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CHALLENGE 57

The Magazine of Science-Fiction Gaming US \$3.50



TWILIGHT: 2000™

Black Siberia

Thomas M. Kane

MEGATRAVELLER®

Kiraag Station

Jonathan Crocker

CYBERPUNK 2.0.2.0.™

**Curiosity
Killed the Cat**

Craig Sheeley

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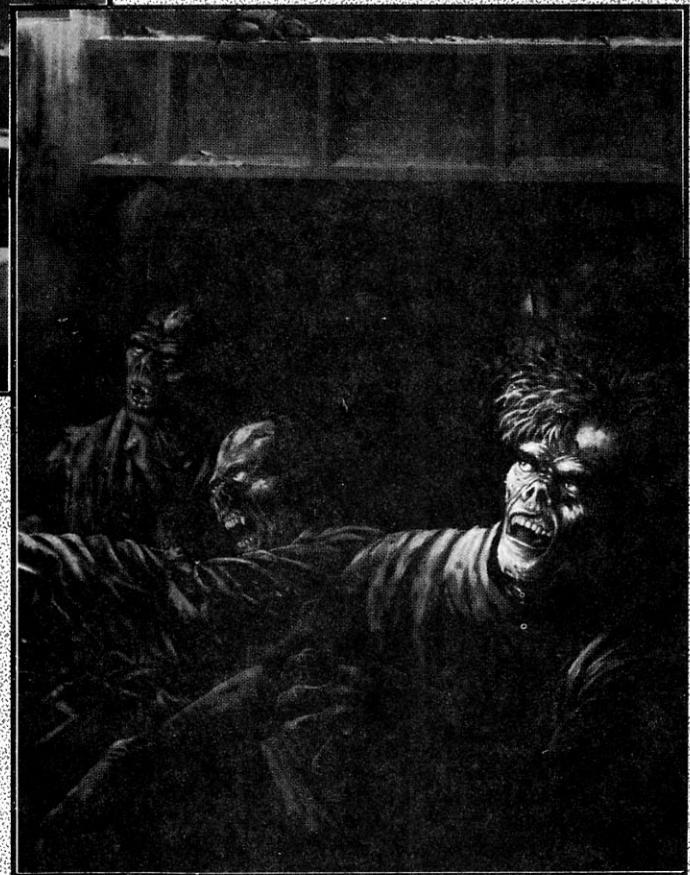
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About the Cover

"From this moment on, you will do as I bid," were the last words that Martin Spade heard before his mind clouded and his vision grew dark. Martin's friend, Carla, strains to glimpse the process the insectoid extraterrestrial is using to subvert Spade to its own, dark purposes in this **Dark Conspiracy** scene brought to us by artist Nick Smith.

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CHALLENGE

The Magazine of Science-Fiction Gaming

Twilight: 2000

6 Black Siberia

In AD 2000, many armies shoot their prisoners, set them free, or simply abandon them. But in the Jublunkov Pass of Czechoslovakia, near the ruins of Ostrava, one of the old POW camps still operates. Its prisoners have become an invaluable pool of slave labor. *Thomas M. Kane*

13 Standard Operating Procedures

You can develop your own standard operating procedures to help ensure your mission's success. The key is to make sure that everybody knows the SOP and that you have sealed it with a KISS (keep it simple, soldier!). *Capt. Thomas E. Mulkey, US Army (Ret.)*

MegaTraveller

14 Kiraag Research Station

My first impression of our new employer was that she was an agent for some tenth-credit company, out to run a fast one past some poor monks. I couldn't have been more wrong. *Jonathan Crocker*

20 Behind Blue Eyes

Retrieve the Star of Ilarir, infiltrate the underground Freeman movement, and solve the secret of the mysterious microfiche in this action-packed conclusion to the "Behind Blue Eyes" adventure. *Charles E. Gannon*

Space: 1889

32 Thymiamata: 1889

Welcome to Silvertap, population zero? Hired to mediate a labor dispute, you instead must solve the mystery of the missing miners in the thrilling conclusion to this three-part series. *Neil V. Young*

2300 AD

36 Operation Back Door

The Ylii are willing to ally with the humans against the deadly Kafers—but only if their envoy is delivered safely to Earth. A secret mission through a back door into Kafer space. Episode 3: Saboteurs and Skulduggery. *Charles E. Gannon*

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Shadowrun

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It was a normal evening in the Razor Edge Club. Trog and Wolfboy were sucking down brewpaks and trying to outbelch each other; Alisande and Three Feathers were acting like they didn't know these two grunges; and I was scoping the crowd, hoping something interesting world happen. Looks like I got my wish. *James L. Cambias*

Cyberpunk 2.0.2.0.

