find the upper bronchi in humans.

The Ylii mouth provides direct access to the alimentary canal, located in the abdomen. The abdominal mouth structure inverts and folds out of sight when not in use. Communication is achieved by passing air through the four breathing slits, resulting in wheezing/whistling phonemes with a muted nasal quality that has been likened to French. Without palate, dental structures, or larynx, the tonal variations of Ylii language are much

subtler, since fewer phonetic options are available.

The Ylii are trisexual and deliver single, live young. The three genders are male, female, and bearer. The male impregnates the female, who then carries the fertilized ova for approximately one month. Then the female transfers the ova to the bearer, who carries the child for another 10 months. Consequently, Ylii females do not endure long or difficult pregnancies. Also, the more specialized and single-purpose anatomical arrangement of the bearer makes for easier and safer births. Ylii infants are slightly less physically dependent than human newborns, but must quickly master the

complex social arrangement that results from the polytaxic nature of their society.

All Ylii are covered with a smooth, silky fur, although color, length, and texture vary according to genera. These differences are not signifiers of class or caste. With the exception of only one of the 33 species, Ylii are herbivores.

GENERA AND SPECIES

The Ylii are divided into seven genera—Alphas, Betas, Gammas, Deltas, Epsilons, Iotas, and Zetas. Within these seven genera, there are 33 separate species and subspecies. Each of the seven genera classifications is also the classification for the dominant (by percentage) species within that genus. The different species are distinguishable not only by physical characteristics, but by the tasks they perform within Ylii society. Most of these task-related roles will be explained in terms of human equivalents. However, the reader should be aware that many of these parallels are crude congruences at best. Even where Ylii activities may “seem” to be physically analogous to human behaviors, this in no way implies that the two share a commonality of function, purpose, or cultural significance.

Alphas: Ylii of the Alpha genus are the most adventurous of the Ylii and are the most likely to be encountered off-world or as interspecies liaisons. They are curious, hardy, and have a strong, aggressive will to survive. Alphas have traditionally served as the Ylii's explorers and first-wave colonists. The Alpha genus includes two related but distinct species, which might best be termed the *gamers* and the *finders*. The gamers serve a purpose that might be likened to a cross between professional athletes and performers. In short, they seem to retain and enact those cultural aspects of Ylii society that require physical expression. The finders seem to specialize in tracking things, searching for lost objects, persons, and livestock. They tend to be the most reclusive of all the Ylii, and tend to associate predominantly with the Alpha species of the Alpha genus. All species of the Alpha genus are fairly large (for Ylii), averaging 1.5 meters in height. With the exception of the palms of hands and feet, they are covered with glossy brown or brown-gray fur.

Betas: The Ylii of the Beta genus might well be called technicians. They tend to follow quickly in the wake of Alpha explorations, their inquisitive natures drawing them to the new and puzzling challenges presented by novel environments. While they are skillful artificers, they are also extremely placid and socially malleable. They quickly adapt to—and adopt—any social order in which they find themselves. The dominant species of this genus—Beta-Beta—makes highly dextrous and knowledgeable engineers, designers, and manufacturers. However, Betas' fixation on such things appears to degrade their overall intelligence. In fact, they are not so much “slower-witted” as they are just plain uninterested in (and therefore, ignorant of) other things.

There are two other species in the Beta genera, which would best be called the *fixers* and the *tinkers*. The fixers tend to be a little less intelligent than the dominant Betas, and a little more stubborn. However, they are extraordinarily dextrous and doggedly persistent repairmen. The tinkers are quite the opposite, being quick-witted, utterly cooperative, but a bit fickle. The tinkers manufacture the small items used by the Ylii, as well as little eye-pleasing objects that are jewelry-like adornments to be added to utilitarian devices. The Beta genus are small for Ylii, never standing much more (or less) than a meter in height. They are covered with short brown fur that is quite sparse on their heads, hands, and feet. Exposed skin is red-brown to rust-colored and somewhat wrinkled.

Gammas: The Ylii of the Gamma genus might be called the *proles* of the Ylii culture. Gammas provide the strong backs and hands that do whatever heavy labor remains to be done by Ylii. They are simple-minded and docile, and are less sensitive to environmental differences than other Ylii. Consequently, they are frequently found in the Ylii industrial sites that dot Ssuushni'a's deserts, moons, and orbital stations.

There are three specialized species in addition to the dominant strain of Gammas. These species would be best referred to as *helpers*, *scavengers*, and *wildlings*. The helpers seem to fulfill a role not wholly unlike that of an itinerant laborer, except that their homelessness seems to stem from an ingrained nomadic nature. In effect, they wander about Ylii society, perpetually on the lookout for any little (or big) job that needs a strong back or hand—which they gladly supply. They stay and eat either in the homes of other Ylii species, or in special hostels maintained for them.

The scavengers are essentially garbagemen/undertakers, who consume any edible waste products—including dead Ylii. This makes them the only meat-eating species of all the Ylii. They also have the most complex sensory apparatus, including a variable-sensitivity retinal arrangement and brown-tinted nictating ocular membranes that function as “sunglasses.” This arrangement allows them to function equally well in light and dark.

The wildlings are possibly the most interesting—and enigmatic—of all the Ylii species. Essentially, the wildlings are elemental or “prehistoric” Ylii. They do not read, only fashion the crudest tools, and speak a simplistic pidgin dialect of the Ylii language. The rest of the Ylii accord them a great deal of respect and take great care not to influence or change the habits or lifestyle of the wildlings. In fact, the wildlings play a complex role in the “macropsychology” of Ylii cultural outlook. Basically, the wildlings both serve as a living reminder of what the Ylii were, and constitute a way for at least one species of the “proto-Ylii” not to become extinct. The importance of these concepts reflects the Ylii focus on not exterminating any species, even if that means carefully preserving one's own evolutionary predecessors.

The Gamma genera are the largest of the Ylii, averaging 1.8 meters in height and 80 kilograms in weight. They are sturdily built

Ylii NPCs

In the course of the accompanying (and subsequent) adventures, the PCs are likely to encounter a number of Ylii NPCs. The following statistics offer mean values for each of the Ylii genera (based on the dominant species). Variations across species can be inferred from the separate description of each genus' nondominant strains. There is considerable variation due to individual differences as well, but generally less so than in humans.

Statistic	Alpha	Beta	Gamma	Delta	Epsilon	Iota	Zeta
STR	7	3	10	6	5	5	4
DEX	15	18	12	16	14	14	18
END	9	6	11	4	8	9	10
DET	9	10	12	11	5	10	5
INT	11	8	5	15	9	8	4

and quite strong for their size. Their fur is short, thick, and either black or charcoal gray. Their hands and feet are hairless and black-skinned.

Deltas: The Delta genus is the most intelligent—and elusive—of all the Ylii. The great majority of Deltas are teachers, a term which includes authors, documentarians, reporter/observers, and any other task that focuses on the transmission of knowledge. Deltas are nonaggressive, but are highly individualistic. Humans would think of them as politely pigheaded. A Delta that is forced into an environment or role that it does not approve of will quickly weaken and die. This is its inborn way of fighting back: a physiologically activated metabolic change that effectively suicides the Delta. The Deltas generally oversee and orchestrate the activities of the other genera, although they are not hands-on leaders. Quite the contrary—their guidance takes the form of suggestions, which are readily obeyed by the other genera.

Although the Deltas tend to make excellent and thoroughly considered decisions, they do not do so rapidly. The only important thing to Deltas is that their decision is (in all ways) responsible and ecologically holistic. Besides the dominant species, Delta-Delta, there are three other species, which would best be referred to as *mnemonics*, *healers*, and *conceivers*. Mnemonics are less mentally agile than the dominant Deltas, but have extraordinary memories and a knack for logical and mathematical thought. They are expert computer programmers, librarians, and simulation experts. Healers are the doctors of the Ylii, who tend to work in close concert with the comforter species of the Epsilon genus (for more information, see below).

Perhaps the most important—and rarest—of all Ylii species are the *conceivers*. More than any other species, these are the Ylii leaders, and possess unusually powerful and versatile minds. They tend to spend long periods isolated in monospecific groups, where they may work together or apart. Their role is a mix of many things: inventor, judge, macroeconomic logistician, and think-tank consultant. Deltas stand about 1.4 meters tall and are almost completely hairless, except for scattered tufts on their torsos, forearms, and a sparse covering across their backs. Their skin is dark gray to black and is quite wrinkled. They are extremely sensitive to light (even for Ylii) and still follow an almost completely nocturnal existence.

Epsilons: The Epsilon genus is the most gregarious of the Ylii genera, with the dominant species of this genus being akin to civil servants. The Ylii word for this group translates roughly as *communals* and certainly conveys more of the diffuse and broad nature of their role in this society. On the surface, they are the noisiest of the Ylii, tending toward hyperactivity when they are excited or upset. The Epsilons are to the Ylii community what the Gammas are to Ylii industry: They are the hands that get the work done. But beyond this, there is a predisposition in the Epsilons toward social amalgamation. In some strange way, they are the glue that holds the Ylii together as a unified society. There is no logic behind this, nor is it simply explicable as an adaptation that ensures enhanced survival due to their specialized contribution to the welfare of the other genera. Rather, the activities and interaction of the Epsilons seem to be a behavioral cue to the rest of the Ylii to remain tightly integrated and socialized. They make the logical structure of the polytaxic society “feel right” to its various, diverse members.

There are four species other than the dominant Epsilons in this genus. They are the *commercial*s, *organizers*, *comforters*, and *watchers*. The *commercial*s oversee the final distribution of goods and services in the Ylii community, although there is no “selling” or “buying” per se—Ylii do not have any concept of money. They are more akin to social welfare administrators.

The *organizers* fill a slot that might best be described as ombudsman/foreman. They keep track of what is going on in a community, do any simple planning that does not require a Delta,

and oversee the execution of any directives from the Deltas.

The *comforters* are a combination day-care provider/nurse/midwife/hospice attendant/counselor. Separated from other Ylii, they will die within days.

One of the more interesting of the Ylii species is the *watcher*. Quite literally, the job of a *watcher* is to make sure that everything is going according to plan and that everybody is doing what they should be doing. While this might sound to a human like a cross between a kibitzer and a policeman, it is actually more analogous to a baby-sitter/surrogate parent. The most common task of the *watchers* is to see to the ongoing socialization of the Ylii young, regardless of genus. The complexities of a society that integrates 33 different species into a single functioning unit are learned with some difficulty, and parents cannot always be present. When they are not, a *watcher* will usually be around to guide the young Ylii through any social insecurities or errors.

Generally, adult Ylii are of no concern to *watchers*. Lacking a concept of crime, the Ylii never *try* to do anything that's wrong. However, if a Ylii is getting senile or is becoming mentally disturbed, the *watcher* is there to make sure that the impaired Ylii's cognitive impairment does not bring it—or other Ylii—to harm. The *watcher* will then report this impairment to one of the *organizers*.

The Epsilon genus averages 1.2 meters in height and frequently adopts a four-limbed lope when moving on the ground. Except for their hands and feet, Epsilons are covered with light gray to snow-white fur. The fur around the eyes is jet black, giving them a “masked” appearance. Their skin is also black. They are the most numerous of all Ylii genera.

Iotas: The Iota genus is the Ylii answer to the professional builder. The dominant species of this genus has an innate fondness for structures, whether of stone, steel, or composite laminates. Like the Betas, they're a little bit detached from the rest of society. However, they are not as socially malleable as the Betas, and have a strong self-preservation instinct.

There are two additional species in this genus, which are best thought of as the *miners* and the *finishers*. The *miners*' role is fairly self-explanatory. These Ylii actually like working in narrow, confined spaces. Given their heavier fingers and prominent nails, Ylii evolutionists speculate that this species probably made its home in burrows, or in hollowed-out “tree” trunks. The *miners* also enjoy working in p-suits, although the vastness of space produces agoraphobic reactions in them. The *finishers* essentially handle the fabrication of building components and have an extraordinary eye—and feel—for balance, smoothness, and stress lines.

The Iota genus stands about 1.3 meters tall and (except for the hands and feet) is covered with an almost blue-gray fur. The skin of the Iota is tannish-gray.

Zetas: The Zeta genus is essentially the agrarian equivalent of the Gamma. These smallish Ylii are fairly docile and simple-minded, although the dominant species of this genus has a thorough understanding of farming and horticulture. Of all the genera, the Zetas are probably the least curious, evincing a strong desire to live and die in the same vicinity where they are born.

Although there are only two species (other than the dominant) of Zetas, each one of those species is further subdivided into subspecies. One species would best be qualified as *arboreal gatherers*, of which there are five subspecies. The *arboreal gatherers* have only one task in life—to tend and/or gather needed products that grow in the high vegetation of Ssuushni'a's temperate zone. The subspecies discriminations are largely due to different sensory

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sensitivities and varying weight (with the smaller subspecies being able to range up into the higher regions of the Ssuushni'an forest). These gatherers are by far the best climbers of the Ylii.

The other species—the *land gatherers*—are ground dwellers who range back and forth across thinly forested areas and even scrublands in search of food or other natural products of interest. They tend to be larger than the arboreal gatherers and are the swiftest runners of the Ylii, frequently using a four-limbed gait.

Zetas range between 0.8 to 1.1 meters in height and are covered with tan-brown fur (except for their hands and feet). The arboreal gatherers have the largest ears of any of the Ylii, as well as the most developed balance sensors. However, their eyes are the smallest of any Ylii.

EVOLUTION AND HISTORY

The Ylii "race" evolved via the compilation of symbiotic interdependencies between closely related species. This occurred largely due to the gradual cooling of Ssuushni'a's star, a trend which became significant enough to begin to change the biosphere approximately 10 million years ago. Ssuushni'a became colder, and glaciers advanced across once-temperate plains. Air temperature decreased, causing a long-term increase in rain.

For the "forest"-dwelling proto-Ylii, this heralded unwelcome alterations to their biome. Although they preferred the lowland forests and jungles, their ranges were eventually flooded, killing many of the trees. This provided the first impetus toward a polytaxic society.

The Epsilons and Zetas, originally a single suborder, had already begun evolving into separate genera. However, these branches of the Ylii evolutionary tree were still closely related and still inter-fertile. Social structure was similar as well. Consequently, when local conditions worsened, these two proto-genera began to cooperate, evolving a symbiotic relationship. The Zetas were food scroungers *par excellence*, possessing the excellent noses and superior agility that enabled them to locate and retrieve fruits from even the highest reaches of the trees. Meanwhile, the Epsilons patrolled, oversaw the young of both groups, and saw to the portage and storage of the food, thereby freeing the Zetas to do what they did best.

However, as the forests continued to decline, more ground foraging was required—which put the Ylii at hazard from various predators that they had never had to worry about before. In order to acquire protection for the Zeta ground foragers, the joint Epsilon/Zeta troops began to shadow the movements of the more formidable Gammas, who were often left alone by the same predators that troubled the smaller Ylii genera. In time, this relationship was cemented by food-sharing with the Gammas.

As the decline of the forests continued and their habitat shrank and grew colder over the course of several million years, these first crude polytaxic groupings began to migrate toward the warmer equatorial regions. These were the darkest—and most dubious—days of the Ylii struggle for existence. Forced to cross swamps, open plains, and mountains, the Ylii frequently found themselves stranded in treeless biomes. It was during this period that the Deltas and Alphas were added to the symbiotic network. More oriented toward the individual than the other Ylii, these genera were accustomed to fending for themselves, and were better able to adapt to living in treeless climes, due to their greater ingenuity and versatility. So, in a reprise of the way the Epsilons had begun to shadow the Gammas, the whole polytaxic troop now began to follow the Alphas and Deltas (which at this time had just begun to evolve into separate genera). The Alphas and Deltas adapted to this new arrangement quickly and rapidly emerged as the "brains" of the troop.

Those groups which reached the warmer equatorial regions did so only because they adopted this sweeping macrosymbiotic arrangement. Consequently, by the time the "crisis" of survival had

passed (Ssuushni'a's climate essentially stabilized at a new, cooler level approximately 6 million years ago), the Ylii polytaxic structure was firmly in place. Some troops had stumbled upon toolmaking as they struggled for survival during their equator-bound migrations. The tool as an extension of self was a notion the Deltas were temperamentally primed to embrace, and before long, they began using drinking gourds, ropes, and javelins (to repel predators). The rest of the Ylii evinced keen interest in these objects, and an offshoot of the Epsilons began to fashion these devices with an almost compulsive dedication. This offshoot eventually subdivided into the Beta and Iota genera. At this point, Ylii society began a rapid upward climb in sophistication and intelligence.

It should be noted, however, that whereas human intelligence was almost exclusively prompted by survival needs, Ylii intelligence evolved as much from the challenges inherent in managing a polytaxic social order as from desperate responses to Maslowian needs. Consequently, Ylii are not particularly tool-oriented compared to other intelligent species. Much of their intelligence and inventiveness is focused on the nature and manipulation of ecological and social relationships. Ylii thought tends therefore to be broad in scope (seeing the universe as an intensely and absolutely interactive whole made up of inextricably linked parts), yet oddly narrow in focus (the only valid criterion for anything is whether it is in keeping with the dynamics of the universal equilibrium).

EARLY HISTORY

Given their emphasis on ecological manipulation and their general lack of violence, the Ylii did not experience any of the classic human "technology drivers." Only as their societies grew larger and more complex was any form of industrialization or mass-provided service required. Hundreds of millennia passed before the changeover to a truly technical society began.

It is appropriate to note here that by the time they were beginning to enter their equivalent of the Bronze Age, the Ylii had evolved an alternative to war that might best be described as a war of words. These wars were simply generation-long debates between differently minded factions. Central to the concept and implementation of these wars of words is the effort to determine whether a given course of action is "holistic" or not.

The Ylii achieved most technical breakthroughs either to serve the needs of their society or—later on—to sate their curiosity about the universe. Lacking a colonial drive, the Ylii expanded slowly across the face of Ssuushni'a, and even more slowly once they began to reach out into space. By this time, the pattern of Ylii technical excellence was already clear. They evinced extraordinary abilities in the areas of animal communication, ecology, clean energy technologies, environmental control, philosophy, mathematics, programming, and biogeneering. Their military and health technologies were—by comparison—decidedly retrograde (and in some cases, downright primitive).

However, approximately 100,000 years ago, the Ylii encountered a crisis that they were unprepared for. In the course of their slow but steady expansion into their interstellar neighborhood (including settlements or bases in a number of systems that are in human space—Ylii remains in human space can be found in systems Ross 863 I, DM+5 3409 I, Ross 867, DM+3 3465, and DK+17 4521), they came across a race of intelligent creatures—the first intelligent life they had ever encountered. Ironically enough, this race was the Kafers.

CULTURE IN CRISIS

Study of the Kafers had a profound effect upon the Ylii, who had been accustomed to discovering biospheres and biots in balance—the unfailing and unconscious drive of all things to follow the universal law of cosmic homeostasis. The Kafers confused the Ylii, who could not understand a species that would despoil environ-

ments, kill more prey than it needed, and revel in violence.

This presented the Ylii with a major problem. Clearly, the Kafers were a product of the universal order; after all, everything is. Yet, the universal order had created a species which was either blind to or uninterested in maintaining the order that had created it. The philosophical implications and dilemmas inherent in this concept embroiled the entire Ylii culture, which—for the first time—was forced to consider that its emphasis on ecological communalism was an arbitrary, not inevitable, outcome of evolved intelligence. Dramatic rifts began appearing in the Ylii society when xenologists pointed to the Kafers' success as survivors, and the rapid (by Ylii standards) improvement of their technology and social ordering. The end result: expansion into space, and contact with the Ylii.

What could be done? Certainly, the Ylii could contain the Kafers; they had the technological head start to maintain absolute control of the situation if they wished. But such action flew in the face of the central Ylii instinct: Never interfere with the natural order of things. And any decision to keep the Kafers bottled up on their home world would constitute just such interference with a naturally evolving race.

Most Alphas took a stand with the minority of Deltas who believed that it was only natural for the Ylii to respond to the Kafer question with *some* kind of action. The Alpha reaction was seen by the majority of orthodox Deltas as the beginning of a fracturing of the natural Ylii order—and panic began. In actuality, the Alphas were responding in accordance with their nature. The Kafer question, representing a threat to the Ylii, reactivated the old defensive/aggressive scout instincts of the Alphas, who were the closest things to decisive or military leaders that the Ylii had. But they had not functioned in this role for so many hundreds of millennia, that the "organic" nature of their reaction was unrecognized by most of the Deltas.

No one incident touched off the ensuing cataclysmic war. However, the orthodox Deltas were unable to control the comparatively excitable Epsilons, who began to withhold communal services from those Alphas and Gammas that were seen as rebellious. The ineluctable upward spiral of escalation took care of the rest.

The war devastated Ylii society. Unknowledgeable in the waging of war, the Ylii did not have an ethic for how to handle it societally or personally. Literally billions of the Ylii—particularly the Epsilons—went insane and/or committed suicide. The weapons developed were crude and imprecise, slaughtering millions that might have been spared had the Ylii ever evolved a science of war. All this was made more horrific by the fact that, since there were no real military targets, *everything* was a target.

The orthodox Delta factions won the war (if it can be said that anybody won it) and determined that the only way to preserve the homeostasis of Ylii culture was to remove those aspects of aggression that made the Gammas respond to Alpha crisis leadership. Similarly, they decided that the Alpha aggressiveness had to be toned down by making the defensive instinct of this genus self-centered rather than socially protective. After several centuries of careful eugenics work, this was accomplished on Ssuushni'a, which by then boasted the only remaining population of Ylii in the universe. Then the Ylii turned inward and blissfully forgot war and much of the technology that had made it so horrible.

The Kafers are now preparing to finish the job they are unaware they indirectly started. The "modern" Ylii resumed interstellar space travel only 900 years ago. Three hundred years ago, they encountered the Kafers, and since then the Ylii have been brutally swept aside or taken as slaves by these savage neighbors. (See **Kafer Sourcebook** for more information.) Now, only three systems still remain under Ylii control; SS-27 6854 (site of the Ylii homeworld, Ssuushni'a), DK-33 1023, and DK+32 2390. And moves are afoot in the Kafer Associative to conquer the remaining Ylii worlds quickly, in order to free up assets for the next human conflict.