50 Curiosity Killed the Cat

In the world of 2020, practically anything is available—for a price. Changes in personal appearance are no different. Want to be one of the "beautiful people"? No problem. Want to look like a famous vid star or a face from the history databanks? Easy. Want to be larger, smaller, even the opposite gender? If you have the cash, you can get the bod to match. There's the catch. *Craig Sheeley*

Star Trek

54 Gaming with the Prime Directive

A starship is one of the most powerful weapons platforms available to the United Federation of Planets—a *Constitution*-class starship can eradicate the surface of most worlds in a matter of hours. What is to prevent a captain from meddling in a civilization with the gentle diplomacy exhibited between Spain and the Aztecs? Enter the Prime Directive. *Charles G. Weekes*

How To

56 Taming the Terrible Trivia

Timesaving tips for the busy referee. *Andy Slack*

Silent Death

58 A Time for Overkill

Flying for the Dneprodzerkutzk Warband known as the "Behemoth," the 1st AAR saw plenty of action during the invasion of House Ptolemus. Its three operational squadrons were called upon time and again to subdue bypassed points of resistance and crush defiant knots of Ptolemeian citizenry. *Kevin Barrett*

BattleTech

62 The Warriors' End

Well known throughout the Sphere, the Warriors' End bar is frequented by warriors from all parts of known space—whether Mercenary or House troops, they all come here to find fun and excitement. A dedication plaque at the entrance reads: "To all the gallant 'Mech Warriors, Scouts, and Troopers who lose their lives every day and show up here at The Warriors' End." *James Beane*



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From
the
Management

I was recently the guest of Mid-Con '91, a convention in Sundsvall, Sweden. Sundsvall is a port city on the Baltic coast and has over 21 hours of daylight per day, but the hotel room curtains were thick enough to block off the light, so sleep wasn't a problem (after I got over jet lag).

Most Swedes speak some English, especially those in service jobs. If you go there, buy a tourist guidebook and you'll have no major language problems. Two important words are *herrar* (men) and *dammar* (women), often abbreviated to H and D on the doors.

Mid-Con '91 was held on the campus of two Swedish high schools (high school is called *gymnasium* in Sweden, which causes some slight confusion to Americans). It was a small convention by American standards, with 150-200 attendees. A contingent of the Swedish SCA (Society for Creative Anachronism) gave a number of interesting demonstrations of hand-to-hand-combat.

My seminars were fairly well-attended and quite lively. There were few language problems, largely due to Anders Blixt, who was kind enough to translate when I used a word most people didn't understand.

Swedish gamers are primarily roleplayers. Boardgames haven't made much of an impact in Sweden, and miniatures are fantasy and medieval types because of restrictions against the sale of war-oriented toys. There are two broad classes of RPGs—English language and Swedish language. English-language RPGs tend to sell more among older players (college-age and above), and Swedish-language ones to younger gamers and a more general market.

Swedish gamers tend to be a little quieter than Americans and play tournament games in teams (with team names and sometimes T-shirts). There are about the same number of female gamers as in America, but more women there play "male" games like *Twilight*. Indeed, when I was presenting the awards for the *Twilight* tournament, I was surprised to notice that the first-place team included a young woman.

All in all, I had a great time, made a number of new friends, met hordes of gamers, and autographed endless piles of game books and modules.

CHALLENGE

RUMOR HAS IT...

Whoever started the false rumor that I was organizing "Allen Varney Games"—quit it! Give it a rest!

This anonymous prank has gotten out of control. A convention invited "Allen Varney Games" to buy tables in its dealers' room. Rumors appear in gossip columns of computer magazines. Australia's biggest game distributor asked for a catalog and price list.

I am sorry to see that this "Allen Varney Games" nonsense has continued, despite my best efforts to quash it. Let me assure you: There is no "Allen Varney Games." Not now, not ever! This was a joke on me, started by persons unknown at GenCon in August 1990 and carried forward by friends at a science-fiction convention last year.

They even printed fake business cards for 12 corporate positions in this alleged game company.

But it's not true. There has never been an "Allen Varney Games." I have *never* intended to start one, and I doubt very strongly that I ever would!