PSYCHOLOGY, PHILOSOPHY, AND INTERACTION WITH HUMANS

The broadest assertion that can be made about Ylii psychology

and philosophy is that it is exceedingly conservative by human standards. Not surprisingly, this is a direct outgrowth of the environmental and physiological realities of Ylii existence.

Although the Ylii trisexual arrangement significantly reduces the risks that humans associate with reproduction, it does not alter the fact that Ylii never deliver more than one young over a combined gestation period of 11 months. Furthermore, the "chain of reproduction" is more complex (requiring three rather than two participants), making it more fragile; the removal of any of the three participants will result in reproductive failure. Consequently, Ylii reproduction is a slow process that is still quite vulnerable to all sorts of disasters. The bottom line, then, is that (similar to humans) the first roots of Ylii society are grounded in assuring adequate care and protection for the young and for pregnant adults. As a strictly nonpredatory, herbivorous species, this led the Ylii to an extremely conservative approach to food gathering and defense.

The polytaxic arrangement of Ylii society also intensifies Ylii tendencies toward social conservatism. Place and role in one's society is largely predetermined. Furthermore, the complex rules of a polytaxic society and of trisexual parenting and family groupings force developing Ylii to tread carefully and cautiously.

The Ylii conservatism has also been reinforced by the postwar eugenics work of the Deltas. The traits removed from the Gammas—but most particularly, the Alphas—were essential to a balanced Ylii society. The orthodox Ylii were too overwhelmed by the horror of the war to realize that their society *needed* a reactionary element. Instead, they excised this very capability.

The result was more than just a reduction of aggressive tendencies in Alphas and Gammas; it was a decided trend toward social stagnation. The adventurous Alphas now seemed more content to stay in known environs, to explore less boldly, to raise fewer scientific questions that had spurred the Ylii on to some of their best and brightest discoveries. Acceptance of things as they are became the uncontested mindset of the Ylii.

This attitude underlies the Ylii approach to health and medicine. The Delta healers are quite capable surgeons and biogeneers. Their expertise lies with recombinant DNA therapies, but they only use these capabilities to heal injuries or infectious diseases. Congenital, inherited, or other "innate" health failures are left untreated, although any discomfort to the afflicted is alleviated. A human seeing this for the first time might perceive this as being profoundly cruel, but it is in fact a result of the Ylii worldview.

The Ylii care deeply for those among them who are plagued with an innate illness, but their philosophy stresses harmony with the natural order of things, rather than the preeminent importance of individual lives. Consequently, they perceive an innate illness as a part of the natural order, and are thereby bound not to interfere with it. Conversely, the Ylii see the repairing of damage to be consistent with natural behavior; individual creatures attempt to heal themselves, and social animals rally to the aid of the infected or injured.

Ylii conservatism is also reflected in Ylii language, which emphasizes precision and functional construction. The complex social patterns of Ylii culture make it inevitable that each individual will have to describe and distinguish many different relationships between persons. Additionally, some of these relationships are almost identical structurally, but have vastly divergent social connotations. The necessary distinctions are achieved through increased emphasis upon the importance and definitive detail of labels, or "names." However, the vocabulary is tremendous, since terms do not change meaning according to "context." In Ylii, there is no such

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thing as context, and consequently, there is really no such thing as Ylii "humor." The closest thing that Ylii experience to laughter or amusement would be analogous to the Victorian notion of being "charmed" or "delighted." Ylii would probably interpret human laughter as a sign of anger (or possibly gastronomic distress).

For the Ylii, many human concepts will be utterly alien, odd, or downright alarming. Ylii have no word for *murder*. Their closest equivalents—roughly corresponding to *manslaughter*, *assassination*, and *war-killing*—are not shaded by the concept of domestic premeditation that underscores the human concept of murder. Similarly, the Ylii do not even have a concept faintly resembling the human values known as *disgusting* or *lofty*. The Ylii perception of the universe is that all things fit, and therefore, all things are to be as they are. Individual Ylii are not wont to pass aesthetic judgments when determining the worth of a thing. Consequently, a whole category of human adjectives—here represented by *disgusting* and *lofty*—are meaningless to them.

Many human concepts—such as covetousness, gluttony, exploitation, competition—are known to the Ylii only because of their three centuries of contact with the Kafers, in whom they observed such behaviors. Humans may not find the comparison very flattering, but that's the truth of the matter.

In all fairness, humans may have some problems understanding a number of Ylii attitudes, particularly the sometimes chilling aspects of their social pragmatism. To humans, this may look like the ultimate in depersonalized, clockwork autocracy. However, to the Ylii their adherence to—and acceptance of—this system is as natural as a human's self-preservation instinct. No Ylii is complying unwillingly; no one is getting cheated or exploited. This is simply how Ylii society works. Consequently, humans may also find that the Ylii have a different view on the importance of individuals. Ylii revere each individual, much the same way we are grateful to each cell in our body, but this does not alter the social knowledge that certain Ylii are more expendable than others.

HUMAN/YLII ALLIANCE

Clearly, the Ylii need allies if they wish to survive the continuing aggression of the Kafers. Despite projects to reintroduce aggressiveness into Gammas and the development of an effective remote fighter (the *Fastball*—see future parts of the adventure "Operation Back Door" for details), the Ylii simply do not have the numbers or temperamental predisposition to mount a fast, effective war effort against the Kafers.

One of the major paralyzers of the current Ylii defense initiative is that many of the Deltas (once again) see the Kafers as behaving in accord with their nature; the species is doing what it evolved to do. However, unlike the last time, the Kafers are not just a potential threat—they are a proven hazard that is threatening to exterminate the entire Ylii race. So the Deltas are compelled to ask themselves: Is it the natural fate of the Ylii to be exterminated? Is this the Ylii role in the events of the universe? Or—as some are beginning to wonder—must they fight back, and thereby take a natural step forward in their own evolution?

To humans, this debate may seem ludicrous, but it is serious business to the Ylii. And resolution is difficult, since the Deltas eliminated the aggressive Alpha traits that would have galvanized thought and action in the face of such a threat.

This is where the influence of first contact with humans may have a profound impact upon the Ylii as a race. Certainly, upon learning that the modern Ylii believe that their forebears "removed" the aggressive instincts of at least one genus, some human is likely to ask whether in fact the ancient Ylii—in tampering with some of the genera—destroyed the very thing they wanted to create: *natural* balance. This is a crucial perspective that the Ylii need to consider, and contact with humans—and their value system—will help the Ylii make that critical conceptual jump.

However, there is an equally likely—and efficacious—outlook that more conservative Ylii thinkers are likely to embrace (humans may find it somewhat odd—or even repulsive). This view would perceive humanity as the "defender" species that must now be integrated into Ylii society!

Although this may seem a strange conceptual turn, one must remember that the Ylii do not see themselves as a "race." Each genus is physically and mentally disparate. Consequently, their collective "identity" has nothing to do with biological/genetic conformity.

Furthering the perspective that suggests "adopting" humanity into Ylii society is the alluring fact that the humans have come along just when their protective tendencies were needed. From the Ylii viewpoint, conflict (and therefore, fighting) is evidently natural for humans. Consequently, it is all too simple for the more orthodox Deltas to see current events as a parallel to the prehistoric evolution of the relationship between the Epsilons and Gammas—with the humans cast in the role of the less-aware, but physically imposing, protector-Gammas. In this equation, the Kafers are the new and dangerous predators that must be discouraged from attacking.

It is important to note that any human offerings beyond military alliance (such as trade and cultural exchange) will be seen as an invitation to the kind of "social amalgamation" that underlies the more orthodox Ylii view. Not really understanding the human notion of sovereign states and commercial transactions, the Ylii will assume that the humans are following the polytaxic paradigm that shapes all Ylii thought and perception. Understanding the human political notions of "united, yet separate," and "cooperative, yet self-determining," will require a colossal conceptual leap on the part of the Ylii. To them, these ideas are every bit as logical as assertions that up is down, and black is white.

THE RETURN OF THE DEFENDER

However, some Ylii already exist who may be more ready to understand humans than the Deltas or even the normal Alphas: a new (or, actually, very old) Alpha species, the *defender*.

The defender species is actually an evolutionary throwback to the original, prewar dominant Alpha-Alpha strain. After almost 300 years of Kafer conflict and fears of extinction, the Ylii genetic pool has undone what was done to it by the ancient Deltas who biogeneered the aggressiveness traits out of the Alphas.

The new defenders are no larger than the modern Alpha-Alphas and are similarly colored. However, they tend to be somewhat more intelligent, more goal-oriented, and more outspoken. However, the Ylii—including the defenders themselves—have not yet realized that these temperamental changes actually herald the reemergence of the original Alpha species.

The other major impact of human-Ylii contact will be the way that Alpha defenders gravitate toward humans, their philosophies, and the comparatively radical idea that the Ylii must accept that moral dilemma is part of the natural process of all sophonts, and that ecological and/or genetic engineering is not always the answer to social problems.

By clustering around humans, the defenders will increasingly come into contact with each other and become a distinct, cohesive voice in Ylii affairs. This, in turn, will prompt investigation by more Deltas, who will begin to realize that the defenders are not just oddly outspoken Alpha-Alphas. Rather, they are the welcome throwback to the original Alpha—now to be labeled as the defender species. ♀

This article expands upon basic data that was first presented in the Kafer Sourcebook, by William H. Keith, whose work is gratefully acknowledged. While it is not necessary to possess the sourcebook to run adventures involving the Ylii, the author highly recommends it as a source of deeper understanding about the Kafer-Ylii interaction, as well as some features of Ylii physiology.

CHALLENGE

Briefs

A GATHERING EVIL: A novel of deceit, paranoia, shadowy conspiracies and unspeakable horror, set in the world of *Dark Conspiracy*. By Michael A. Stackpole. GDW: 2150. \$4.95.

STAND & DIE, The Battle of Borodino: Stop the Third Reich in this fascinating boxed board wargame. The Germans must be held, or Moscow will fall. GDW: 0118. \$60.

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AVAILABLE FROM ICE are *Black Guard* and *Black Guard* miniatures (*Silent Death*); *War Law* and *Rolemaster Companion V (Rolemaster)*; *Bladestorm*; *Classic Organizations (HERO)*; and *Minas Ithil (Middle Earth)*.

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AVALON HILL presents *Attack Sub* (a game of tense undersea warfare) and *Blackbeard* (a new boardgame that recreates the golden age of piracy).

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nal #2, featuring information and adventures centering around starmercs and Vargr corsairs. Future volumes will be 104 pages, released biannually. DGP's next product release is *The Mega Traveller Alien Vol. II: Solomani & Aslan*, available during the summer convention season. Contact Digest Group Publications, 515 Willow Ave., Woodburn, OR 97071-2109.

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TWILIGHT: 2000, the computer game, will be released in June, designed by Paragon Software and marketed and distributed by MicroProse Software, Inc. Other titles include *Mega Traveller I, Space: 1889*, and the upcoming *Mega Traveller II*.

TSR introduces the new *Dungeons and Dragons* game in May. Features several new, full-color items, including 64 flip cards, a rule book, a DM screen, character record sheets, stand-up characters, four adventure folders, dice, and a huge dungeon filled with monsters.

NAARP (National Association for the Advancement of Role-Playing Inc.) is comprised of game players who want to promote their hobby. Write to NAARP, PO Box 2752, Chapel Hill, NC 27515.

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STEVE JACKSON GAMES' recent releases include *GURPS Psi-Tech*, *Deluxe Toon*, and *GURPS China*.

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NUMBERRUNNER

By Michael A. Stackpole



I felt like I was trapped in one of those math problems: Wolf, sprinting south through the alley at 40 kph, has 50 meters to the street and safety. The car, going south at 100 kph, is 100 meters from the street in the same alley. How long will it be before a steel-belted massage ruins Wolf's day?

Leaping over a grease-stained box oozing something noxious at the corners, I figured that my speed meant I was traveling 40,000 meters per hour, or 666.6 meters a minute, or 11.1 meters per second. That put me approximately five seconds from Westlake and a vague chance at being able to walk home under my own power.

The Acura Toro, cruising down the alley behind me with a piece of newsprint fluttering from its radio antenna like a flag, boasted 100,000 meters per hour. That put it at 277.7 meters per second. Roughly translated that meant it would be through me faster than the curry I'd eaten the night before—a distinctly unpleasant prospect. The calculations checked and left no doubt.

That's why I hate math.

That's why I like magic.

The Old One howled with glee as I let him share his wolfborn speed and strength with me. I stooped in the middle of the alley and yanked up the heavy bronze manhole cover. The driver, thinking I meant to drop into the sewer to escape him, punched the accelerator and centered his slender sports car on me.

Like a matador with a metal cape, I cut to my right, but let the manhole cover hang in space where I had been. The lower edge hit the windscreen about halfway down and shattered the glass like it was a soap bubble. The disc began to somersault, end over end, doing its best to turn the hardtop Toro into a convertible. It had better success with the driver, ensuring that while he might have lived fast and died young, he would not leave a pretty corpse.

The Toro hit the alley wall pretty hard. Sparks shot up from where the fiberglass body scraped away to metal, then the scarlet speedster rolled out into traffic. A Nissan Jackrabbit hit it going east, while a Honda truck rolled over its nose. Nothing exploded and no flames erupted, but the Jackrabbit's driver did vomit when he yanked open the Toro's door. I think he wanted to give the Toro's driver a piece of his mind, but ended up getting pieces of the driver's all over his white pants.

I took one last look at the Acura as I left the alley and turned down toward the Sound. I didn't recognize it or the half-second glimpse I'd had of the driver's face while it was still in one piece. It wasn't the first time a professional had come after me with intensive homicidal mayhem on his mind, not

by a long shot.

It was, however, the first time it took less than a full day for someone to decide to off me.

New records like that tend to make me nervous.

Cutting back and forth through the streets gave me the time I needed to make sure no one was following me. I did see another Toro, which spooked me a bit, but only because it was white and looked like a ghost of the car I'd killed. Other than that, my trip through the heart of Seattle's urban gray jungle showed me nothing I'd not seen a million times before.

My haphazard course brought me into the area that had been my old stomping grounds. Normally I'd avoid that area if I were travelling with anything less than an army because the local gang and I did not get along too well. The Halloweeners—*Homo sapiens ludicrous*—were led by Charles the Red, but he'd been feeling poorly for the latter half of the summer. That allowed me to go where I wanted without being hassled.

As I entered the old neighborhood, I suddenly found myself wishing for the return of hostility. A stretch of Westlake from 7th Avenue to 6th Avenue had gotten a significant toasting during the Night of Fire. I remember the blaze rather well, as I relive that evening in more nightmares than I care to count. Every fragment of that frightful landscape was burned into my memory in exquisite detail.

Standing at ground zero I couldn't recognize a thing.

All the burned-out cars had been moved. Buildings had been refaced, and the tarmac was more level and pristine than I'd ever seen it. Old boarded-up apartments were refurbished and, if the window decorations were any indication, already occupied with tenants. All the little grotty businesses on the street level had been replaced with sharp-looking boutiques that had awnings.

And not a single streetlight had a hooker grafted to it.

Looking at the place where I'd grown up, I finally understood the meaning of the word *desecration*.

From deep inside me, in that lightless cave where the Wolf Spirit chooses to dwell, the Old One growled deeply.

Now you know what I saw in the Sleeping Time. Your people, Longtooth, they destroyed the lands I loved. They crushed my people and savaged my world. And for what?

"So you can complain."

"Excuse me, young man?" An old woman with a dowager's hump stopped in front of me and let her little metal grocery cart come to a rest. "Did you say something to me?"

I smiled at her. "No, I'm sorry. I was talking



to myself."

She squinted her eyes, and I half-expected her to recognize me. Something did flash through her eyes, and I desperately searched for a name to attach to her face, but I came up a blank. She, on the other hand, pointed at my tie. "We owe you a great vote of thanks."

I cocked an eyebrow. "Excuse me?"

She jabbed my tie again. "You do work for Tucker and Bors, don't you?"

For at least this week, if I survive it. "Yes. Sorry, I just started with them."

"Oh." She smiled in a kindly way. "Your company oversaw the rebuilding of this neighborhood. Did everything very fast. You'd not know it to look at it, but this place used to be horrible."

"I can believe it." I smiled at her, then stepped into the street. "Good evening, ma'am."

My smile grew as I saw a familiar narrow doorway with a pumpkin glaring down at me from above it. Tucker and Bors might have renewed this bit of urbanity after the Night of Fire, but there were some institutions here that were too sacred to be touched and too disgusting to die. The Jackal's Lantern was one of them.

I pulled open the door and reveled in the wall of smoke that poured over me. True, I'd never liked the place when I lived here, and the Halloweeners would have cut my heart out for invading their stronghold, but the Lantern was a life preserver to a drowning man. I let the door swing shut behind me and rubbed my hands together. *Who says you can't come home again?*

Well, whoever said it was right. The Lantern might have been too sacred to touch and too disgusting to die, but apparently it wasn't that hard to buy out.

The smoke didn't cling to my flesh like a toxic fog because it came from a smoke machine. The only light in the place still came from orange and black plastic pumpkins, but the wattage of the bulbs had been upped so you could see more than three feet into the bar. They'd left the car fenders wrapped around the pillars the way I remembered, but all of them sparkled with a new coat of chrome. Barbed-wire jewelry still adorned various parts of mannequins, but all the rust had been polished off it and the razor wire was duller than your average chiphead's sense of reality. They still used cable drums as tables, but thick coats of epoxy sealed them and the fossilized graffiti

left behind from when real people used to populate the place.

A fresh-faced girl walked up to me and smiled. The two dark triangles surrounding her eyes pointed down and an upward-pointing one hid her nose, but they'd been drawn in a dark green makeup, not the black the Halloweeners had demanded. Her clothing, while stylishly tattered, had obviously been washed within the last week. Instead of looking like a zombie summoned from beyond the veil to serve in the Jackal's Lantern, she looked like a creature from the Casper the Friendly Ghost school of haunting.

"Welcome to Jack O's Lantern," she smiled.

Something inside me died. "Jack O's Lantern?"

"The very same. Table for one?"

I blinked twice, then shook my head. "I'm meeting someone. A guy, mid-40s...."

Her nose wrinkled in distaste. "In the back. He's nursing a beer."

I smiled. "Bring us both another."

Leaving her to traipse through the corpgEEKs in synthleather trying to look tough at the bar, I made my way toward the back. Even though I didn't like the changes, I had to admit the added light was an advantage. I'd never noticed how big the place really was, or how tall the scarecrow crucified on the back wall really was. Of course the smiley face didn't really suit him, but not many people got this far back.

I slid into the booth and noticed my name was still carved on the table. Even the nine lines beneath it had been left intact. "Hi, Dempsey. How's it going?"

Dempsey gave me a nonchalant shrug. He's one of those guys who looks like absolutely everyone else in the world—you'd forget him in a second if you had no reason to remember him. That, and the fact that he knows people who know just about everything or everything in the world, make him very good at what he does. Dempsey is a private eye, and for someone who's got no magic and no chrome, he's lasted a lot longer than he has any right to have lasted.

"Life goes on."

"Easy for you to say." I laughed lightly. "Dropping cold into the corp world means I have to wake up during this thing called morning."

Dempsey kept both his hands wrapped around his sweating beer bottle and appeared not to hear what I'd said. "I've done some checking, just like you asked."

"And?"

Another shrug lifted the shoulders of his Kevlar-lined trenchcoat. "There are plenty of folks who'd love to take a shot at Tucker and Bors for what they did to the Lantern here, but no one has anything that suggests TAB is angry at the Ancients. Moreover,

there are no antimetahuman groups with ties into TAB. This city positively stinks with Humanis Policlub members, but TAB is as clean as can be in that department."

I chewed my lower lip. "What are the chances some snake is living under a rock you haven't overturned yet?"

Dempsey showed no concern over my having questioned his ability. "Slim and none. The word whispered in some high dark places is that Andrew Bors had a daughter who goblinized right after the awakening. Her daddy got her out of Seattle and has her staying in a mansion up on Vachon Island. After that, employees were screened for their feelings about metahumans through their employment questionnaire. You show signs of being a bigot and you're out."

"Damn." I'd been inserted into Tucker and Bors because the Ancients had gone to Dr. Richard Raven with their suspicions that TAB was backing gangs making attacks on them. As the Ancients are a rather powerful and militarily adroit street gang, the invasion of TAB headquarters was a distinct possibility, and Raven started to work on the problem to forestall that from happening.

The waitress arrived with our beers, and I handed her my company-issued credit card. She looked at it and laughed. "You should have told me you were one of us."

I frowned. "Come again?"

"You're a TABbie, just like me. TABbies get a discount." She scooped up the bill and headed back toward the front.

The Old One did not like being called a TABbie, but I managed to keep him in check. "Dempsey, I need you to keep digging on the Policlub angle. This whole thing smacks of race hatred to me. Something has to be there."

He nodded. "Anything else?"

"Yeah. I need you to find out if anyone has a hit out on me."

"You mean besides LaPlante?"

"Yeah, besides LaPlante." It was an open secret that Etienne LaPlante had a contract out on Dr. Raven and any of his associates. It was also well known that hurting a single hair on one of our heads would set Kid Stealth on the assassin—proving once and for all that capital punishment, if applied quickly and without mercy, could be a deterrent to crime. "Some Gillette in a Toro tried to interest me in tarmac fusion. I declined. He flipped his lid and had an accident."

Dempsey took it all in stride. "Do I still relay information through Valerie Valkyrie?"

I thought for a moment, then shook my head. "Takes too much time. If you get anything on the hit angle, call TAB and ask for Keith Wolverton."

"And if Mr. Wolverton is not at his desk, and I want to leave a message?"

"Say a relation is coming to visit. The greater the danger, the more distant the

relative."

The detective's eyes focused distantly, then came back with a twinkle in them. "So if I say Adam and Eve are coming to see you?"

"I'll know Stealth is free-lancing again." I glanced at my watch and slid out of the booth. "Stay and have another if you want. I have to go meet with Raven."

Dempsey shook his head and left the booth. "If I stick around here, they'll come by and give me a new trenchcoat."

"It's hell being a fashion trendsetter." I looked at the refurbished bar and shuddered. "I think this is the first time I've been in here and I've *not* felt like taking a bath afterward."

"It's the only time I've not *needed* a bath afterward," Dempsey quipped. "Those were the days."

I signed for the tab up at the front, then walked a couple of blocks to the parking garage where I'd left my Fenris. The flat black sports coupe waited for me in a darkened corner of the basement like a feral creature hiding from the light. I disarmed the antitheft devices—you only forget to do that *once*—and climbed into the cockpit. I punched in the ignition code and cruised out into the light evening traffic.

The trip to Raven's headquarters took longer than it should have because of the series of turns and cutbacks I used to make sure no one was following me. With Raven and the rest of his crew having done things to anger one or more powerful individuals in the SeaTac sprawl, paranoia became a survival trait. Just because Kid Stealth would descend like a bloody avenger on anyone bothering us, it did not mean we were inviolate. Insanity becomes a courtroom defense because lots of folks do irrational things, and I had no desire to have bits of me in baggies labeled Exhibit A.

I parked the Fenris in the basement garage below Raven's brownstone, then took the stairs two at a time as I climbed to the main floor. Adjusting my tie and rolling down my sleeves, I marched straight to Raven's office and paused in the doorway. "Would have been here sooner, Doc, but someone wanted me to play immovable object to their irresistible force."

Raven leaned back in his black leather chair, pressed his hands together and rested his index fingers against his lips. Seated there in a custom-built chair, behind his individually handcrafted desk, he looked normally proportioned. The pointed tips of Elven ears jutted up through his long black hair as the only clues to his Elven heritage. If not for that, his coppery skin, high cheekbones and broad-shouldered, muscular build would have marked him as an Amerindian.

His dark eyes focused above and beyond

me, but I found myself entranced by their steady gaze. The blues and reds weaving through them in an aurora-like fashion flickered past in what I imagined was a mirror of how quickly thoughts strobed through his brain. The lights slowed, then he closed his eyes, and I felt myself in control of my own mind again.

"Interesting." His hands fell away from his mouth as he leaned forward and stood. "I will want a full report later, of course, but I should introduce you to our clients. This is Sting and her lieutenant, Green Lucifer."

Elven women are generally described with plant terms, but with Sting you'd have to make that an industrial plant. Sure, she was long and lean like most of them, but you could only describe her as willowy if you thought rebar swayed in light breezes. I heard she had a temper to match her fiery mane, and her yellow Opticon eyes certainly reflected none of the warmth in her soul—if she had one. She had an edge to her that made it clear why she was running the Ancients, but likewise told me why, though attractive, I didn't find her seductive.

"My pleasure," I smiled. I didn't offer her my hand. I knew her street name had been earned because of the metal claws that could shoot from the backs of her hands and rake through flesh like it was water.

"So you're Wolfgang Kies. Makes sense, I guess."

Before I could even begin to work my way through the maze of tone and inference in her words, the nearly imperceptible stiffening of her partner drew my attention to him. Unlike Raven, Green Lucifer had the typical starveling build of an Elf. His chin, or underabundance of it, suggested a character flaw that the burning light in his gray eyes used as fuel. Green Lucifer clearly had not liked the fact that Sting had paid me any notice at all, and he was aching for any opening to exert his territorial rights. That told me they were more than just partners in power, and that Green Lucifer was the jealous type.

I immediately put him on the list of folks I didn't want in possession of a chainsaw while my back was turned.

"Mr. Kies or 'Mr. Wolverton,'" he began with mock sincerity, "what have you learned?"

I stared at him for a second, then turned to face Raven. "I spent most of the day getting situated. Valerie's transferring Mike Kant to Shanghai was accepted without question, as was my being sent in to replace him. Ms. Terpstra acts more like a schoolmarm than a supervisor, but Bill Frid is helping me get squared away in Kant's office. In fact, I've not really had to do anything because Frid had done it all while showing me what I'm supposed to do."

Raven sank back in his chair again. "Good.

What about this attempt on your life?"

The mention of an assassination attempt caused the fourth individual in the room to take conscious notice of the conversation. Kid Stealth, sitting back on his haunches, turned his head to watch me. The light flashed off his Zeiss eyes and his brows nearly touched as they pointed down at his nose. I knew better than to think he was concerned about me—he could see I survived—but his concentration came from his desire to hear how a rival assassin had failed in his job.

Having Stealth crouched behind Green Lucifer, and Greenie surreptitiously trying to keep an eye on him, made me feel loads better.

"I found a couple of things in some files and made copies of them. I dropped them into my trash basket, then bagged the litter and dropped it in the disposal chute. After work I went back around to the alley and fished the bag out." I reached into my back pocket and retrieved the folded-over papers. "They're several pages of receipts Kant got while, as nearly as I can figure, making money drops to the folks fighting the Ancients."

Green Lucifer's face darkened. "That is hardly a substantial amount of evidence, Mr. Kies." Scorn rolled from his words like crude oil off a duck's back.

I continued to speak to Raven alone. "It has to be something because a razorboy in an Acura Toro mistook me for an on-ramp."

"Did you get anything from him?"

"Sorry, Doc, I'm not a necromancer. Chances are my cover is blown. I think we should consider taking me out of there."

Raven nodded solemnly. "If you think it is best."

Green Lucifer hammered a fist into the arm of his red leather chair. "This is too important and has taken too long to set up just to let him drop it like this. We are being systematically exterminated. Order him to remain in place."

Raven leaned forward and rested his forearms on the desk. "Being new here, you do not understand..."

"I understand this human operative of yours has no stake in or concern about Elven lives being lost." Green Lucifer gave me a gray-eyed stare that started the Old One growling defiantly in the back of my mind. "He's your employee, order him back in."

"You do *not* understand," Raven repeated slowly. Threat arced like lightning in his words, and anger reverberated like thunder in his voice. "These people are not my employees. They are my aides, my companions, my friends, and my allies. They work *with* me, not *for* me. What they do, they do because I ask, not order. I have never found myself called to doubt their



judgment or their courage or their compassion. If Wolf believes his life is in danger, then I believe that as well."

Green Lucifer managed to hold his composure better than the other half-dozen people I've seen invoke Raven's wrath like that. He settled back into his chair like a steel beam being bent by the inexorable progress of a glacier, but his defiance did not drain away. Still, he knew better than to open his mouth.

His tone lightening only slightly, Doc continued. "Wolf is fully cognizant of your situation. He knows that your alternative to having us attempt to solve this problem peacefully is for the Ancients to wage war with the Tucker and Bors Company, and that is not likely to be pretty. It is for the sake of your lives, and the lives of the innocent men and women who might be caught in any crossfire, that we began this investigation. Wolf knows I would not ask him to return there unless I felt the risk was justified, but if he chooses to decline my request, I will think no less of him, and my confidence in him will not diminish."

I'd have said I was leaving Seattle for Japan if I thought it would deepen the scowl on Green Lucifer's face, and I knew Raven would back my play unquestioningly. I started piecing together the perfect way to drop that bit of information on Greenie, but I caught Sting's eye and saw a hopeless determination in her expression and shifting posture.

I knew the Ancients had gone through a nasty battle recently with another street gang. The Ancients, supposedly under direction from someone in TAB, had tried to expand their territory into the turf held by the Meat Junkies. The battle got nasty fast, and looked really grim for the Ancients when an Ork sniper killed the Elves' previous leader. At that moment, however, Green Lucifer smoked the sniper and used his rifle to ace the Meat Junkies' top dog.

Both gangs retreated to lick their wounds, but over the following weeks other gangs had taken shots at the Ancients. That wouldn't have attracted any attention, but no one was picking on the similarly weakened Meat Junkies, and the Junkies themselves started sporting very new and very expensive guns and bikes. As TAB had stopped bankrolling the Ancients, anyone with more than two working brain cells could deduce a shift in corporate policy that was not beneficial to the Elves.

Sting clearly knew her gang had to deal

with the problem of TAB's shifting loyalties or the Ancients would become fodder for the "Obits and Old Bits" newsfax files. If Raven couldn't help her—and looking for outside help, even from another Elf, showed how desperate she saw the situation to be—she had to go to war. Given that TAB, like any other multinat, had its own army, long odds for betting on the gang were not hard to find.

Even knowing that, she would have no choice. If she didn't go to war, she'd be replaced by someone who would. The outcome would be the same, but when you whisper, "I told you so" from inside a grave, very few folks listen or care.

"Actually, Doc, I have Dempsey looking into the contract angle. That could be a shortcut to whoever is ramrodding this campaign. If I bow out, the bait will be gone. I'll just be more careful." I glanced over at Sting. "As I'm replacing Kant, and he appeared to be the bossman's courier of choice, I should see some action soon. If we let it slip that you're bidding on a shipment of arms coming into Seattle, our man should move to procure that shipment before you."

Raven smiled. "If someone wants you dead, Dempsey will find out. Good choice, Wolf."

I painted a wide smile on my face and proudly displayed it for Green Lucifer. He started to get a bit restive in his chair, but Stealth's flesh-and-blood right arm snaked over the back of the chair and his shoulder. Pointing in my direction, it stopped a foot from Greenie's face. From the sleeve of Stealth's waist-cut coat, a blocky little deringer slid down to fill his palm. The delivery device retracted silently, then Stealth arced the gun across the room to me.

I caught it gingerly. "What's this?"

Stealth didn't exactly smile, but his expression grew as pleasant as I've ever seen it *sans* anyone actually dying in the vicinity.

"Richard said he found your being unarmed disturbing. I customized a design based on a Remington Double Derringer. I expanded the caliber to .50 and have crafted some of your 'silver' bullets to fit it. It's single action. You get two shots."

I turned the pistol over in my hand, then slipped it into my pocket. It made less of a bulge than my loose change. Getting it into TAB would not be a problem, and I could feel safe even without nearby manhole covers. "Thank you, maestro."

I knew it was loaded because Stealth wouldn't have it any other way. The Old One knew it too and snarled something derisive about my dependence upon the tainted and artificial when his tools were so pure and natural. The only problem with the Old One and the abilities he lent me in times of need was that I couldn't always be certain I would remain in control of my actions. In light of that, using a hand-detonated nuclear bomb

could be seen to have an up side.

"So what is your next step?" Green Lucifer leaned forward and perched his chin on his right hand.

"Well, tonight I'm going to go check on a former client, Lynn Ingold. That's a very important part of this case." I saw Raven suppress a smile. Lynn Ingold was a woman we had rescued from LaPlante earlier in the summer. She and I had begun to date, and I'd been planning to take her out to a Seadogs game well before the TAB problem came up. "Then, tomorrow, I return to work and wait."

His face screwed down into a sour expression as if he'd been sucking sulphur schnapps through a straw. "We cannot afford to wait long." Raven looked over at Stealth. "Kid Stealth has agreed to let it be known that he and his Redwings are just waiting for someone to start shooting at you so they can raid undefended territory. Again, this steps up the pressure on TAB and will make it easier to find out who is behind all this."

"Fine, Raven, just so long as you know we won't wait until forever." Greenie leaned back in his chair and steepled his fingers. "You have until Fri..."

Sting laid her right hand on his left arm. "You have as long as you need at this point. If things change, I will let you know about it." Greenie didn't like that very much, but he and Sting exchanged a pair of glances I can only describe as cobra and mongoose. I smiled broadly at his discomfort, earning myself a big jump on his enemies list, no doubt, and nodded to her. "We'll get you results."

"Good, Mr. Kies." She looked me up from my toes to the tippy-top of my head and back down. "Just so you know, if they do get you, Stealth will have all the help he needs in avenging you."

Damn, I just love it when women talk lethal.

Lynn didn't talk lethal to me, but she did say some other things that made me think I'd died and gone to heaven. I was tired enough in the morning that I almost slay-tested Stealth's pistol on my alarm clock. I refrained because I was too lazy to want to patch the hole I knew the bullet would leave in my wall—and that of the other two tenants on this floor—and dropped back to sleep for another half hour.

The Blavatskys downstairs woke me up for the second time. After a quick shower and shave, I headed downtown to Tucker and Bors. I arrived 10 minutes late and, as an afterthought, I considered what a good idea that might have been. I mean, all the detective simsense dramas had me believing whoever had set me up to be killed would faint when they saw me walking in.

In fact, the only person who seemed to notice me was the matronly Ms. Terpstra. She stared at me hard enough to melt my brain, but I scampered to my cubicle too quickly for her to properly focus her powers. On my monitor I read the note she had sent me precisely at 9:00:01: "Punctuality is a virtue, and the virtuous are rewarded. Those without virtue face perdition."

Bill Frid appeared at the doorway to my private domain and handed me a steaming cup of soykaf. "I see you got a perdition memo."

I accepted the soykaf and sipped. "Is that bad?"

"Naw, wait until you get an 'eternal damnation' note. That's bad. She's been in a bad mood since Rev. Roberts stopped doing video." A jovial guy, Bill's double chin and curly, blond hair made him look softer than I figured he saw himself. Right from the start I had him pegged as one of those guys who has learned all the shortcuts to getting things done. They're workhorses, and no corp could get anything done without them, but contempt for the bureaucracy barred them from ever getting into the power structure.

"You look tired. You feel okay?" he asked me.

I shrugged. "Went to the 'Dogs game last night."

"Extra innings?"

"Yeah," I smiled. "Oh, wait, you mean the game. No, just eight and a half. Mackelroy caught one on the warning track in center then threw out the runner from third on a one-hopper to end the game. It was great."

Bill sipped his soykaf. "Good, good. We'll have to take in a game some time."

I nodded. "Yeah. Let's do it when we're on some errand for old TAB and we can get them to reimburse us for the 'business lunch.'"

"I like it." He gave me a conspiratorial wink, then looked up and nodded. "The wicked witch of the paycheck is watching, so I'll get back to my workstation. If you need anything, just let me know."

"Thanks, Bill."

Left to my own devices, I had to figure out what I was supposed to do. I really had no idea what Kant's duties had been, and even Frid had been fairly vague. As nearly as I could make out, Kant was part trouble-shooter, part confidential courier. Even when I called up a log of things Kant had done in the past two weeks, it looked like the majority of his time had been spent sitting on his hands.

Fully aware that idle hands are the devil's playthings—a concept I was certain Ms. Terpstra detested—I pulled a blank manila folder from my desk drawer and placed the employment and location policy agreements I'd signed the previous day into it. I labeled the file "Wolverton, Keith" and stuck it behind

the Wolcott Trucking file.

Feeling fairly satisfied with myself, I noted, to my chagrin, that I had another two hours to kill before the roach coach arrived outside. I looked at the stack of optical data chips on the corner of the desk, but all of them dealt with statistics, math, and probability modeling, so I just couldn't bring myself to pop one of them into the computer. Making a mental note to have Valerie get me games that would work on this monster, I started exploring the Interactive Building Directory.

By the time the phone rang and saved me, I'd succeeded in memorizing the names and divisions for all TAB employees A to J in the building. "Keith Wolverton here."

"I have good news and bad news for you." Dempsey was one of the few people who sounded better on the phone than in person. "What's your pleasure?"

I saw Ms. Terpstra glowering in my direction, so I raised my voice a bit so she could hear. "Well, doctor, will the patient live?"

"Mr. Kies is in no danger, beyond those expected for a man in his line of work. Whatever symptoms he thought he had, he was mistaken."

"And the bad news."

"No one's out to ace Wolf, but there's ¥5000 on your head, Mr. Wolverton."

Someone wanted Keith Wolverton hit? Why? He didn't exist 48 hours ago. "Your source was impeccable as usual, I assume?"

Dempsey grunted out a laugh. "The grieving widow was spending the ¥500 down payment to blot out the memory of her late squeeze. Closed casket ceremony, you know."

"At least they could go for a shorter box and save money." I drank some more of the soykaf. "You have a name for the patron of this poor departed soul?"

"Are you sitting down and alone?"

I looked at my computer monitor and saw a message presenting itself to me, letter by letter. "Only my very wonderful supervisor, Ms. Terpstra, reminding me that I should not be taking personal calls via the wonders of binary magic."

"Probably safe, then. The name William Frid mean anything to you?"

I suddenly wondered if soykaf could cover the taste of arsenic. I assumed I would find out shortly. "Rings a bell. Thanks, Dempsey."

"No sweat, chummer. Tell me, is your Ms. Terpstra heavysset, first name Agnes?"

I shrugged. "Hit on the first, and an 'A' for a first initial on her nameplate. Why?"

"No real reason." I could see Dempsey smiling like a fox in some dark phone booth. "Heard that was the handle she had adopted. Always wondered where she ended up after the Mashitsutsa embezzlement scam. Watch your paycheck."

"Got it, Dempsey. I owe you bigtime."

"You'll be hearing from me."

"Anytime, bud, anytime."

I placed the receiver down and glanced over at Bill's cubicle. Braving the harsh look on Ms. Terpstra's face, I walked over there and crouched down at Bill's side. "Bill, I need some help."

His smile slowly died as the seriousness in my voice got to him. "Sure, Keith, what is it?"

I shook my head. "Not here. It's personal. I'm new in town, and there was this woman last night...."

He patted me on the shoulder. "You're right, not here. C'mon."

He led the way past the dragon lady to the men's room. We quickly checked the stalls for lurkers, then flipped the lock. Leaning back against a sink, Bill smiled with mild amusement. "Now, what's the problem?"

I shrugged. "The problem is that this woman is upset because the man you hired to kill me got dead himself in the attempt." I filled my right hand with Stealth's pistol. "That almost ruined my day. Explain to me why I don't want to ruin yours."

Bill's eyes grew wider than the bore of the pistol he was staring at. "No, no, no, you have it all wrong."

"That's correct about one of the two of us." I tore the loop-towel across the back part of the loop and started pulling it down in long lengths.

His blue pupils rolled around like a chalk mark on a cue ball. "What's that for?"

"You're going to wrap it around your head so the brains don't splatter when I shoot you." I let my smile die except for a nervous twitch at the corner that convinced him I meant business. "No need to make the janitor's job any tougher."

"Oh, God, oh, God, oh, God." Frid dropped to his knees. "I don't want to die."

"Good, then tell me everything you know about the Elves and TAB."

"What?" He looked at me with absolute terror in his eyes. "What are you talking about?"

"The Ancients."

"Who?"

"Dammit!" He flinched as I swore. "Why'd you want me killed?"

"I didn't want you killed. I just wanted you, ah, roughed up." His thick lips quivered in such a way that I knew he had to be telling the truth.

"Offering someone ¥5000 to rough me up is a bit much."

He looked crestfallen. "How was I supposed to know? I went down to Damian's and offered a guy ¥5000 to do a job, then I gave him ¥500 and the copy of your picture I got from security. I just wanted to have you put out of action for a week or so."

I frowned. "I'm still waiting for a 'why' here, chummer."

"Because I wanted your job. Kant gets all



sorts of courier jobs, and he gets bonuses." He looked down at the floor and clasped his hands in an attitude of prayer. "You have to believe me."

"No, chummer," I said tossing him the towel, "You have to convince me. What do you know about Kant's courier actions?"

"Oh, God, you're from Auditing, aren't you?" Frid wilted, and his shoulders slumped forward. "Kant said he dealt with black projects."

Black projects. Anything a corp wanted to do without the shareholders or the government knowing about it went onto the books as a black project. That meant, really, it didn't show up on the books at all. Someone funneled money to the black projects through fake projects and promotions. Given all the interlocking directorates and vertical integration within the corporate world, tracking down the source of funding for almost anything was impossible. For black projects it was that much more so.

And funding a war against the Ancients definitely sounded like a black project to me.

"Okay, Bill, let's take this slowly. Kant made three courier runs recently. One was on the 23rd of last month. This month he did one on the 7th and the other on the 12th. Enlighten me."

Sweat poured from his forehead down his face. "I don't know."

"You'll look good in a turban, you know."

"Keith, I don't know. Honest, I don't."

I dropped down onto my haunches and parked the derringer two centimeters off the tip of his nose. "You've got two strikes against you, you weasel. You figured you'd get Kant's job and his bonuses, and you still think you can swing some sort of deal out of this." I paused to let him consider how much his greed might cost him. "Well, chummer, you can. I only care about that one job. It involves Elves and only local travel."

I tapped his nose with the gun. "What will it be? True confessions, or die knowing that whatever you had for breakfast was your last meal."

"Oh, God, oh, God, oh, God. Ah, ah..." He screwed his eyes shut. "I don't know for sure, Keith. All those jobs went through Ms. Terpstra. Please believe me."

I'd seen enough men crumble in my time to know Frid's marshmallow center was leaking through all the cracks in him. He had to be telling the truth, which meant I had a new program to debug. I wouldn't have thought Ms. Terpstra capable of running a

black project, but with Dempsey's cautionary tale about her, anything was possible.

"Okay, Bill, this is the way things go down. You're going home sick, right now." The man nodded like a child promising Santa he'd be good. "If I find you've been lying to me, you can consider our little talk here the opening scene of the worst nightmare you've ever had." I slipped the gun back into my pocket. "Get out of here."

Back in the office, I leaned forward on Ms. Terpstra's desk. "Agnes, I really need to know who asked you to give Mike Kant courier jobs concerning the demise of the Ancients."

Ms. Terpstra's head jerked around as if I'd gaffed her in a gill and yanked her from the Sound. "Mr. Wolverton, I have no idea what you are talking about. How dare you address me in such a familiar manner?"

I gave her my best I-know-lots-you-don't-want-to-have-known smiles. "Is it that Tucker and Bors has a better retirement policy, or did you just tire of the Mashitsutsa corporate grind? Audits after an embezzlement can be so tedious, don't you think, Aggie?" From the sour look that answered my question, I realized that whoever had her running a black project was using the same or similar blackmail evidence to keep her in line.

"You play well, Mr. Wolverton, but you will meet your match." She gave me a cold smile. "Benbrook, Sidney M."

"Benbrook?" I frowned as I tried to remember his entry from the directory. "Benbrook is in marketing! Why would marketing have a black project?"

"Mine is not to wonder why..."

"Yeah. What you do is steal and fly." I shook my head. "Thank you for your help, Ms. Terpstra. You make me proud to be a TABbie."

Sidney Benbrook looked exactly the way you'd expect someone with that name would. The Interactive Building Directory showed me a tall, cadaverously slender man with dark hair so thin that when he combed it from right to left over his scalp it could have been deciphered by a bar-code reader. His deeply set eyes remained hidden in shadow and, along with his corpse-like pallor, accentuated the impression that he had died late in the last century.

As I entered the darkened sanctuary of his office, I knew, almost immediately, that no matter how benign or un-salesperson-like he looked, he was at the core of the problem with the Ancients.

Benbrook sat in a big padded chair centered on a raised dais at the end of a narrow canyon formed by walls of computer mainframes. Little amber and red lights flashed off and on across the faces of the machines, enclosing him in a star field with constantly

shifting constellations. Cables crisscrossed the area behind him, and one snaked out from the tangle to jack into his skull behind his left ear.

Like a spider being aware of a fly's careless tread upon its web, Benbrook swiveled his chair around toward me as I entered the room. I had not tried to be particularly quiet, but he unnerved me with his reaction to my visitation. His head came up, and his torso came around instantly, but his eyes took their time in focusing down on me. His fingers flew across the keys of an invisible computer deck. I had no doubt he was jacked in so deep that he mistook me for a Matrix icon until I failed to run from torch programs he dispatched to destroy me.

"You're Sidney Benbrook?"

"I know that. Who are you?" His voice came out as a harsh croak, as if he was entirely unused to speaking to another person. "I did not send for you."

I'd seen other wireheads who were tied even tighter to their machines, but never in a corporate setting like this. I held my hands up in the universal sign of surrender. "I am Keith Wolverton. I'm taking Kant's place. Thought we should be acquainted in case you need anything done."

"Done?"

I gave him my best hey-we're-all-in-the-know-here smile. "Aggie told me Kant did courier jobs for you—all vapor, no flash. She says there is bonus money in it, and she turned me on to the deal for a rounding error. She told me it could be dangerous, but I told her I wasn't afraid of any dandelion-chewers."

"Dande...? Yes, Elves." Benbrook froze—the only motion from his end of the room coming from the computer light show. "I find it disturbing, Mr. Wolverton, that your computer records appear never to have been tampered with. How can you explain that?"

My smile broadened. "You can figure I've made a career of keeping my nose very clean, or you can assume that I came across Kant's action independently, and I decided I would like to milk the cash cow myself for a while."

"Tucker and Bors takes a dim view of extortion, Mr. Wolverton."

"I said 'milk,' not 'slaughter.' You have been devoting significant resources to destroying a population of Elves. If you knew someone who was paying for Elven scalps, I might know people who would be willing to create a supply to satisfy that demand."

"You small-minded bigot. Elves and scalps and bounties are not important." Benbrook's eyes reflected the flashing computer lights around him. "Do you think these people might be able to get rid of the Ancients?"

I frowned. "You have me confused. You said scalps are not important, but you want someone to 'get rid of' the Ancients."

"That is correct."

"But you do not mean 'get rid of' as synonymous with kill?"

He frowned, which was rather scary given the gangrenous pallor of his skin. "I mean it as in move, dispense with, create a decreased population concentration of."

I shrugged. "That says kill to me."

"Whatever!" Fingers convulsed and danced across a virtual keyboard. "I need to effect a 10% reduction in the Elven population of the Denny Park zone by the end of the fiscal year. Is that possible?"

Denny Park marked the southwest edge of the territory the Ancients claimed as their own. Their recent battle with the Meat Junkies was over a piece of turf to the west of that area. That zone was one of the least habitable areas in the Elven enclave in Seattle, but it was the Ancient stronghold.

"Possible, yes, but that will be a very tough block of ice to salt." Something was not adding up because I wasn't hearing Humanis Policlub rhetoric coming at me. In fact, Benbrook had accused *me* of being an anti-Elf bigot. "If you don't care how I get rid of the Elves, why do you want that particular piece of real estate?"

His right hand rose from the arm of the chair and, with index finger pointing down, rotated slowly to indicate I should turn around. As I did so, a projection TV imager slid down from the false ceiling, flickered to life and shared computer graphics of Seattle with me. As I watched, the image swooped lower like a helicopter sailing down through vector-graphic canyons. As it headed north from downtown it hit a block of solid green: the Ancients' turf.

The image dissolved into a series of numbers. They scrolled past fairly quickly, but I caught bits and pieces of things. It looked to be a cost comparison between two programs. Then it shifted over into a point by point comparison of population. Outlined in red, and pulsing in time with my heartbeat, I saw the approximate number of Elves living in the Denny Park area of Seattle.

I turned back. "I still don't get it? Why are you paying to have Elves scragged?"

"It's obvious." Benbrook stared at me as if I was an idiot. "Demographics."

I remembered the opdata chips in Kant's work space, then stared at Benbrook, unbelieving. "You're killing them because of numbers?"

The red, pulsing light burned off and on in his eyes. "Those are not *just* numbers, Mr. Wolverton. They are the very lifeblood of this company. Those numbers affect our bottom line. That means those numbers determine how much we can pay you and how much you get in your pension plan and what your profit-sharing statement will look like. Those numbers are the most important numbers in the world."

Though to look at him I'd not have thought it possible, Benbrook rose from his chair and pointed a scarecrow finger at me. "You will forever be doomed to be nothing but a slave chip in the engines of industry if you fail to understand how important those numbers are. On the right you have the demographics and psychographics of the group the North American Testing Agency uses to test market our products."

His shoulders hunched, and his hands rubbed together like those of a miser aching to fondle credsticks. "They determine what we produce, when we produce it, what it tastes like, what it looks like, what it smells and feels like, and how much we can charge for it. The shift of a percentage point or two in the approval rating for a product can cause us to retool a factory or to scrap a line altogether. NATA's test group is a fickle mistress whom we labor to please, yet pay whether our results satisfy or anger."

His kindling fingers pressed spread onto his chest. "I will free us of our dependence on NATA and their group. The Denny Park district is identical to their area except for one thing: We have too many Elves. Once I can eliminate enough of the Elves, we will have our own captive market here. I can create a division that will perform like NATA, and we will wrest the dataflow away from them. Our costs will be a fraction of what they were for research, and we can charge others for using our group, which will reverse a negative cash flow in my division."

I shook myself to clear my head of his missionary message. "You want to kill Elves so you can taste-test chocolate bars in the Sprawl?"

"Crudely put, but I believe you have a grasp on reality."

"Oh, I've got more than a grasp on reality, chummer." I pointed back toward the flashing red numbers. "You're trying to lower the river when what you need to do is raise the bridge!"

He shook his head. "I tried that. I paid the Ancients to take more territory outside the Denny Park district. It would have created a more even distribution, but they failed."

"No!" I slowly started drifting toward his silicon altar. "Have you seen what TAB did on Westlake?"

Benbrook paused as if unable to remember the projector unable to comprehend why I would mention it. "That was the construction division. They are not my concern. Irrelevant."

"Very relevant, Mr. Benbrook." I channeled the Old One's growl of outrage into my voice. "You are seeking to destroy something when you could make it all so much better. You are blowing a perfect chance to do more than just develop one new division."

His hawk stare bored in at me as he slowly sat. "Explain."

As he called my bluff I panicked for a half-second. The Old One came to my rescue as he translated all the demographic statistics into his own view of the world. Suddenly I saw Seattle as it must have been before men set foot on the continent. The Old One and his brothers knew where the deer would drink. They knew what plants would flower or bear fruit and when—attracting animals upon which they could prey. Had it been in their power they would have created more tree stands to keep their animals safe in the winter and more meadows to feed them in the summer.

"It's fairly simple, really," I smiled. "You can rebuild sections of the Denny Park area. Encourage people that will even up the demographic mix to move in. You'll have your own little population from which to draw focus groups. You can have your own stores so you can test product placement. You can employ some of the people so you can raise or lower their income to a level appropriate for whatever you want to test. You can create your own little world, and it will pump out streams of data for you to analyze, all the while saving money."

His face had begun to become positively animated as I started to talk. I thought I almost had him with the "streams of data" line, but something changed. The light in his eyes died. Settling his angular, skeletal body into his chair, he became an electronic spider again.

"Projections show the cost of building up that area will be more expensive than wiping out the Ancients."

I drew the pistol. "Factor in the cost of your own funeral."

He slowly shook his head. "Employee contract, page two, section VI, paragraph three, prohibits one employee from threatening another with deadly force."

"I quit."

"Now that I think of it, your suggestion has some merit."

I nodded solemnly. "Those expenses can be charged back against the fees of clients who use your market testing. And you can make the changes through the construction divisions, guaranteeing the head of that division a tidy profit on the construction work, while the work is done at a below market rate for you."

Benbrook's head started bobbing in time with music that I could not hear. "Yes, that could work. As you said, I would have focus groups and store fronts to test product placement." His eyes flicked up at me. "These people would have children, and I would have to educate them, correct?"

"You better believe it."

"Excellent. We diversify into children's products."

I winked at him. "You build schools and sports facilities. You improve Denny Park and..."



"And we create sports leagues for employees. We get them exercising, which will cut health insurance costs. And they will all be wearing clothing they buy from us that has our trademark names emblazoned on it."

"Now you're cooking."

He stopped hearing me. "And we create brand-name loyalty indoctrination centers. We inculcate the children in the ways of only buying our products. We can wire every home for closed-circuit televisions that will display our ads..."

His eyes started to glaze over orgasmically, so I cocked the pistol and brought him out of it prematurely. "Hey, sparky, you also have to pay the Ancients to patrol the area so no one can infiltrate it, right?"

Benbrook hesitated, then nodded. "We can get them uniforms...."

"Do you *really* want to see what they would do with uniforms?"

"No, perhaps not. Plausible deniability can cut liability." His eyes went blank for a moment, then he smiled. "Yes, I think this has a higher profit potential because of the retail sales and the information development angles. It will work."

"Good for you." My eyes narrowed and became the same silver shade as the wolf's head pendant I wear at my throat. "Listen, Moses, there's only one more thing you have to do before you can lead your people to the Promised Land."

"And that is?"

"You want to adjust the environment of a profit center because the psychographics are set to take it into a negative growth curve." I gave him a smile that was all mayhem and arson.

"That sounds unsatisfactory. I'm sure, in return for your service here, I can do something about it." His hands hung in space as if poised over the keyboard. "Explain."

I smiled. "Ever heard of a place called Jack O's Lantern?"

I breathed in and got a nose full of noxious vapor that convinced me someone was burning tires for warmth in the middle of the Jackal's Lantern. Of course I couldn't see that far into the place, but I felt happy enough that I was willing to stumble blindly toward the back. Lucky for me, a blond waitress named Pia saw me groping about and slipped her arm through mine.

"The Elves said they were waiting for you, Wolf." Despite the black makeup turning her face into a nightmare pumpkin mask, the smile she gave me made my socks roll right up and down. "I can be softer than she is, and I'm much prettier than he is."

"No disputing that." I returned her smile. "It's business with them, darling."

"All work and no play will make Wolf a dull boy."

"And you're the whetstone that will sharpen me up?"

"We can rub our bodies against each other and see." She laughed lightly as we reached the back of the bar. "A Henry Weinhard's for you, Mr. Kies?"

"In the bottle, no glass." I slid into the booth across from Sting and Green Lucifer. "Anything for you?"

Sting shook her head, and Pia vanished in the billowing cloud of smoke. Green Lucifer wrinkled his nose, looked around, then snarled at me, "Why did you demand we come to this dump?"

"I wanted to see you in your natural habitat." I glanced over at Sting. "Here's the deal: TAB is going to rebuild some housing in your turf and generally upgrade the Denny Park area. They'll pay you to keep things under control. The new housing will go half to folks already there and half to people they bring in."

As Sting considered what I had told her, and Green Lucifer practiced his "I'm mean and nasty" look on me, Pia arrived with my beer. I saw she'd written her number on the napkin she put beneath the sweating bottle, and I gave her a wink. I twisted the cap off the bottle with my left hand, drank, then set the bottle down again and frowned at Green Lucifer. "Well, pay her."

He blinked his big Elf eyes at me. "What?"

"And tip her well, too. I'm a big tipper."

Pia smiled and gave me a wink. "Thank

you, Mr. Kies."

Green Lucifer became obstreperous. "If you think..."

Sting nudged him with an elbow. Grimacing, Green Lucifer pulled out a wad of Elven scrip and peeled off enough to pay for my beer. A light cough from Sting tripled the amount, and all of it ended up deposited on the tray Pia carried. Smiling broadly and nodding her thanks to Sting, Pia retreated from sight.

I drank a bit more. "What do you think?"

Sting's eyes narrowed into lifeless amber wedges. "Do you think the deal will be honored for long?"

I shrugged, and my left thumb traced the letters of my name in the table. "If they invest in the project as they are supposed to, yes, they will stay there for a long time. If not, we'll know soon enough to forestall more trouble of the type you've been through. It is chancy, but if Raven thought it was going to blow up in our faces, he wouldn't have asked you to meet me here. Is it a go?"

Sting nodded her assent.

"Good." I started to smile and feel proud of myself, but Green Lucifer went and spoiled it. His face scrunched up as if he were about to throw a temper tantrum, but then the expression eased everywhere except around his eyes. "And now the minority report?"

"I just want one thing from you, Kies." He hissed the last letter of my name like a snake. "Who was behind the plot to kill us?"

I shook my head. "Not part of the deal. You hired us to stop them, not mount them on a trophy wall."

"You needn't worry. We'll do our own killing," he sneered at me.

"Hey, Greenie, this is the real world." I let the Old One growl through my throat as I rubbed my right hand over my silver wolf's head pendant. "Any of us with Raven are willing to do wet work,

but not to save *your* ego. So, chummer, you've got what you've got."

"What I've got is an anti-Elf racist protecting more of the same." He balled his fists and hammered them down on the table, nearly upsetting my beer. "We've had people dying out there. We've had Elven blood running through the gutters. Someone has to pay."

My eyes started a slow shift from green to silver, with a black killer's ring circling the iris. "Someone *is* paying. TAB is paying a wergeld that will make things better for your people."

"Tell that to the dead."

My right hand contracted into a fist. "I've seen the streets run with blood, chummer, and I've leaked my fair share into them, too. It's damned easy to call for blood when you aren't going to be the one shedding it. And you can't tell me, Greenie, that a single death at TAB will make life better for those who live in Denny Park."

He started to reply hotly, but Sting stopped him. "Your deal is acceptable and, if TAB upholds its part of the bargain, we will let the matter drop." She glared at Greenie, and he nodded his head as little as his stony rage made possible. "We are indebted to you and Raven, and even your friend, Dempsey."

"Raven will send you a bill," I smiled, "and you probably already have a message from Dempsey waiting for you at your crib." I used the bottle cap in my left hand to scratch a tenth line beneath my name, then snapped Green Lucifer's head back with a right jab. He bounced off the rear of the booth, then his forehead dented the table just before his unconscious form slid beneath it. "I, on the other hand, consider us even." Ω

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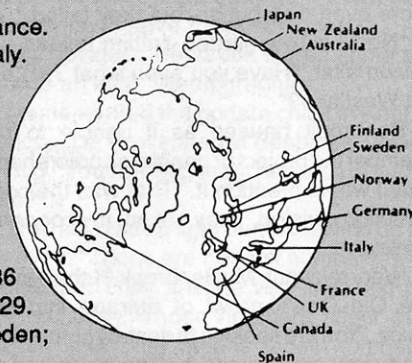
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Tribble Maker



A Humorous ST: TNG Adventure

By
Marcus L.
Rowland

Space is big—extremely big. Travel takes a long time. Even a *Galaxy*-class starship like the *Enterprise* can't return to base whenever supplies are needed. Luckily, it doesn't need to do so; the ship's computers maintain transporter templates which can be used to replicate any nonliving object that might even conceivably be wanted by some or all of the 1200+ people aboard. Literally anything that has once been recorded can be copied, within the limits of mass that the system supports. Naturally the system has sensor circuits to ensure that no one orders anything dangerous or illegal. A kilo of antimatter in your delivery chamber could ruin your whole day. Naturally.

And of course nothing can go wrong...go wrong...go wrong...go wrong....

The team should be the bridge officers of the *Galaxy*-class USS *Enterprise*, or another similar large Federation ship with civilian families aboard. Wesley Crusher should not be a player character.

PROLOGUE: CAPTAIN'S PERSONAL LOG

As part of the Federation's agreement with the Free Worlds of Klinzai, we are carrying two dozen Klingon Defense Force officers on this leg of our mission. Their duty is to observe and advise as we patrol the area claimed by the so-called Imperial Klingon States. It's strange to remember that a generation ago all Klingons would have been our deadly enemies; today, we are thankful for their help and knowledge of Imperial tactics. So far there has been no sign of any problems, and their integration with our personnel is so complete that I must continually strive to think of them as our guests, and not as members of the crew...

SCENE 1: BLAME THE KID, AS USUAL

Wesley Crusher is busy writing the last page of his term paper on paleontology. In an hour, at 09:10 hours, he's scheduled to lecture to the rest of his class, so he's also preparing a speech with visual aids and

other props. For someone as bright as Wesley, an hour is plenty of time to do all this; he'll probably have time to wash, too.

Wesley still likes to type at a keyboard, partly because it lets him talk while he's working, and partly because modern keyboards let him type 400 words a minute, and he can't talk quite that fast. As he works, he's talking to the computer, telling it what specimens are needed for the display, and chewing on a nice, fresh V'lhaag fruit.

At 08:50 hours, Wesley bites a piece of fruit, then tries to say "and I'll need a couple of really good trilobites to show the class." Unfortunately, the computer hears this as "a couple of really good tribble pests to show the class."

Normally the ship's computer would query this; unfortunately, it's pretty busy. A hundred or so crew have just come off watch and are ordering meals, and the computer is also handling several transporter operations, refereeing round four of the ship's four-dimensional *Star Fleet Battles* tournament, and reconstructing Holodeck C as a fair replica of Transylvania (including castles, bats, wolves, rats, and Count Dracula) for one of the more romantically inclined ensigns. Wesley's request comes at just the wrong moment and is the straw that breaks the camel's back.

Inside a massive chunk of integrated molecular circuitry, something goes "spungg." The failing circuit takes out others in a chain reaction that leaves a gaping hole in this section of the computer's logic. The system creates two authentic tribbles. They are extremely lifelike, chemically fueled replicants, microscopically accurate down to details of fur and internal organs, with pseudobiological chemical "brains" programmed to behave exactly like the real thing.

Since it believes Wesley said he wanted them as "pests to show the class," the computer has made one tiny change—instead of reproducing every few hours, they'll replicate at approximately 20-minute intervals if they can find food.

At 08:55 Wesley reaches into the delivery chamber. He expects to find a box containing four fossil dinosaur footprints, a holocartridge set up to project a few full-sized dinosaur images, some ammonites, and a couple of trilobites. Instead he finds the dinosaur footprints, the holocartridge, some ammonites, and two cute little furry balls that purr at him. He doesn't know what they are.

Wesley is going to be late if he doesn't hustle. He pulls everything out of the chamber, orders the trilobites again, puts the fur balls in a belt pouch (also containing a half-eaten macrobiotic muesli bar) to show the kids in his class, stuffs the newly arrived trilobites in the box, and heads for the door. As he gets into the turbolift he doesn't notice

something small, plump, and furry climb out of the belt pouch and drop to the floor.

At 10:20 hours, Wesley finishes his presentation, and remembers the furry things in his pouch. When he reaches inside he finds one large fur ball, five small fur balls, and the wrapper from a muesli bar. He's a little puzzled, and shows the animals to his class and teacher.

At 10:22 hours, Wesley's teacher finds the right reference in the *Federation Encyclopedia*. At 10:24, she learns that there were originally two tribbles. At 10:26, she reports the incident to security.

At this point the PCs should learn that there are alien pests aboard, in violation of Federation regulations on transporting hostile life forms. Naturally, everyone will probably assume that Wesley has somehow smuggled the tribbles aboard—with his record, he's the obvious suspect.

Give the team some time to hold an informal counseling and child-guidance session, and otherwise behave like concerned, caring Starfleet officers/mothers/Klingons/androids. Then let them realize that the other tribble is still missing. Wesley really is telling the truth, and that therefore something is wrong with the computer.

If the computer is questioned, it will reveal that it thought Wesley ordered a "couple of tribble pests," and it gave them to him. To make them useful as teaching aids they naturally have an accelerated life cycle—about 20 minutes from birth to reproduction instead of around four hours! It can't explain why it didn't invoke Federation law and refuse to create them. It also won't mention that the tribbles are designer replicants, unless it is specifically asked.

SCENE 2: NOBODY KNOWS THE TRIBBLES I'VE SEEN

Meanwhile, the free tribble has rolled out of the turbolift and, completely unnoticed, followed the scent of food to a ventilator duct, and thence to a food synthesizer outlet in an ensign's cabin. (The ensign is busy fighting vampires on Holodeck C, and doesn't intend to be back for a few hours.) It purrs at the outlet. The universal translator built into the unit recognizes the noise as a request for food, correctly identifies the type required, and delivers a plate of Quadrottricale grain. The tribble tucks in, and soon polishes off the plate. Ten minutes later five small tribbles are busily purring at the machine.

By 10:30, there isn't enough room for all of the 600 or so fourth and fifth generation tribbles to cluster around the synthesizer. Tribbles don't fight, so the hungrier specimens head back into the ventilators. They're light enough to be blown along horizontal and vertical ducts.

At about 10:45, while the team is interrogating Wesley, security starts taking "pris-

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oners"—tribbles are turning up on four decks, with unconfirmed reports from another three.

SCENE 3: YOU THINK YOU'VE GOT TRIBBLES?

It's time for the big "Lieutenant Worf Meets The Tribbles" scene. Just one or two—or possibly a half dozen or so—in the turbolift. Although he's spent most of his life amongst humans, Worf has normal Klingon instincts, and the tribbles don't like him either. Award experience points for good roleplaying, screaming, phasering, and scratching. When you've finished awarding experience to the tribbles, see if Worf deserves some too.

Meanwhile, the other Klingons aboard have also started to notice that there are lots of obnoxious furry critters about. It's time for the KDF officers to start clogging the intercom with requests for vermin control, antiallergy serum, and a clean ship. They aren't exaggerating; one has a serious respiratory allergy triggered by tribble fur, and there's now a lot of it floating in the ventilators. Give Dr. Crusher the job of treating him, complicated by the fact that the handiest routes to sick bay passes through the densest tribble populations.

SCENE 4: WHAT'S SAUCE FOR THE KIRK...

By now, the team will probably be trying to find out how to deal with tribbles. There are records of previous Federation and/or Klingon encounters with the little darlings; unfortunately, all of the solutions used previously are impractical. It's possible to set a transporter to selectively pick up tribbles—75 years ago, Scotty decontaminated the *Enterprise* that way, and dumped the tribbles into a Klingon vessel. Unfortunately, there don't seem to be any hostile ships around.

Of course, it's possible to dump the tribbles into space; that's how the Klingons cleaned ship after the "Troubles with Tribbles" episode. If she is played as an NPC, Counselor Troi will point out that this violates Federation laws on cruelty to animals, and that she will suffer massive psychological trauma if she is forced to "listen" to the minds of thousands of dying tribbles. If Troi is a PC, remind her player of these facts.

It's also illegal to dump the tribbles on a planet. If it's hostile, they'll die; if not, there may be intelligent or potentially intelligent species present who might not survive a tribble plague.

A glommer (a carnivore that lives exclu-

sively on tribbles) could eat them, but probably wouldn't be able to keep up with the speeded-up reproductive cycle. Can Dr. Crusher come up with a suitable controlling agent, or Data suggest another answer? The ball's in the PCs' court.

If the team finds out that the tribbles are replicants, the moral dilemma is solved, and Counselor Troi can stop worrying about the pain of their deaths. She should eventually notice that she isn't actually picking up any emotional signals from them; admittedly, tribbles don't think much, but all life forms emit some neural energy.

If the KDF officers hear that there is any delay in dealing with the tribbles, they may feel that drastic measures are called for. Those that aren't covered with hives will head for a transporter bay and start to program it to pick up tribbles and dump them into the nearest sun. They'll use phasers (set to stun—these are *friendly* Klingons) if anyone tries to stop them.

If you're feeling really sadistic, this is a good moment for Q to turn up and point out that the Federation can't even cope with a few pathetic little animals. He stays to sneer.

SCENE 5:

RUB THE MAGIC LAMP

By now another problem starts to become apparent: The judgment circuits associated with transporter template reconstitution have failed completely! The blood-drained body of an ensign is rushed from Holodeck C to sick bay, where the duty doctor orders "a massive dose of Tri-ox compound" from the synthesizer, intending to oxygenate the patient's blood. A second later, 10 gallons of the stuff erupt from the

materialization chamber. Meanwhile, Dracula is flapping around in bat form.

Throughout the ship any attempt to order goods (such as food) from the synthesizers becomes a game of Russian roulette. Careless phrasing makes matters much worse. Maybe everything will be OK, but then again.... A crewmember who orders "a little pick-me-up" may be supplied with a normal dose of stimulant, but there's also a good chance of him getting a pair of jet boots, an antigravity pack, or a working propeller beanie instead.

Once the crew and passengers start to realize what's happening, a few will decide to take advantage. The Federation still uses some "paper" currency and coins, though the economy mostly runs on a credit basis, and most primitive worlds still use cash and regard diamonds and other easily synthesized jewels and metals as valuable. Several crewmembers will order currency from the synthesizers. Then there's the fat kid who'll order a gallon of ice cream and try to eat it, the engineer who'll order his favorite holo star (he'll get a convincing robot replica), and stamp, art, and antique collectors whose avarice or thoughtlessness outweighs their sense of responsibility.

The computer can't be ordered to repair itself, or to use other circuits to override the sensor circuits—that would cause massive logic problems (and short circuit the plot!). Encourage the team to think of asking Data to plug into the computer and monitor every synthesizer aboard (several thousand of them) while the system is repaired. If he limits the service to essential items he'll just be able to do it, though any attempt to maintain the holodecks and entertainment

systems will give him a massive "head-ache." If Data isn't a PC, he won't think of this on his own.

Soon Data will find (or report) that the number of orders is rising despite his censorship. Many of the orders seem to be requests for food, and most are for Quadrottricale and other grain. It shouldn't take an Einstein, or even a Wesley, to figure out that the tribbles are getting food from the synthesizers. With the information now available, Data should be able to calculate that there are approximately 75,000 tribbles aboard, plus or minus 2500! If food services aren't cut immediately, the next round of reproduction will lead to some of the cabins literally bursting open under the mass of tribbles inside them. Already security reports corridors clogged with furry vermin, and several compartments have rapidly stagnating air because the ventilator fans are choked with tribbles.

SCENE 6: WHO'S BEEN SITTING IN MY CHAIR?

Every tribble story has to have a scene where several hundred fall on the captain's head and/or turn up in his seat. Combine both by having a ventilator outlet in the bridge ceiling above the captain's chair. The grille pops open and he's deluged with tribbles, preferably while debating the situation with Q.

The Klingons finish reprogramming the transporter. Unfortunately, the transporter discrimination circuits use the same logic as the delivery terminals, and their tampering may accidentally hurl members of the crew or other animals (such as the cute pet frog mentioned in the *Next Generation Officer's Manual*) into space. It won't pick up the tribbles—they aren't real, so a transporter tuned to tribble metabolism will miss them completely. This problem will also delay Dr. Crusher's attempts to control the tribbles biologically.

SCENE 7:

FADE TO HAPPY ENDING?

Hopefully your PCs will have stopped feeding the tribbles by now. If not, they will soon weigh more than the ship. If they haven't already realized that the tribbles are nonliving replicants, you may want to start giving them clues. In any case, attempts to repair the computer will eventually bear fruit. Once it is back to normal, it can soon get rid of the tribbles. It will cut off the Quadrottricale supply and create a pseudopheromone which attracts the tribbles to one of the holodecks, where they can conveniently be broken down to their component atoms for recycling.

If the team doesn't try to repair the computer, it will eventually start converting bits of the ship into tribble food. This is an extremely bad idea. If things reach this point, it's probably time for the Federation to

Tribbles and Glommers

	STR	DEX	END	MENT	AP	DMG	Armor
Tribble	5	5	5	1	6	—	0
Glommer	10	20	10	1	3	—	1

Possible Population Explosion

Normal Cycle (Hours)	Tribbles	Biomass (Approx.)	Fast Cycle (Hours: Minutes)
0	1	0.25 kg	0:00
4	6	1.5 kg	0:20
8	36	9.0 kg	0:40
12	216	55 kg	1:00
16	1296	325 kg	1:20
20	7776	2 tons	1:40
24	46,656	12 tons	2:00
28	279,936	72 tons	2:20
32	1,679,616	432 tons	2:40
36	10,076,696	5 kilotons	3:00
40	60,460,176	30 kilotons	3:20
44	362,761,056	180 kilotons	3:40
48	1,813,805,280	900 kilotons	4:00

appoint some new officers.

Once the crisis is over (it is over, isn't it?), the Klingons will apologize for their minuscule. No one should be hurt, and they were heavily provoked, so the captain should be merciful. The allergic Klingon recovers eventually, though he also happens to be allergic to the pheromone used in the tribble trap. For days afterward the ship will smell of tribbles, and engineering will have to clean all the air filters and purifiers.

If Q has been interfering, it's time for him to make a last speech then vanish. Everyone breathes a sigh of relief.

About 10 minutes later, the *Enterprise* is attacked by Imperial Klingon privateers, Ferengi, or whatever else you prefer, and the next adventure begins.

APPENDIX: TRIBBLES AND GLOMMERS

Unfortunately for pet lovers everywhere, statistics for tribbles and glommers can only be found in the first edition *Star Trek RPG* rules, which are long out of print. The material that follows paraphrases FASA's old description and adds some additional comments. (Refer to the Tribbles and Glommers Table.)

Tribbles are inoffensive furry animals with one bad habit: Their asexual reproductive cycle is geared to their consumption of food, and they'll breed as soon as their stomachs are full. In extreme cases this can take just a couple of hours. On their native world

there are undoubtedly predators to keep tribbles in check; unfortunately, the location of the tribble homeworld was only known to a few smugglers. It's rumored that the Klingons found and destroyed the planet in the era of the Organian Peace Treaty, but there is no record to confirm this.

Assuming ample food supply, one ancestral tribble, reproduction every four hours under normal conditions (every 20 minutes for the replicants in this adventure), and an average of five offspring, see the Possible Population Explosion Table.

Note that the table assumes that all animals eat and breed, and that no deaths occur. In practice, many tribbles would be unable to reach food and reproduce more slowly or would be crushed by the weight of those surrounding them!

Tribbles are prohibited throughout Federation space. It's illegal to transport them or sell them. That doesn't stop con men from smuggling them onto human worlds. Tribbles purr in a manner that calms and soothes humans, and thus seem to be the perfect pet. The smugglers generally keep quiet about their reproductive habits and get off-world before the population explosion becomes severe.

Some Federation philosophers have suggested that an unknown intelligence may have originally bred tribbles as biological Von Neumann machines. Protein synthesis is expensive, but on a world with no predators and ample vegetation, tribbles will soon breed an immense amount of food. Such

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worlds can be created using the Genesis effect, which is a prohibited weapon throughout the Federation. Although Genesis worlds tend to be unstable, they would last long enough for a useful tribble harvest.

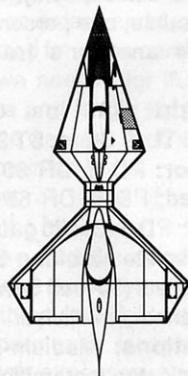
Tribbles and Klingons don't mix well; tribble purring makes Klingons feel ill. The feeling is mutual; a tribble will screech at any Klingon it encounters. Additionally, many Klingons are allergic to their fur. After their first encounter with tribbles, the Klingons bred glommers, genetically engineered predators that feed exclusively on the "vermin." The glommer gene structure isn't recorded in the *Enterprise's* memory banks. The Klingons dealt with their infestation several years before the alliance to the Federation, and all records are filed away somewhere in the vaults of the old Klingon admiralty. ☐

At the time of writing (October 1990) the BBC has just begun to show the first series of ST: TNG in Britain. Other sources are FASA's ST: TNG First Year Sourcebook and Officer's Manual, the first edition Star Trek RPG rules, "The Next Generation" by Sam Bowne (Challenge 42), and Star Trek 3 by the late James Bligh.

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Wearing the Steel

Powered Armor in GURPS

By
David L. Pulver

It was a cold June afternoon outside the Marine Academy on Lungold, and the scent of stormtrees was in the air, carried by the brisk wind. The sky was clear of clouds, but overhead wheeled two black dots: hellravens. One perched on the clock tower. Its mate flew low over the parade ground, watching the cadets in their black and silver.

The rows of cadets were still, facing the man on the podium, waiting for him to begin speaking. The man was tall, dark hair frosted with gray, with gunmetal eyes. He wore the skull and star of a marine colonel and the silver dagger of the jump commandos. His gray eyes scanned his audience, taking measure of the silent cadets. He nodded slowly, and began to speak.

"The topic for my guest lecture is powered combat armor."

The colonel spoke without a throat mike, and though he didn't shout, his voice carried easily across the open parade field.

"You're all familiar with the basics, the mechanical theory—negative feedback, myoelectric limbs, even the new neural interface and nanocrystal armor technology. So I won't add much to that, though I will have a bit to say about weaponry, later on. I'll pass over tactics. You'll get that lecture next week, from General Amalric. What I do want to talk about is the different suits that have been used over the years, their strengths and weaknesses, and what powered armor means to the corps."

MATSAI CORPORATION M-3 NIGHTSTALKER

"Powered armor! Two words that conjure images of Bob

78 Challenge 50



Heinlein's starship troopers, the Paneuropean infantry dying under an ogre's guns, interstellar marines storming aboard the enemy flagship.

"Powered armor is the ultimate fusion of armor and infantry, combining the agility and deployability of the individual soldier with the firepower of a light tank.

"Today, the powered fighting suit is the mainstay of the Marine Corps, almost its symbol, but that wasn't always true. In fact, until recently, the powered suits were just too expensive for general issue.

"Instead, the first suits went to special-operations units: jump troopers, commandos, rangers. The M-3 was an early stealth exosuit designed for the Federal Rangers, fast and sneaky, with superb ECM for its time. Of course, it was too lightly armored for the battlefield, but as a raiding unit it was first-rate. It was declared obsolete a few years ago, and most of the surviving suits were to be transferred to planetary militia or sold off to allied star systems, but a surprising number turn up on the open market, acquired by mercenary units and soldiers of fortune. Or terrorists." The colonel chuckled, softly.

"Of course, one person's terrorist is another's freedom fighter..."

Weight: 135 lbs. **Cost:** \$60,000 **TL:** 9 **Stats:** ST 24, HT 11 **Armor:** PD 6, DR 80 torso and head; PD 6, DR 65 limbs and feet; PD 5, DR 50 gauntlets and faceplate **Mobility:** Speed +4, jump jets (30 fuel) **Sensors:** Multiscanner, multivisor **Communications:** Medium-range communicator (scrambled) **Internal Weapons:** Blaster finger in right hand **Electronic Defenses:** Infrared cloak, laser sensors, stealth coating (-4 to be detected by radar or chemscanners) **Life Support:** 12 hours of air, radiation PF 10 **Power:** 1 E cell, lasting for 8 hours **Miscellaneous:** None **Complexity:** Amazing

Adventure Seed 1: A Hold Full of Trouble

Adventurers operating a merchant vessel discover that the crates of "farm machinery" they are supposed to deliver to a planetary agribusiness in return for a lucrative commission actually hold 20 suits of Nightstalker powered armor obviously bound for a local resistance movement. Will they try to smuggle the armor past customs and win their commission, or risk the wrath, and possible retribution, of the rebels by turning the suits over to the authorities, or will they keep the suits for themselves? And are the rebels really the underdog freedom fighters their propaganda portrays them to be, or the brutal terrorists the government describes them as? By the way, the penalty for smuggling military weapons is 10 years in a labor camp...

MACROTECH MK IV CYBERSLAVE

"The Nightstalker was the first powersuit to be used by the Federation Marines, but it wasn't the last. By this time, the entire corps, not just the rangers, were to get powered armor, and we wanted something just a bit heavier than the Nightstalker, which was basically a stealth/infiltration unit. We thought we'd found what we were looking for in the Macrotech, but it had a few bugs in it.

"It was a sleek and deadly suit optimized for close combat, just what we needed for the urban warfare and jungle fighting actions we were involved in during the Dominion Wars.

"Now, as some of you may know, the Macrotech is unusual because it is equipped with a computer autopilot which enables the suit to fight on even if the operator is incapacitated. Although expensive and occasionally prone to software glitches, many believe this feature proved its worth in an engagement that took place during the Battle of Shiva, when the 4th Marine Division assaulted the Dominion's elite Phoenix Guard.

"Marine Sergeant Irene Selika

in her Macrotech closed with and destroyed an emplaced gauss autocannon that had pinned down the lead company of the battalion, enabling our forces to take Shiva's capital before enemy reinforcements arrived. Cut down a minute later by enemy fire and found dead after the battle, Selika was recommended for the Federal Star for Valor (posthumous)—an award that proved embarrassing when a subsequent autopsy determined that she had died eight hours before the engagement! Some execs at Macrotech suggested the medal go to their programmer, but I don't think the general staff bought that."

Weight: 125 lbs. **Cost:** \$240,000 **TL:** 10 **Stats:** ST 24, HT 11 **Armor:** PD 7, DR 100 torso and head; PD 6, DR 90 limbs and feet; PD 5, DR 80 gauntlets and faceplate **Mobility:** Speed +2, jump jets (60 fuel) **Sensors:** Multiscanner, sensor visor **Targeting:** /3 targeting system, holographic HUD **Weapons:** Plasma ejector (left arm), powersword (right hand) **Electronic Defenses:** Chameleon system, infrared cloak, laser sensors **Communications:** Medium-range communicator (scrambled) with neutrino receiver **Life Support:** 12-hour airpack, radiation PF 20 **Miscellaneous:** The Macrotech is equipped with an interface jack and a Complexity 4 computer autopilot. Its programs are Battlesuit-12, Beam Weapons (Flamer)-14, Brawling-12, Tactics Expert System-10. On its own, it has Mov 5. **Complexity:** Amazing

Adventure Seed 2: Renegade Armor

In a Planetary Guard armory, an unmanned Macrotech suit has come alive, killed two techs, and is heading downtown, killing anything in its path. Can the PCs stop it? And is the suit's glitch the result of a computer malfunction—or sabotage?

HUNTER INDUSTRIES' "ORION" POWERSUIT

"As some of you know, a handful of peacetime incidents

with the Macrotech's battle computer forced the corps to go looking for a new mount. We found one in the Orion. Manufactured specifically for the Federation Marine Corps, based on data from the Dominion Wars, the Orion powersuit is a main battle unit designed for the nuclear battlefield, and features state-of-the-art communication and ECM systems. It proved its worth again and again in the Ilshani conflict, and we equip half our front-line regiments with it today. There's a good chance you'll wear an Orion yourselves; many of you already have, in training. Me, I've lived in the armor, and I've seen friends die in it as well, and I'd rather wear it than anything else.

"A fully operational Orion suit which belonged to Colonel Skafloc Pendragon stands in the Museum of War in Azrael, donated by the military to commemorate the last stand of Pendragon's "Ace of Swords" Regiment during the Second Ilshani Invasion. Pendragon's action saved Azrael from being overrun, although it cost him his life, and most of his men. Among the human inhabitants of this border world, there is a legend that his suit will rise again in the darkest hour of Azrael's need."

Weight: 150 lbs. **Cost:** \$100,000 **TL:** 10 **Stats:** ST 30, HT 12 **Armor:** PD 7, DR 120 torso; PD 6, DR 100 limbs and feet; PD 7, DR 100 head; no faceplate; PD 5, DR 80 gauntlets **Mobility:** Speed +2, jump jets (60 fuel) **Sensors:** Multiscanner, sensor visor **Targeting System:** /5, holographic HUD **Internal Weapons:** Laser finger in left hand, gauss gun in right forearm **Defensive Electronics:** Chameleon system, infrared cloak, laser sensors **Communications:** Long-range communicator (scrambled) w/ neutrino receiver, neutrino communicator **Life Support:** 12 hours of air, radiation PF 20 **Power:** 1 E cell lasting for 12 hours **Miscellaneous:** Neural interface jack **Complexity:** Amazing

GURPS®

Adventure Seed 3: A Relic of War

The vice president of the Federation is opening a new wing of the Azrael War Museum when heavily armed terrorists choose that moment to seize control of the building and hold the visiting dignitaries hostage. One of the PCs (preferably someone with military training) is visiting the museum, or perhaps employed as a security guard, and is trapped in the hall holding the Orion powersuit. Can he get it working in time to save the hostages and himself?

ILSHANI GHOSTSUIT

"Now we've talked a lot about the Federation's suits, but I'm sure you're all curious about the other side, especially the aliens.

"The Ilshani Domination's Ghostsuit—we don't know their designation for it—was built for microgravity and zero-gee boarding actions and assaults and is still used by them today. As it was designed for the aliens' willowy bodies, this graceful, form-fitting suit is one of the lightest examples of powered armor presently in service. In an emergency, the suit can be modified by a good armorer in 8 hours to fit a skinny human—those of you from low-gee worlds should have no trouble with it, but cadets from Colossus had better look for something else.

"But just because you can't lift a ton in it doesn't mean you should underestimate it. I've fought the Ilshani, and I speak from experience. Compensating for its lack of strength and armor are some powerful weapons, including an EMP pulse gun which can fry your suit systems in a microsecond, and an extensive array of stealth systems. The suit has the usual array of infrared and electronic countermeasures, but the Ghostsuit's name comes from its gigatropic camouflage cir-

cuits: An array of billions of fiber-optic lenses bends light around and through the suit, making it very hard to detect visually, even with the Mk I eyeball."

"And what you can't see, you can't hit."

Weight: 85 lbs. **Cost:** \$120,000 **TL:** 10 **Stats:** ST 18, HT 9 **Armor:** PD 6, DR 90 torso and head; PD 6, DR 80 limbs and feet; PD 5, DR 70 gauntlets, no faceplate. Armor has a reflective surface (+2 PD vs. lasers and flamer weapons). **Mobility:** Speed +3, zero-gee thruster pack, magnetic soles **Sensors:** Sensor visor, multiscanner, internal biosensor **Communications:** Medium-range communicator (scrambled) with a neutrino receiver **Targeting:** /4 targeting system, neural interface **Electronic Defenses:** Gigatronic "intruder" system (-6 to be hit or detected), sensor distorter (-8 to detect with any chem, rad or bio scanner), infrared cloak, laser sensors **Weapons:** Laser finger (left hand), pulse gun (right arm) **Life Support:** 14 hours of air, radiation PF 20 **Power:** 1 E cell lasting for 12 hours **Miscellaneous:** A self-destruct system (6d×6 explosion) activates 32 seconds after the internal biomonitor shows the wearer to be dead. Entering a code into the suit (via communicator) can turn it off. **Complexity:** Amazing

Adventure Seed 4: Ghostriders

An exiled politician is trying to put together a rescue mission to break her dissident son out of a heavily guarded Domain prison planet. She has money, but aside from one or two old Nightstalkers, the only modern commando armor she's been able to scrounge on the black market is a dozen Ghostsuits salvaged from a derelict Ilshani starhunter. She needs volunteers who match the skinny Ilshani build.

One of the PCs may fit the bill (especially if he or she comes from a low-gee world), or, if no handy planet of lightworlders is available, the party will be hired as recruiters in a quixotic search for prospective troopers with appropriate physiques, who run the gamut from skinny asteroid

miners who have never known gravity to anorexic teenage gymnasts seeking adventure. And even if the characters can train them, how will this motley crew perform in battle?

USING THE ARMOR

The powered armor statistics given above are generally self-explanatory. HT is the suit's hit points, and applies only if one is keeping track of suit damage (see Damaging and Repairing Powered Suits, below). The ST of the suit is that of the suit's built-in exoskeleton. If the wearer has a higher ST, use it instead. Do not add wearer and suit ST together. The bonus to Speed given under Mobility does not affect Dodge, only movement. The cost of powered suits is for new armor. For obsolete systems, the cost halves on the TL after a suit first appeared and is quartered two TLs later.

Except for the new internal weapons which are described below, all of the systems built into these suits are described in *GURPS Space* or *GURPS Ultra-Tech*. All systems draw energy from the suit's power cells. They do not use their own power cells, and aside from weapons, can operate for as long as the suit's power system remains functional.

INTERNAL WEAPONS

Internal weapons are built into the suit itself, and are usually concealed until they fire. Beam weapons operate off the suit's power cells: Each shot reduces the amount of time the cells will operate. The targeting system's bonus applies only to the suit's internal weapons and any weapons connected to the suit's heads-up display. Because internal weapons are slaved into a gyro-stabilized arm linked directly into the suit computer, all snap shots made using them get to add half the weapon's Accuracy bonus.

If a suit has multiple weapons, only one can be used in a turn, but with no penalty for using a left-hand mounted weapon if the character is right handed, or vice versa.

A character must have Bat-

lesuit-10 or better to use any weapons or targeting systems built into powered armor.

WEAPON TYPES

"Suit weaponry's a question that's endlessly debated: Which systems are best in what tactical situations, which weapons are more cost effective, what has the most punch? There's no one right answer. But for what it's worth, I'll take a laser finger any day. Unless you're carrying a Gatling laser—and maybe you are—there's nothing that can match it for penetration or long-range accuracy—even if it does burn energy like a supernova!"

Note: A "(2)" following damage given for any weapon means the armor DR is divided by 2.

INTERNAL WEAPON STATISTICS

Blaster Finger (TL 9)

An arm-mounted particle accelerator firing a powerful electron beam along a laser pathway. The target will also take radiation damage equal to five rads×damage rolled (divided by his suit's radiation PF). **SS:** 8, **Acc:** 12, **Damage:** 3d×10 imp., **1/2D:** 1200, **Max:** 3600, **ROF:** 3~, **Rcl:** -1. Each shot reduces the suit's power cell life by 0.1 hours. Uses Beam Weapons (Blaster) skill.

Gauss Gun (TL 9)

An arm-mounted electromagnetic railgun firing 0.17 caliber ammunition. The magazine is built into the suit's forearm, and takes three turns to reload; spare clips weigh four pounds and cost \$40. **Malf:** Ver., **SS:** 9, **Acc:** 12, **Damage:** 10d+10 (2), **1/2D:** 1500, **Max:** 4000 **ROF:** 12, **Shots:** 120, **Rcl:** 0. Damage assumes use of sabot rounds. Halve damage after DR is penetrated.

Laser Finger (TL 10)

A rapid-pulse X-ray laser weapon built into the suit's gauntlet. **Malf:** Ver., **SS:** 9, **Acc:** 15, **Damage:** 5d (2), **1/2D:** 2500, **Max:** 7500, **ROF:** 8, **Rcl:** 0. Be sure to use the special laser automatic fire rules (p. 120 in *GURPS Basic Set*). Each burst of four shots reduces the power cell's life by 0.1 hours. Uses Beam Weapons (Laser) skill.

Plasma Ejector (TL 10)

A palm-mounted plasma projector, firing a stream of ionized plasma along a path ionized by a laser beam. The plasma feed is energized by the suit's E cell, making for a very "hot" jet compared to other flamer weapons, although it dissipates rapidly. If the target is hit, armor is unsealed (location loses suit integrity and halves its DR) on a roll of 21 or less, -1 per 10 points of target DR. **Malf:** Crit., **SS:** 4k, **Acc:** 20, **Damage:** 6d×5 fire, **1/2D:** 150, **Max:** 450, **ROF:** 1, **Rcl:** 0. Each shot reduces the power cells' life by 0.5 hours. Uses Beam Weapons (Flamer) skill.

Powersword (TL 9)

A retractable 12-inch sword blade built into the suit's palm or forearm. The blade is made of aligned crystalline steel and edged with a strand of monomolecular wire. Reach is C,1, and the blade does +2d swinging/cutting damage and +1d thrusting/impaling damage. More significantly, the blade acts as a wedge that slices into the target at the molecular level, so armor protects with one-tenth normal DR against a cut! Uses Shortsword (Battlesuit) skill; defaults to Shortsword or Battlesuit at -4.

Pulse Gun (TL 10)

Generates a powerful electromagnetic pulse. **Malf:** Crit., **SS:** 6, **Acc:** 12, **Damage:** Spec., **1/2D:** 800, **Max:** 1600, **ROF:** 1, **Rcl:** 0. If it hits, disables electronic systems, including power armor or robots, on a 3d roll of 16 or less; modifiers are -1 per 20 points of DR on location hit. For every point the roll succeeds by, the target is disabled for two turns. Success by 10 or more, or critical success, permanently fries the target's electronics. Does not work in vacuum. Each shot reduces the power cells' life by 0.2 hours. Uses Beam Weapons (Laser) skill.

HAND-HELD WEAPONS

"Supplementing a suit's internal weaponry are whatever weapons the powered infantryman can carry on his back. The

hand-held weapons most of us prefer are the biggest ones we can find. After all, if the suit gives you the strength of two men, why not take advantage of it?

"The usual choices are the automatic rocket launcher, the electromag grenade launcher (especially in autofire configuration) or "em-mortar," the I-PAWS particle accelerator, the nuclear capable M-LAWS missile launcher, the splat gun, the tripod screamer, and, of course, the Gatling laser.

"A regulation Marine fireteam consists of one person with a Gatling laser and three more with M-LAWS, but a fair number of units seem to pick up auto grenade launchers with smart rounds for rapid anti-armor fire.

"The Dominion uses the same mix we do, but since most suits are standard models lacking internal weapons, they carry more ammo and spare power cells.

"The Ilshani? They generally rely on their built-in weapons, but we've seen them use I-PAWS and M-LAWS, and I've heard of some units using tripod screamers on extermination sweeps."

JUMP JETS

"The so-called jump jets installed in some of the suits are actually small plasma drives that enable the suit to jump twice as high or far as would be normal for a person of the suit's strength in gravity, and to slow falling speed by up to 15 yards per second.

"They'll even function as a thruster pack in zero-g. Of course, it takes a lot of skill to use them properly without breaking your back. And they burn a lot of fuel. And fuel is one thing you never seem to have enough of...."

In game terms, each suit only allows a limited number of jumps (or null-gee burns). Each jump costs one point of fuel. Refueling requires a source of hydrogen. Any use of jump jets requires a Battlesuit roll; failure means the character falls and both he and the suit take 1d of crushing damage (armor doesn't protect). A critical failure does 4d of crushing damage. Roll for hit location randomly.

WEARING POWERED ARMOR

"As long as the power cells aren't drained, powered armor is air-conditioned and relatively comfortable in temperatures from absolute zero to several hundred degrees. All suits have waste relief systems and a 24-hour food and water supply. In addition to their listed air supply, powered suits have CBR filters with a respirator/reducing respirator combination enabling the wearer to breathe indefinitely in a thin or standard oxygen-nitrogen atmosphere, and for up to a month in a contaminated, dense or very dense atmosphere, after which replacement air filters and chemicals will be needed.

"Because of the negative-feedback sensors and interface contacts lining the suit's interior, powered armor has to fit like a glove. Normal clothing or armor cannot be worn under powered armor. Usually either a skinsuit or biosuit is worn, or nothing at all. There is no such thing as 'one size fits all' powered combat armor. Fitting a person to a suit is a sweaty job that requires an armory tool kit, two hours, and a lot of patience."

Anyone attempting to wear powered armor that has not been specifically fitted for him will be at -1 to DX and all DX-based skills, and will suffer double fatigue penalties due to chafing and irritation. PCs attempting to fit a suit will require either Armory (Battlesuit/TL) +2 or a Battlesuit/TL roll; failure requires another two hours. Characters with Dwarfism, Gigantism, Skinny, Overweight or Fat disadvantages must have a custom suit designed for them at 20% extra cost. Once a character has been fitted to a suit, it will take him or her four minutes to put on a suit or half that time to remove it. This time can be cut by 10 seconds per point by which a successful Battlesuit skill roll is made by, to a minimum of 10 seconds.

DAMAGING AND REPAIRING POWERED SUITS

"It's inevitable that someday something will poke a hole in your suit. If you're very lucky,

you'll live through the hit and survive to fix it. Remember, take care of your suit and it'll take care of you."

Any damage (round down) that gets past armor DR is taken by the suit's HT and the wearer's HT. (Damage does not come off the suit's HT first, then the wearer—they are both reduced simultaneously, although impaling damage, for instance, that penetrates DR will be doubled vs. the wearer but not the suit itself.) If reduced to 0 HT, the suit can no longer function; a conscious operator will be trapped in a metal coffin unless he can pull himself free (this requires a ST-1 roll; further rolls are allowed once every two minutes). At -5xHT, the suit is totally wrecked. Unless this happens, a suit can be repaired by Armory (Battlesuit/TL) skill (if it hasn't reached -5xHT) if an armorer's tool kit is available. Each attempt takes one hour; a success fixes one hit point times the amount the roll succeeded by.

REVEILLE

"In another term your classes at the academy will be over.

GURPS

Some of you will wash out into general infantry battalions, and others of you—hopefully most of you—will graduate into the corps. You've all been watching the news holos, and have seen what's happening at the border, near the Phoenix Nebula. I can tell you that several reserve units have been activated. I've been posted back to active duty myself to command the "Ace of Swords" Regiment. You should have your assignments by then, and I'll be looking forward to seeing some familiar faces. Those of you who will be wearing the steel. That's all."

The colonel saluted, turned, and was gone. Overhead, the afternoon sky was darkening, and dark clouds were riding in on the winter wind. The hell-ravens took off, seeking shelter among the trees. A storm was coming, and the Lungold sky was the color of steel. Ω



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Through the Looking Glass Eye

Time is of the essence in this short adventure for approximately five characters.

By Legion G. McRae

One of the player characters receives an urgent phone call at 6 a.m. from an old friend. Which PC receives the call is up to the referee. Ideally, however, the PC should fit the following two points:

1. He must have rolled "make a friend" (this friend must be a female) during his Lifepath Determination in character generation.

2. He must possess a cellular phone or something similar.

Referees: If none of your players has bought a phone, and I know mine tend to overlook phones in favor of handguns and armor T-shirts, you might want to just give them one.

This old friend's name is Jeanette. On the phone she will be very upset and will ask the character to come to her condominium in the ArmorTech corporate suburb in Surrey. Her address, which she will give over the phone, is #305-612 Tannery Rd., Surrey, ArmorTech Corporate Suburb (ATCS). At this address is a condo complex called Riverside Estates.

Referees can wing the telephone conversation: All that is important is that the player characters go to Jeanette's condo.

BUT I TALKED TO HER ONLY AN HOUR AGO!

When the characters arrive at Jeanette's condominium, they will find the door standing slightly ajar. Upon entering, it becomes immediately apparent that her place has been ransacked. If the PCs look around (and they better or this run's going to be really boring), they will find Jeanette lying dead on the bathroom floor in a pool of blood, her throat cut.

If Jeanette's body is examined, covered, etc., then each character so doing should make an Average Awareness skill test to



notice that her left eye is a cyberoptic. Once this is discovered, if the PCs scrutinize her cybereye, they will notice that it has a tiny pressure button on it. Pushing the button will open a small aperture on the iris and eject a computer microdisk.

If the player characters search the rest of Jeanette's condominium, they will find a man's blue designer leather glove on the floor of her bedroom. The label in the glove is from an exclusive (read "extortionately expensive") leather shop in downtown Vancouver, on Robson Street, called The Leather Look.

The glove belongs to Rifter, an ESPerSRI agent, who forgot it when he left Jeanette's condo after murdering her and searching her place. The reason Rifter murdered Jeanette and ransacked her condominium is that Jeanette was stealing technical data about CADS from ArmorTech and selling it to ESPerSRI. This last time Jeanette decided her services were worth more so she held back some information (the microdisk). Rifter was sent to teach her the error of her ways—but he didn't find the disk.

At this point, the PCs should want to do one or both of two things: go to The Leather Look and check sales records to find out who bought the gloves and/or find a computer with a microdisk drive and run the disk from Jeanette's eye.

LEATHER AND LEAD

The characters go to The Leather Look but are too late. When they arrive, Rifter will already be in the back office of the shop blanking the store computer's sales records. When he realizes he has been discovered, he will shoot his way out to the back of the store.

On his way out, Rifter will "bug" a couple of the player characters with thrown miniature tracer-transmitters. A PC will need to make a Very Difficult Awareness skill test to realize he has been bugged. This test is only Difficult if a character has a radio splice

implant. The tracer-transmitters thrown by Rifter will be used by ESPerSRI to track the PCs down later on in this adventure.

Rifter (Solo)

Int	7	Cool	7	Emp	5
Tech	6	Luck	6	MA	7
Ref	11	Att	5	Body	8

Skills: Combat Sense +6, Awareness +6, Athletics +6, Streetwise +5, Pistol +5, Martial Arts +5, Drive +4, Corporate Policy +2, Wardrobe & Style +6, Rifle +5

Cyberware: Interface plugs (one set, right wrist), skin watch (right index finger), seismic detector, reflex booster, left cyberarm, right cyberoptic with targeting scope and Times Square marquee.

Outfit: Interface cables, armor T-shirt, armor jacket, H&K MP5K Smartgun, shoulder rig, three 30-round magazines for the MP5K, and blue leather trenchcoat by The Leather Look.

WHY ALL THE FUSS?

After their run-in with Rifter, the PCs might want to find out what is on the computer microdisk they've got. It is a small problem to track down a microdisk drive personal computer (MDDPC, also known as a "madpack") in Vancouver. It's time to give the party's Fixer a turn to steer the ship.

A few hours, kilometers, and EuroDollars later, the player characters should find what they need and be able to run the microdisk. The information on the disk is technical line drawings and detailed data on the ArmorTech CADS Mk 2013-3. This model of CADS is top-of-the-line armor and not even in retail production yet. Its proposed sale availability date is November 1, 2013. The PCs should find this a little curious.

THESE CHICKS ARE PACKED!

After they leave the place where they found the madpack, the PCs will be shadowed by someone for a few blocks. All



characters should make Average Awareness skill tests to sense that they are being followed.

As soon as the PCs figure out they are being tailed, they will be attacked by the Valkyries. The Valkyries are an all-girl puppet (see page 19 of *Solo Of Fortune*) streetpunk gang and are the street enforcement arm of ESPerSRI in Vancouver. They won't deal; they're here to kill. The player characters are attacked by twice as many Valkyries as there are PCs.

Referees: This episode is really a matter of dramatic timing. Let the scrap go on until it starts to look painful for the PCs, then start the next episode.

The Valkyries (Streetpunks)

The Valkyries are an all-girl street gang which was organized and is backed by ESPerSRI. The members are similar to the typical boosterganger described on page 21 of *Solo Of Fortune*. They all have at least shoulder-length blond hair.

THE BOYS IN BLUE (AND KEVLAR)

After the PCs have been fighting the Valkyries for awhile, a Vancouver Police Department SWAT team will move into the area in an AV-4. The whole area is shrouded in a dense gray smoke, paper swirls in the engine's jet blast and a deafening roar fills the air. A couple of the Valkyries will be cut down by a burst of fire from the AV-4's minigun chin-turret, and the rest take off.

After the police land, they will gather the PCs into the AV-4 along with the Valkyries' weapons and wallets. Once the AV-4 is in

Vancouver Shakedown

Vancouver, B.C., in 2013 is a huge city. Together with Seattle and Tacoma in Washington state, it forms the VanSeaTac Metro Zone.

The old cities of Vancouver, Burnaby, and New Westminster have largely fallen into disorder. North and south of the peninsula on which those cities lie are the public and corporate suburbs of the North Shore and Surrey, respectively.

The ferry traffic has slowed between Vancouver and Vancouver Island since the opening of the Georgia Strait Bridge. This bridge links the VanSeaTac Metro Zone to the Victoria-Nanaimo Urban Strip at southern Nanaimo.

Air traffic in the city is based on Airport Island. Other forms of transportation available in Vancouver are rickshaws (25 cents per city block), taxis (\$2.50 to start, plus 20 cents per kilometer), light rapid transit (called LRT, now a maglev system, 50 cents per station), and buses (all fares are \$1, no passes and no transfers). Taxi and bus service in the Combat Zones is intermittent at the best of times. Rickshaws only work downtown, usually. LRT runs on raised and barricaded rails.

The Combat Zones are ringed by either water or police (city and corporate) cordons. These cordons also screen the Zone ends of bridges in the city which run into or out of the Combat Zones.

The University of British Columbia is now operated by the EBM corporation as a private concern and is protected by EBM corporate police.

the air, the police will tear off their Vancouver Police Department shoulder patches, attached by Velcro™, to reveal red-and-blue, clenched fist ArmorTech corporate logos sewn to their uniforms.

While the PCs are trying to figure all of this out, a man will move over and sit beside them on the AV-4's rear bench seat. He introduces himself as Bannon, a mid-level officer of ArmorTech's Information Security (InfoSec) Division.

Bannon explains that when Jeanette was found in her condo, the ArmorTech Police were ordered to conduct an investigation. When her eye aperture was discovered, InfoSec was called in. The PCs were tracked down by InfoSec using video camera footage taken earlier in the morning at the entrance to the ArmorTech corporate suburb in Surrey.

While Bannon is speaking to the PCs, the police will be sorting through the Valkyries' possessions. One of them discovers a low-level ESPerSRI identification card in one of the Valkyrie's wallets and hands it over to Bannon. Bannon will be very interested in this, and ask the characters if they know what is going on.

During all of this, the AV-4 is "winging" its way over Vancouver's Combat Zones (describe the motion of the AV-4's turns and climbs, etc., to the PCs) toward the ArmorTech Corporate Headquarters downtown at 819 Pender Street.

This would be a good time for the players to return the microdisk to ArmorTech. You may want to hint bombs to the PCs that it

would look a lot better for them if they did. Remember that ArmorTech doesn't have the whole picture of what is going on and is still suspicious of the PCs. The rest of this run assumes that the PCs do return the microdisk.

Bannon (Cop)

Int	9	Cool	8	Emp	8
Tech	5	Luck	7	MA	7
Ref	9	Att	7	Body	8

Skills: Authority +5, Awareness +5, Corporate Policy +4, Pistol +7, Drive +3, Martial Arts +4, Interrogation +5, Intimidate +4, Interview +3, Athletics +4, AV-4 Pilot +3.

Cyberware: Speeding Bullet (paired cyberlegs), interface plugs (two sets, one in each wrist), chipware processor (base of skull).

Outfit: Mamba machinepistol, shoulder rig and five 15-round magazines for the Mamba, armor T-shirt, three-piece suit by Gucci, two pairs of interface cables, assortment of MRAM and APTR chips, mirrored shades.

A HAPPY ENDING? NOT YET

After the AV-4 touches down on the roof of ArmorTech Headquarters, Bannon will take the PCs to an executive elevator and ride down into the building with them. Meanwhile, the corporate police will be removing the magnetic strips with the VPD markings on them from the AV-4, thus turning it back into an ArmorTech vehicle.

Walking toward the elevator, if the char-

acters look south, they will see the upper stories of the mirror-covered ESPerSRI Core Complex, with its flashing orange neon name and logo, a few blocks away on Nelson Street.

Once inside the ArmorTech building, Bannon will ask the PCs to wait in the executive lounge for a few minutes. The lounge is full of people and drinking is allowed. Any character, should he or she wish to do so, will find a number of men or women to approach. This lounge is an opening for roleplaying at its finest!

Bannon has gone to report to his superiors at InfoSec. After a brief report and discussion, Bannon will be ordered to recruit the PCs to find out why ESPerSRI is conducting espionage against ArmorTech.

THE OFFER

Bannon will return to the lounge and tear the characters away from their newfound friends, leading them to his office. As the bugged PCs enter Bannon's office, an alarm will sound. Bannon will take a small bug detection "wand" from his desk and "frisk" the PCs with it. After he removes and destroys all of the tracer-transmitters, Bannon will say that they must have been used by ESPerSRI to guide the Valkyries to the PCs.

After this interruption is over, Bannon will explain that he wants the PCs to hire on to ArmorTech temporarily. ArmorTech wants to know why ESPerSRI, an entirely different type of company, would want to spy on it. Bannon has been authorized to grant the PCs the following payment: Each character

Everything You Ever Wanted to Know About CADS

Okay, so most of the CADS information is in the article "CADS" published in **Challenge 48**. These are just a few brief commentaries relevant to this adventure.

Unarmed CADS are available on the civilian market in the province of British Columbia. The only restrictions on ownership are that a purchaser may not be a convicted felon and that every CADS sold in the province must be fitted with rubber soles on its "feet." This second restriction is intended to minimize wear and tear on the streets and sidewalks of British Columbia's towns and cities.

The coding system used by ArmorTech to identify its CADS units is written as: first, the year of the model's commercial availability; second (after the dash) the order, in numerical series, of the models released in the same year.

Example: The coded classification CADS Mk 2012-1 means that the model of CADS in question was the first model released by ArmorTech in the year 2012.

Presented below are the game statistics and details of the ArmorTech CADS Mk 2010-4:

CADS Mk 2010-4

Call Sign: Pilot's "Handle"

REF Penalty: To pilot: -2

Run: 60

Leap: 6

Carry: 200

Lift: 800

Throw: 120

Armor: 25 SP

SDPs: 30

Batteries: 6 hours

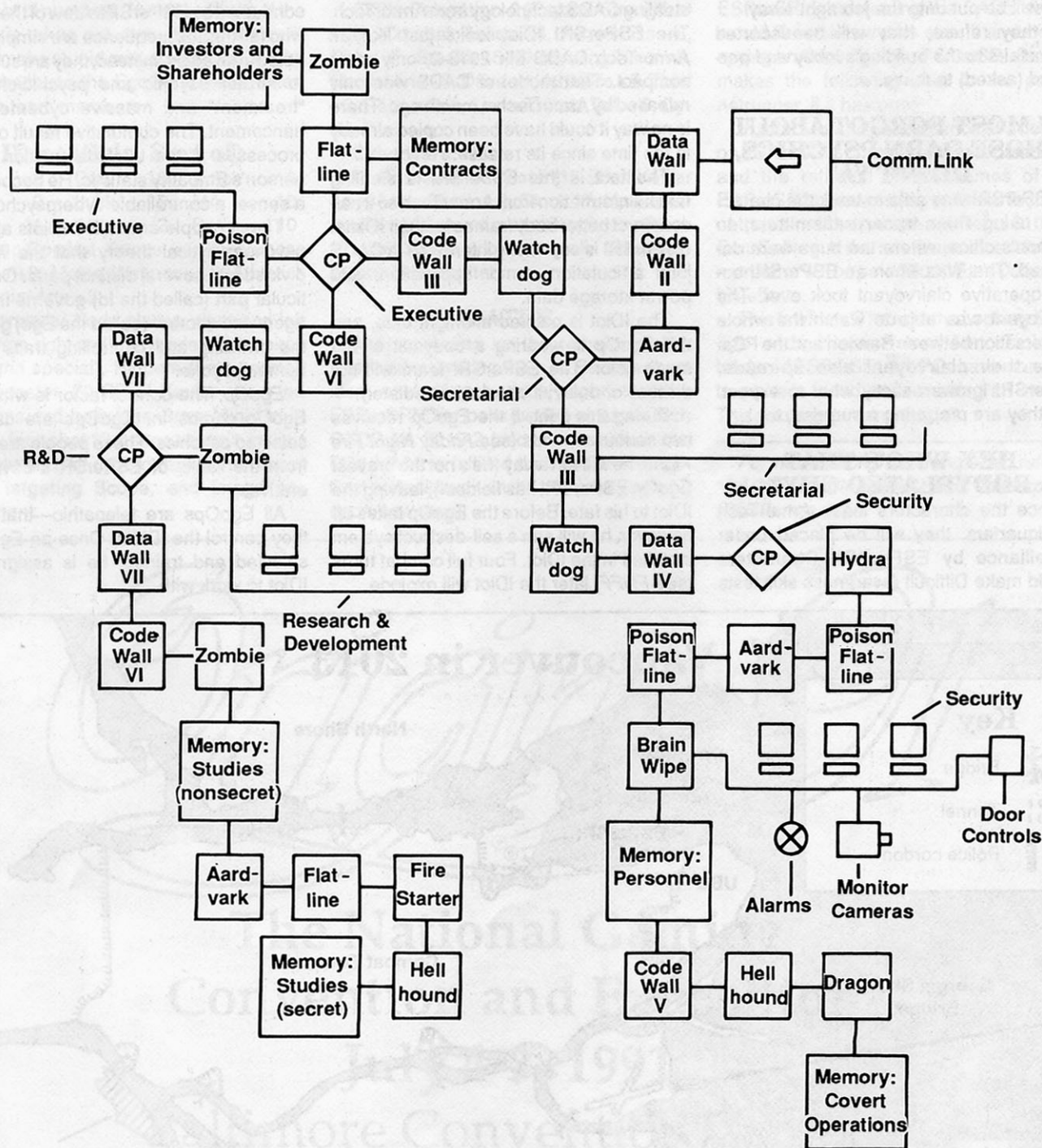
Weapons and Ammo: None; standard

Cybernetics: Cyberoptics (2) with telescopes, interface plugs

Basic Cost: \$15,000 EuroDollars* (doesn't include cost of cybernetics)

*This is what a Mk 2010-4 cost when it was first released in May of 2010. In mid-2013, they can be bought for between \$8000 and \$10,000 EuroDollars.

Net Map for ESPerSRI Core Complex, Vancouver



Watchdog programs "run" to alert ESPerSRI security netrunners.
ESPerSRI runners enter the Net through their security work stations.

will receive either \$20,000 EuroDollars (half now, half upon completion) or \$10,000 EuroDollars now, and a reconditioned ArmorTech CADS Mk 2010-4 upon completion of the mission.

All characters that go for the second offer will be trained by ArmorTech in the CADS Operation Skill (+1), free of charge, at the end of this adventure.

If the players agree to work for Bannon, they will be put onto the job right away.

If they refuse, they will be escorted downstairs to the building's lobby and permitted (asked) to leave.

ALMOST FORGOT ABOUT THOSE DARN PSYCHICS, DIDN'T YA?

ESPerSRI was able to track the characters, using their tracer-transmitters, to Bannon's office, where the bugs were destroyed. That was when an ESPerSRI covert operative clairvoyant took over. The clairvoyant was able to watch the whole conversation between Bannon and the PCs. Since their clairvoyant also lip-reads, ESPerSRI knows exactly what to expect. And they are preparing a surprise, too!

HEY, WHO'S THAT BODYPLATED GUY?

Once the characters leave ArmorTech Headquarters, they will be placed under surveillance by ESPerSRI. Characters should make Difficult Awareness skill tests

to realize they are being followed.

Whether or not the PCs notice, they will be attacked when they get a few blocks from the ArmorTech building. The attackers are an IDiot and EgoOp team, ESPerSRI's most secret and most deadly type of strike force. This team is code-named Purple Nightshade.

As soon as the IDiot appears, it will become obvious to the PCs why ESPerSRI is stealing CADS technology from ArmorTech. The ESPerSRI IDiot looks just like an ArmorTech CADS Mk 2013-2, only more compact. That model of CADS was only released by ArmorTech a month ago. There is no way it could have been copied already in the time since its release.

The fact is that ESPerSRI is stealing CADS information from ArmorTech so it can construct better body frames for their IDiots. ESPerSRI is especially interested in CADS joint articulation, armor application, and power storage data.

The IDiot is painted midnight blue, and the EgoOp is wearing a bodysuit of the same color. The ESPerSRI team will not discuss or delay; it attacks immediately.

During this fight, if the EgoOp receives two serious wounds (see *Friday Night Fire Fight*), he will run away (he's not the bravest EgoOp ESPerSRI has fielded!), leaving the IDiot to his fate. Before the EgoOp takes off however, he will arm a self-destruct system installed in the IDiot. Four full combat turns (see *FNFF*) later the IDiot will explode.

The explosion of the IDiot will have the same damaging effects to bystanders as a hand grenade in *FNFF*.

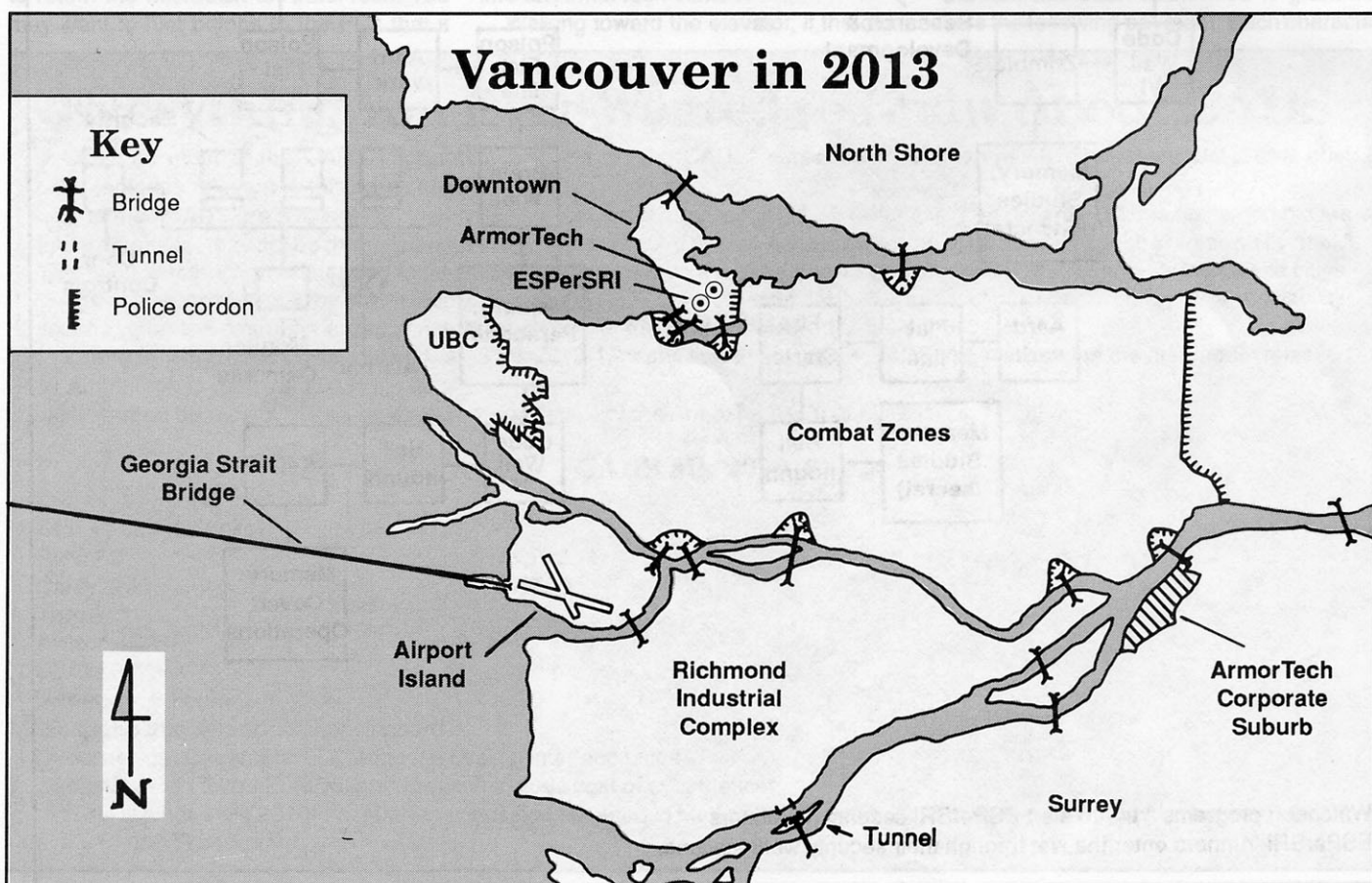
IDiots and EgoOps: This kind of team has been used successfully by ESPerSRI for about the last two years. Both IDiots and EgoOps (from Ego Operative) are still in the refinement stages.

IDiot: An IDiot is a person who has failed the psychoactivity diagnosis battery of tests conducted by ESPerSRI. A few of the people who fail this test sequence are simply never heard from again. Instead, they are subjected to further psychic and psychic/chemical "treatment" and massive cybernetic enhancement. The cumulative result of these processes is the total destruction of the person's Empathy statistic. He becomes, in a sense, a controllable cyberpsycho.

These people are called IDiots after the psychoanalytical theory that the mind is divided into several distinct parts. One particular part (called the Id) governs the savagery and another (called the Ego) governs the civilizing and controlling traits of the human psyche.

EgoOp: The control factor is where the EgoOp comes in. EgoOps are carefully selected psychics. These people are drawn from the ranks of ESPerSRI's covert operatives.

All EgoOps are telepathic—that's how they control the IDiots. Once an EgoOp is selected and trained, he is assigned an IDiot to work with.



The Team: These are two-man teams, one totally savage, the other totally stable. ESPerSRI has fielded approximately six EgoOp/IDiot teams to date. Each EgoOp/IDiot team is given a codename such as Crimson Mist, Yellow Fever, or Black Plague to name a few.

In combat, the team is very strong when working as a unit. If the IDiot is eliminated, however, the EgoOp is fairly easy to take out by weight of numbers if he doesn't run. If the EgoOp is taken out, though, the IDiot will start to make stupid mistakes during a fight. This is because the EgoOp is the "thinker" for both team members.

IDiot (Solo, Sort of)

Int	2	Cool	10	Emp	0
Tech	2	Luck	5	MA	10
Ref	11	Att	2	Body	10

Skills: Combat Sense +5, Awareness +5, Rifle +8, Melee Weapons +8, Athletics +8, Martial Arts +5.

Cyberware: Body plating, right and left cyberarms, right and left cyberlegs, Vampires (sharkgrin special), Rippers (both hands), reflex booster, 20 SP of Kevlar armor on both arms and both legs, 9mm Mini-Uzi in left arm, four-shot 12-gauge shotgun in right arm, right and left cyberoptics with thermograph, targeting Scope, and image enhancement.

Outfit: Self-destruct charges as well as sabotage chipware and company safeguard (the last two are from "The Catch" on page 25 of the *Cyberpunk Handbook* in the basic *Cyberpunk* set).

EgoOp (Solo)

Int	9	Cool	8	Emp	8
Tech	9	Luck	9	MA	7
Ref	8	Att	6	Body	7

Skills: Telepathy +6 (Psychic Strength of 256), Combat Sense +4, Awareness +6, Pistol +5, Stealth +5, Shadowing/Ditch +5, Martial Arts +6, Drive +4, Athletics +5, Thief +6, Persuasion, Lie, and Fast Talk +5, Cyber Tech +4.

Cyberware: None.

Outfit: Armor body suit (15 SP of Kevlar on all body locations), Glock 17, hip holster and three 17-round magazines for the Glock 17, lockpicks, nylon carry-all, IDiot self-destruct transmitter.

LATER

After collecting up the remains of the IDiot and delivering them to Bannon (best idea) or making a verbal report that the ESPerSRI IDiot looks just like an ArmorTech CADS Mk 2013-2 (second-best idea), the PCs will have fulfilled their end of the contract and will be given the previously agreed upon payments.

CYBERPUNK

OH, ONE LAST THING

Now that ArmorTech knows why ESPerSRI was stealing the CADS data, it would like to know who else, if anybody, is spying on ArmorTech for ESPerSRI. Bannon makes the following offer to the party's netrunner, if it has one:

In return for the performance of a net raid on ESPerSRI's covert-personnel databanks and the retrieval of the names of any ESPerSRI spies working at ArmorTech, the netrunner will be paid an additional \$10,000 EuroDollars. If the run is unsuccessful, the netrunner will be paid \$2000 EuroDollars for his efforts.

This is where "Through the Looking Glass Eye" ends. Having helped ArmorTech and hindered ESPerSRI, the PCs have managed to make a friend while making an enemy. This could get interesting! Ω

For more background material, refer to "CADS" (**Challenge 48**) and "Psiberpunk" (**Challenge 47**).

Origins '91

The National Gaming
Convention and Exposition

July 4-7, 1991

Baltimore Convention Center



gemco

PO Box 609, Randallstown, MD 21133



In 2020, Earth was devastated by geological catastrophe, and billions died. The only survivors were the handfuls in the shelters. They came out 450 years later to a radically altered world—an impossible world populated by dinosaurs and the ruins of past civilizations.

This is the Xenozoic era. Here a few brave men and women struggle to reclaim the Earth. They explore the ruins of now-ancient 20th-century civilization, and like people since the beginning of

time, they fight among themselves.

Cadillacs & Dinosaurs, the roleplaying game, is based on *Xenozoic Tales*, the acclaimed comic series by Mark Schultz. Complete rules (based on GDW's award-winning **Twilight: 2000** game system) detail character generation, combat, exploration, equipment, and adventuring in this fascinating future world.

144-page trade paperback. Fully illustrated with Mark Schultz's art. Game rules by Frank Chadwick. GDW: 3000. \$18. Available in November 1990.

Rifts Sourcebook Number One and Neo-Anarchist's Guide to North America reviews by Eric W. Haddock. *Venom* review by Julia Martin.

Rifts Sourcebook Number One

Palladium.

\$11.95.

Written By: Kevin Siembieda

120-page softbound sourcebook for *Rifts*.

The anxiously awaited sourcebook for Palladium's *Rifts* is here and it contains many of the things that players and GMs have been needing to properly run a *Rifts* campaign.

CONTENTS

The book starts with some answers to questions that people frequently have about the *Rifts* rules. It's here that some of the material that was omitted in the *Rifts* rulebook is presented. This includes the Shifter's Sense P.P.E. spell, the Glitter Boy's personal armor suit, and apparently the most often asked question: What is a D-Bee? (It stands for "Dimensional Being.") The largest part of this Q&A section is devoted to addressing which characters can add bionics to themselves.

Other answers are devoted to game mechanics and how to treat mega-armor.

NORTH AMERICA

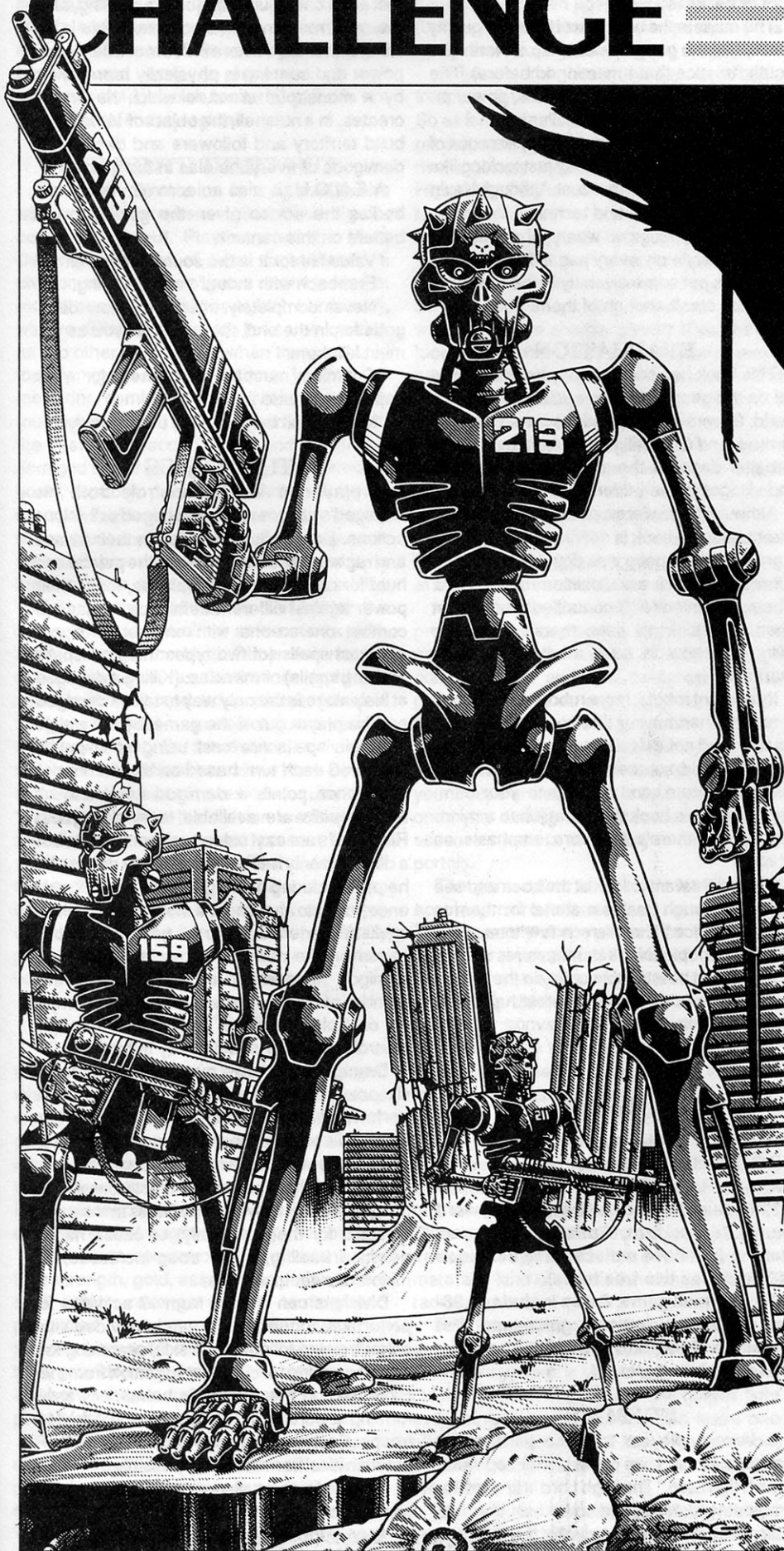
In chapter two, "North America," society and geography are covered. These eight pages cover what I think is the most important material for any roleplaying game that introduces a new world. The basic social structure of both Coalition and non-Coalition citizenry is given an overview that's a little more extensive and to-the-point than what was presented in the *Rifts* rulebook. Although short, the information is very much needed, and it addresses some obvious questions left open by the rulebook.

COALITION MATERIAL

After geography and society, the next topic is the Coalition government and its equipment. The statistics for Emperor Prosek, his son, and four new top government officials are given here, followed by a brief section detailing the composition of typical Coalition squads. This section on squads is a real help for people who wanted a patrol of soldiers to harass their PCs, but weren't sure exactly what such a patrol would consist of. Types of squads described include reconnaissance, light and heavy mechanized, search and destroy, dog packs, espionage, and air squadrons.

NEW ROBOTS

After squad composition, two new Coalition pieces of equipment are introduced: the



Skelebot and the IAR-2 Abolisher Robot. The Skelebots are introduced as being a major piece of equipment for the Coalition and as having quite an effect on the *Rifts* world. These robots are used as infantry troops by the Coalition and everything you'd want to know about them is included in the book.

Although there aren't supposed to be too many of them in the game (their manufacture is an expensive process and only a few facilities that can make them exist), their numbers are increasing in the *Rifts* world. They should make for an interesting opponent to PC groups. At the same time, they offer a way for PCs to have combat with mega-damage weapons and not have to worry about the moral implications of killing living Coalition soldiers.

The IAR-2 Robot is little more than another walking tank, offering little more in the way of adventure potential than the good feeling one might get from blowing one up.

NEW BOY ON THE FIELD

The next 20 pages introduce a new power faction into the *Rifts* world: Triax Industries. This is a corporation that manufactures robots, power armor, weapons, and equipment for the New Republic, a nation in Europe. There is a brief explanation of the alliance between Triax and the Coalition, and the rest of the section deals with statistics for new power armor, weapons, equipment, etc.

GAME MASTER'S SECTION

The second half of the book contains an adventure which introduces two colorful NPCs. These two should highlight excellent adventures for the PCs and should remain a permanent part of anyone's campaign.

However, after the encounters and NPC stats are presented, there is about 15 pages of more robot statistics. It was about here in the book that I began to grow weary of robots.

Following the adventure in the sourcebook is a section explaining in detail how players can play robots as PCs.

The final section introduces a few new monsters and demons for the *Rifts* world. A couple of these are interesting and show depth; the others are mostly there so the PCs have something to shoot at.

The final two pages of the book contain a well-crafted character sheet which has the distinction of being able to be used by any character class (in contrast to other Palladium games). The other page contains a barely readable geographical map of North and South America.

APPEARANCE

The organization of this sourcebook is vastly better than the *Rifts* rulebook, and it even has a larger Quick-Find Table. Players and GMs alike shouldn't have any trouble quickly finding what they need during play.

Although the illustrations in the book are 99% done by Kevin Long (who maintains his usual quality and characteristic "look"), there are a few by Newton Ewell and Larry

MacDougall that are very well done and show a lot of detail.

The maps in the book are of average quality (except for the geographical map of North and South America that I mentioned before). The technical illustrations of the robots, power armor, and equipment are excellent.

My only complaint about the appearance of this book is that it comes away just looking like the average Palladium product. Although Kevin Long is a good artist and technical illustrator, I'm beginning to grow weary of seeing his distinctive style on every page. The two new illustrators put some diversity in the book, but there just aren't enough of them.

EVALUATION

This book has some greatly needed material on the geography and society of the *Rifts* world. Several rules questions have been answered, and GMs will benefit from being able to better describe the environment of towns and villages in the wilderness.

Although there were new and colorful NPCs introduced, the book is definitely robot heavy. A great deal of space was devoted to nothing but robots. There are Coalition robots, Triax robots, and even NPC-controlled robots. Just when you think it's over, there's a section telling you how to be a robot as a player character!

If you want robots, more robots and a bunch of robots, then buying this book should be a reaction and not a decision. If you are looking for *Rifts* world source material that will add color, adventure, and pizzazz to your campaign, well, this book does that job to a minor degree, but there's far more emphasis on robots.

GMs might want to look at the book and see if there's enough usable material for them to justify the price. There are a few interesting NPCs, a couple of neat monsters, a brief section about how to GM society in the wilderness, and an adventure. The other half of the book is—robots.

Venom

Game Systems, Inc.

P.O. Box 160129

Miami, FL 33116-0129

\$20 setup. Rulebook \$5 (counts toward setup). \$5 per turn. Subsequent games after the first have a discounted setup fee (\$10, includes two free turns).

Play-by-mail game. Setup includes a 36-page rulebook plus errata, game map, first turn setup sheet, and two free turns.

Two-week turnaround.

PREMISE

In *Venom*, players take the parts of 20 demigods all set down on an unclaimed world by the "High Lord." The High Lord is tired of the demigods' bickering, and so he sets them up in this "ultimate test of survival of the fittest"—they must "rule or die." Only one demigod or

demigoddess will survive in the end. When there are only four demigods remaining, all of them will meet in a final colossal battle in the Ninth Dimension, where the sum of a demigod's power and cunning is physically represented by a monstrous creature which he or she creates. In a nutshell, the object of *Venom* is to build territory and followers and destroy the demigods of everyone else in the game.

V.E.N.O.M. is also an acronym which embodies the advice given the godling by its betters on this contest:

"Value life for it is the source of power.

"Encroach with thought and planning.

"Never completely trust you fellow demigods for, in the end, they must kill you as you must kill them.

"Optimism must be maintained, for when hope dies...so do you.

"Magic shall be your tool; use it wisely."

THE BASICS

A player in *Venom* controls both his demigod's actions and his demigod's divisions actions. Demigods can reside in their palace and regenerate strength, leave the palace and hunt for other demigods' palaces, focus their power against different demigods, engage in combat one-on-one with another demigod, and cast spells (of two types: magical spells and ring spells) or miracles. (Killing a demigod at his palace is the only way to take a demigod and his player out of the game, by the way.)

Magic spells are cast using spell points (acquired each turn based on the number of experience points a demigod has), and all magic spells are available to all demigods. Ring spells are cast using spell points also, but a demigod only has access to those ring spells he picked during setup. Miracles cost experience points to cast and are more powerful than spells. Experience points are gained each turn based on the number of mortal followers a demigod has, which is closely tied to the number of cities, villages, towns, and camps he controls; they are also gained through controlling territory and victory in battle.

Demigods also own a staff which contains six powers/abilities which are automatically performed every turn. The content of a demigod's staff is chosen during game setup and cannot be changed later. Staff powers can automatically perform division activities every turn (in addition to the four activities that can be selected for them normally) or cause minor demigod healing, minor troop increases, or minor follower increases.

Divisions can choose from 17 activities to perform each turn, which can be divided into either training to improve a skill, searching for a mine, praying for divine intervention from the High Lord on the demigod's behalf, or transforming a portion of their number into better troops. Each turn they can perform four different activities from these 17 possible.

All five divisions also move each turn and can fight other demigods' divisions, visit cities to buy supplies and armaments, or be teleported to another demigod's palace (to

besiege it) or to one's own palace to drop off accumulated booty and pick up teleportation scrolls and special weapons. Divisions can also split off a part of their strength to make a border guard army, an understrength unit mainly useful for quick territorial gains in under- or undefended regions.

THE NINTH DIMENSION

The Ninth Dimension is a special arena where monsters representative of a demigod's power slug it out. Players enter the Ninth Dimension at one of three times: when a division moves into a Vortex storm (a kind of monstrous wandering magical hurricane), when a division moves into the same location as two other divisions, or when there are only four demigods left in the game. In Ninth Dimensional combat all of the division's strength (numbers, types of troops, armaments, etc.) in the first and second case and all of the demigod's total strength (everything—troops, booty, territory, personal health) in the third case are converted into points which are used to construct a monster which fights any other monsters present in the Ninth Dimension to the death in a giant game of King of the Hill.

Entering the Ninth Dimension before the final combat can be either an asset or a detriment. Rulers of the Ninth Dimension receive triple output from resource mines (gold and essence mines) and troop portals (shadow and ghost portals)—a condition guaranteed to build power fast. But the division or divisions which were liquidated to make a Ninth Dimensional creature are not available for use in the "mortal plane" after the division is sucked into the dimension—the assets present in that division are gone forever. The division will reconstitute at its demigod's palace after the creature it composed is killed in Ninth Dimensional combat, but it is now at an extremely puny fighting unit composed of a leader and a scant few troops with no equipment.

STRATEGY

While ripping other players' divisions to shreds or destroying a weakened demigod while he is trying to recuperate at his palace are important, these activities must be engaged in cautiously while always remembering to continue to build one's resources. After all, in the endgame the strength of the Ninth Dimensional creature you can make is based on the overall strength of one's game position.

Resources consist of one's divisions and their strength, gold, essence, experience and spell points, revenge wishes, territory and population centers, and followers. Most of these resources tend to build on their own over time, provided that they are not destroyed in combat or the source of resupply (a mine or portal) lost to an enemy.

Revenge wishes are usually useful to suddenly erode an enemy's resources late in the game, but they can save your position if you are really far behind and cast them on yourself. They either destroy experience points, spell points, followers, and one division of an enemy

all at once (if they succeed) or add equivalent gains to one's own position if cast on oneself (but they only add to one's own position if it is really dire—not if you're in good shape).

Shadows and ghosts, the two most basic troops in divisions, are gained through portals. So as long as a player has his portals, he gets reinforcements of these troops; taking over a rival's portals increases the resupply rate. Higher level troops are gained by either performing a miracle or transforming shadows into ghosts and ghosts into spirits.

Gold and essence (a basic element converted at a demigod's palace into teleport scrolls, special swords, and locate scrolls, which tell where another player's divisions are located currently) are also resupplied every turn from the mines at player starts with, and gaining new mines once again increases the supply. While essence is be converted into useful items, it's a pain to get to one's palace—a division has to be teleported there to drop it off, thus taking them off of useful territory acquisition and combat/defense duties for about two turns. Gold is mainly useful for buying weapons and armor for one's divisions at a city to improve their combat effectiveness.

On the whole, it is usually more important to protect one's troop portals than essence and gold mines, as the erosion of troops through combat losses and their being assigned to guard territory is an ongoing game element. Gold is only used when you spend it (or lose it through defeat) and essence when you get it to your palace (or lose it in combat). How well your troops are equipped is by necessity secondary to having troops, so having gold or essence mines is secondary to having troop portals.

The game turns at its basic level around acquiring more followers and more territory. This is usually accomplished through taking over neutral camps and then building them up through the use of a progression of miracles into cities, although followers can also be gained by converting travellers through the use of miracles or bribes of gold. The more population centers a demigod has, the more followers he has. The more followers a demigod has, the more experience points and, thus, spell points he has to work with. And the more spells he can use and bigger miracles he can cast, and so on. However, spread cities out around the territory you have gained. Closely clustered cities are a ripe target for an earthquake spell which has a chance to decimate any kind of population center within its radius.

Follower and territory acquisition can be accelerated early on by splitting off a border guard army from a division and using it to quickly gain territory. The border guards fight everything in a one location and leave one ghost behind as a guard and then move on, continuing until they finish their turn's move or are decimated.

The game incorporates a tantalizing method for sudden territory acquisition: If a demigod controls all of the border squares to one of the

game's five map regions, all of the region's unclaimed/unowned map squares become his. But all border squares, by definition, belong to two regions simultaneously. This guarantees border wars between demigods struggling for control of contiguous regions.

On the whole, though, it is more likely that you will last longer in the game if you do not grab for the golden apple of border regions early on, where you will quickly make hot and heavy enemies on territory which your enemy is never motivated to concede. At the very least acquire territory deep in the interior of a region while simultaneously pursuing border control with one or two divisions. That way some of your territorial gains are likely to remain with you for awhile.

THE COMPANY

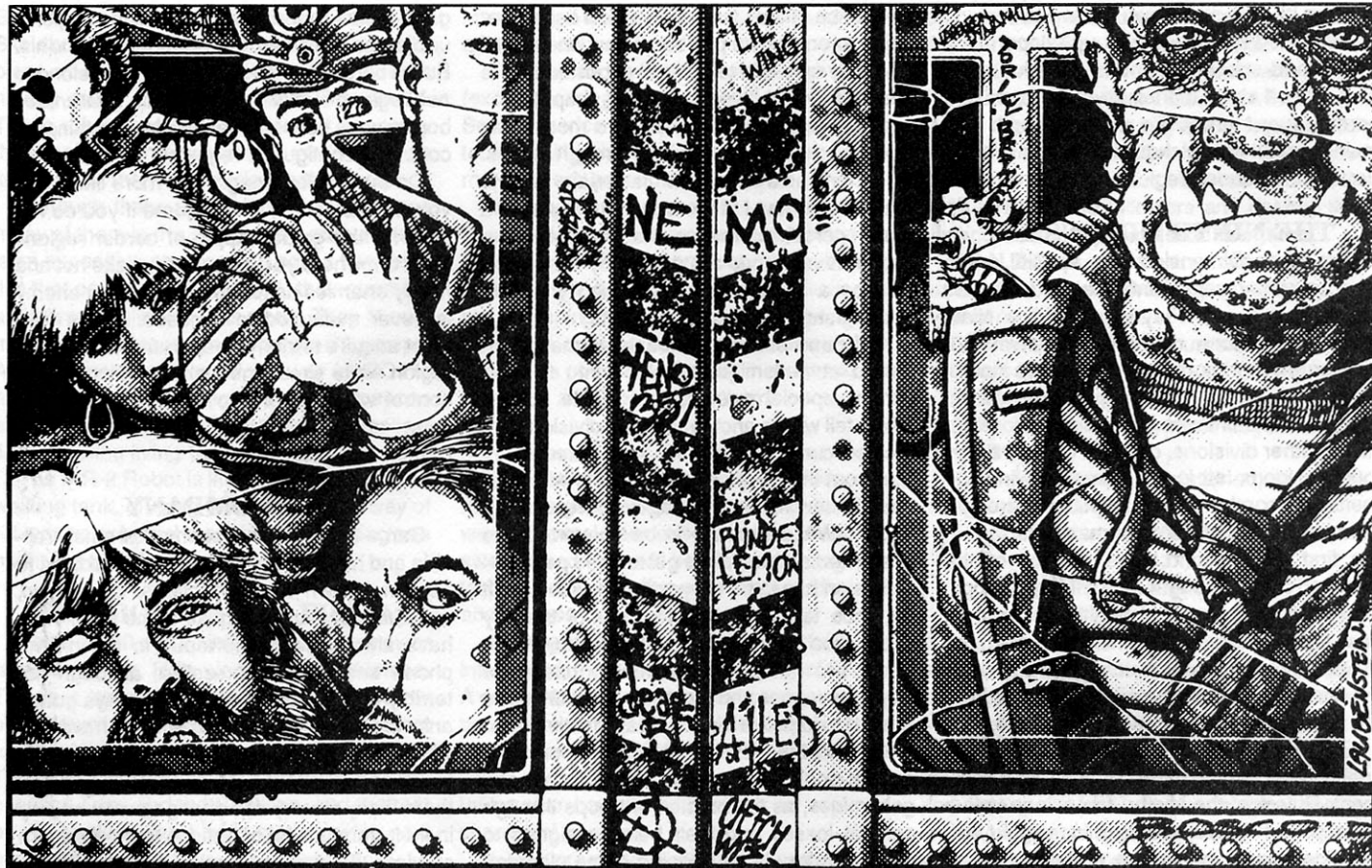
Game Systems, Inc. seems extremely reliable and has run several games in addition to *Venom—Dawn of the Ancients*, *Earthwood*, and *State of War*—for quite some time. They have always been courteous to me on the phone and very businesslike, although not terribly friendly. But, they have always gotten answers for me on any questions I have had with great efficiency, saving on the long distance costs I might have incurred in phoning them. They also try and offer gamers who play in their games a lot of options for special turn services (in case you miss a turn) and for phone-in turns.

GRIPES

One aspect of *Venom's* game system seems engineered purely to stretch the game out, thus eating up more of a player's turn cost money. Each time a division moves (when not teleporting), it runs a chance of getting lost. While the chance of getting lost decreases with increased training in flying (the form of locomotion divisions use), during the early and middle stages of the game, getting lost was a frequent and annoying occurrence for my divisions. While a division is lost, all it can do is wander about and try and guess where it is. The only clues to where a lost division is are where it started the last turn and what type of terrain the square it is now in has. This led to my spending turns and turns with one or more divisions wandering aimlessly.

Part of my extreme frustration with getting lost also stems from the slow rate at which one's forces gain in ability. In the nine abilities which divisional troops can train to gain skill in, each time a training activity is picked its associated skill only goes up by 2%, 3% or 4% (depending on the skill). And you can only train once in each of four skills each turn (provided you have nothing else you needed your divisions to do). Once again, this seems to serve, in essence, mainly to stretch out the game's length.

Finally, while the sheets that one fills out to give orders for one's turn were clear and graphically pleasing, *Venom's* turn reports are an eyesore. While all the information about one's activities and battles is there on one



continuous fanfold sheet of computer paper, battle results are confusing and long, and movement is not as clear as it could be. Finally, rather than give a map printout of some kind with each turn to enable easy tracking of one's territorial gains and losses, the game prints a "Listing of All Owned Squares" summary sheet—basically a giant, hard-to-read table. In order to really tell what had happened to my forces each turn, I had to replot each point on this table on the game map provided with the game setup. This was inconvenient, messy, and it was very easy for me to miss squares I had lost, although I could tell fairly easily what I had gained.

EVALUATION

Venom is a play-by-mail game which provides a great variety of options for game play and vicarious mayhem to its player. If you are a very competitive gamer or enjoy orchestrating backbiting plots (*Diplomacy*™ players pay heed), you may enjoy the game a great deal for its atmosphere and the shifting alliances which form during play. Many different substrategies can be employed and investigated in the game while pursuing a fairly clear overall strategic goal. The fantastic elements of the game, especially the magic spells and miracles, are also rather appealing to deal in as a change of pace.

I would not recommend *Venom*, though, as there are many frustrating and tedious elements to its game system. Skill advancement is slow, and most of the game depends very heavily on random results. The overall impres-

sion this leaves on a player is that most things you try in the game, you usually fail at, unless the results are guaranteed to work every time. While every game needs a random element, the random element in *Venom* is too predominant for my taste. Finally, *Venom's* organization and presentation of turn information is dated, and the lack of any kind of turn situation map (not necessarily a fancy one) makes assessing turn information difficult and tiresome.

The Neo-Anarchist's Guide to North America

FASA Corporation.

\$15.00.

Written By: A variety of authors

128-page softbound sourcebook for Shadowrun with foldout maps.

WHAT IT IS

The Neo-Anarchist's Guide to North America presents sourcebook material for players that covers several cities and nations in the *Shadowrun* world.

One of the things that makes this book interesting is that each entry in the book was written by a different author, and each entry follows a different system of organization. By doing this, the book conveys the impression that it was written by a bunch of Neo-Anarchists, each writing what he thought was important and following the style he liked.

Cities covered include San Francisco, At-

lanta, Manhattan, Chicago, and more. Also in the book is material covering some of the major governmental organizations: the United Confederation of American States, the California Free State, the Republic of Québec, and others.

WHAT IT'S GOT

If you've set or are going to set a play session in one of the cities in the book, virtually everything you need is included. There's material covering law, economics, fines, social structure, transportation, history, crime (organized and not), tourist attractions, descriptions of individual neighborhoods, and even cost of living indexes. Whether your players are going to visit a city or if your whole campaign is to take place in one, you've got everything you need to know.

Some of the best aspects of the book are the descriptions of individual sites in each city which can be visited by the PCs. GMs shouldn't have any trouble with coming up with a convincing local bar or office when using this book.

A GM should also be able to handle just about anything that happens on the street. If the PCs are picked up for carrying illegal weapons, the GM will be able to determine how much the fine will be, what the prevailing social winds regarding the offense are, and how likely it is the PCs are going to get out of jail.

NEO-ANARCHISM

The book begins with a detailed description of and argument for Neo-Anarchism. Basically, Neo-Anarchism is social theory that's based on economics. It uses economic prin-

ciples and these are explained in the book.

The aim of Neo-Anarchism is to bring about a completely fair and open market system, where there's no competition of goods and where every citizen gets enough of these goods to make him or her happy, yet there are still enough goods left to go around to make everyone else happy. Right now (in the *Shadowrun* world), every citizen is a victim of coercion. The average person has no choice in what she buys or does, as everything is run by the megacorporations. Neo-Anarchism seeks to bring about the end of this coercion, by bringing about the end of the megacorporate social and economic structure.

Several economic theories and a few graphs drive the Neo-Anarchist theme home, and anyone reading the material will be able to play a very convincing Neo-Anarchist player character.

Whether you agree with the Neo-Anarchist message or not, you'll find the inclusion of Neo-Anarchism into your *Shadowrun* campaign valuable as a referee or a player.

MAPS

There are several foldout maps in the back of the book which detail each city. The San Francisco map is the only one that has a numbered key corresponding to the sites described in the text, which leaves the other maps somewhat bare of detail and of lesser

utility. Some of the maps are very difficult to read since the streets aren't big enough to allow the lettering of the street names to be properly applied, but players should be able to get around without too much trouble.

Preceding the street map of each city is a large-scaled regional map that shows major highway routes. The last map in the book is an almost impossible to read general map of North America. It really needed to be bigger to be clearer.

APPEARANCE

The cover ranks among the best I've seen, both for pure visual delight and for conveyance of purpose. It's quite striking and conveys the feeling that the book was downloaded from some futuristic computer bulletin board. The back cover has the added nice touch of having some of the words drawn with a "penciled-in" look, and this adds to the general anarchist feeling of the book.

The interior art is of average professional quality and some illustrations are better than others. Few of the drawings look like they were made specifically for the book, but are just random scenes of *Shadowrun* life.

EVALUATION

This sourcebook has tremendous utility for both GMs and players of *Shadowrun*. Even if the player characters aren't adventuring in

one of the cities of the book, the GM can still use it as a reference for seedy bars, fines, laws, and politics for whatever city the PCs are in.

In addition, there is a detailed explanation of Neo-Anarchism included, and this Neo-Anarchist theme alone could form the basis for a whole campaign group of PCs. Instead of fighting megacorps for money or revenge, the PCs could now have an overall purpose for their actions, a grand scheme, and share it with other PCs and NPCs, because this book has everything a player (or referee) needs to start his own local chapter of Neo-Anarchism.

After reading the descriptions of each of the cities, one gets a definite "you are there" impression. Each city is described with just enough detail and generality to allow GMs to include extra material or, if they like, use it exclusively as an absolute source of information. In fact, part of the appeal of the book is stated in the introduction, which is that some of the info in the book may not be "real" and accurate, but just the Neo-Anarchist's impressions. This leaves a lot open for GMs, and certainly prevents conflicts for GMs who've already based a campaign in one of the cities in the book.

All this info, maps, plus an excellent cover equal a superior value for shadowrunners everywhere. Ω



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PLAYTESTERS NEEDED for play-by-mail one-on-one war-game. Tactical level—players control individual troopers and tanks. Medium-high tech, near-future setting: laser rifles, powered armor, smart artillery rounds,

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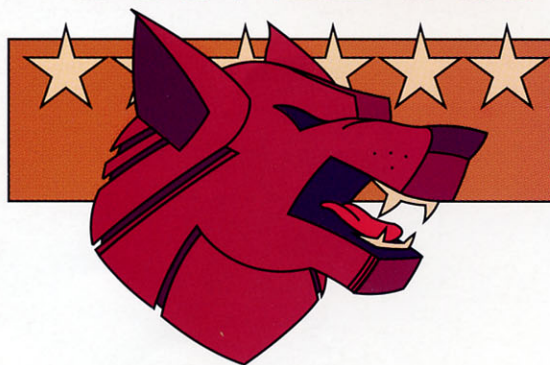
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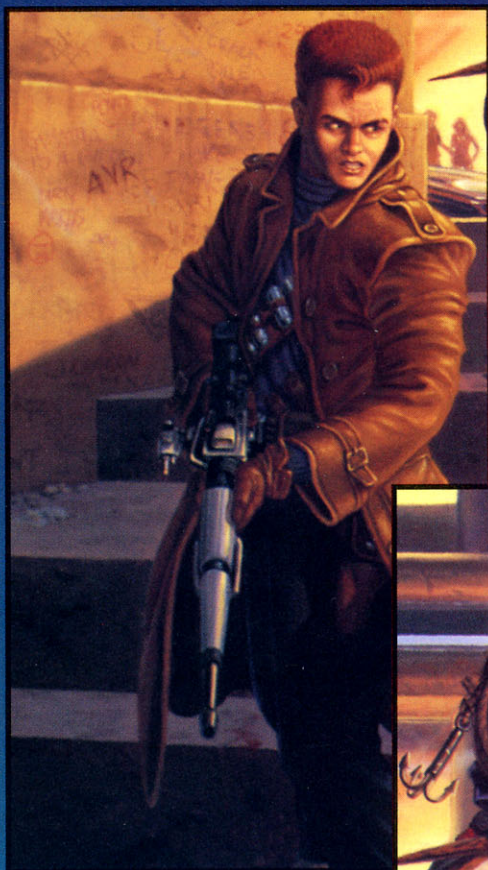
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