I don't mind the joke. My friends who did it—whoever they are—remain my friends, with no hard feelings. In fact, the whole stunt seems to have publicized my freelance writing career. (I design games and adventures for TSR, West End Games and other companies.)

But when it wastes distributors' and convention organizers' valuable time (to say nothing of my own), the hoax has gotten out of control. So I'm trying to spread the word to anyone interested. I applaud anything you can do to spread the light of truth.

Allen Varney
Austin, TX

MORE ON ROMANCE

In response to (Andy Slack's) letter in **Challenge 48** (regarding romance in gaming), I suggest two rather different RPGs: *Albedo* and *Lace & Steel*.

Albedo offers a sci-fi game of interpersonal relations with a background based on the like-titled comics by Thoughts & Images (Seattle). The mechanics can be a bit cumbersome, but the information and rules on "relations and reproduction" are well detailed without being risqué.

Lace & Steel is more the fast-paced action adventure of swash-buckling romance with game mechanics that are a breeze.

Both *Albedo* and *Lace & Steel* were created by Paul Kidd (TAGG).

Thomas C. Jarvis
Colorado Springs, CO

CLASS ACT

What happened with my (classified) ad (in **Challenge 48** and **49**)? I thought my copy was pretty clear—I had a product (maps) and wanted people to send me \$12 for them, postage and handling included.

Is it your policy to change things like that to "write for information"?

Maybe there is no difference in the response rate, but I would suspect there is one. I did have two inquiries, and one did include a SASE.

Hey—my markup on this is not that great; manufacturing cost is \$5 before I pay postage or allow anything for the labor or assembling the original map sheets in the first place.

This is a real small beer enterprise here, but I really needed 10-12 orders to make it worthwhile.

Karl Gaarsoe
Champaign, IL

As our classifieds page states, "all ads are subject to editing." If you'll notice, none of the other classified ads have prices. It's our policy to avoid both prices and phone numbers whenever possible in free classifieds. Paid ads are not subject to this restriction.

I learned the value of that rule in my experience as managing editor of several newspapers: A mistake on a price or phone number can cause a lot of trouble and make people really mad. And no matter how hard you try, mistakes always seem to creep in. So in this instance, my judgment is that it's better safe than sorry.

A QUESTION
OF METABOLISM

Since I teach metabolism at the university level, Dag Stalhandske's letter in **Challenge 49** caught my eye. This letter raised the question of food value for humans of Auroran plants and animals.

Letters from our Readers

As was correctly pointed out, Auroran biology is based on dextro-amino acids, unlike Earth-based biology, which uses levo-amino acids. As a consequence humans cannot digest Auroran proteins.

The issue raised by Dag's letter was whether the nonprotein parts of an Auroran food might be useful to humans. The door to this possibility was left partly open, and I would like to propose an alternative answer.

Like amino acids, carbohydrates are handed molecules. Unlike amino acids, the only form of carbohydrates of biological significance to earth-based life are of the dextro form.

Let us suppose that whatever chemical evolutionary pressure selected for levo-amino acids was also responsible for the selection of dextro-carbohydrates (this is pure speculation). It is possible then that the selection for dextro-amino acids on Aurore resulted in the selection for levo-carbohydrates. Levo-carbohydrates are also indigestible by earth-based life (there is interest even now in finding ways to

produce L-sugars cheaply for use as nonfattening sweeteners).

Vitamins are generally not handed molecules, but would only be of use if the Auroran enzymes they are intended to assist were very close in structure to the corresponding Earth enzyme. Which leaves minerals and water, which are bound to be the same as on earth structurally, but the mixture of minerals in the diet is much more important than the average person realizes.

Besides, just how long can you live on rusty water?

Provided you avoid the toxins, this should make Auroran food a dieter's dream come true (eat all you can—you'll still lose weight). However, there is one detail that might complicate this scheme. A number of foods here on earth, especially legumes, contain significant amounts of carbohydrates which, even though they are the normal dextro type, are very hard for us to digest. The enzymes in our intestines are simply unable to break down these carbohydrates.

However, bacteria present in our gut are able to use these carbohydrates, and in the process they release large amounts of gas. The consequence for the person involved is a certain antisocial behavior, as well as a great deal of discomfort in the abdomen.

Consider now what might happen if a person eats Auroran food and also is exposed to certain Auroran bacteria. The person will get no nutritive benefit from the food, but the bacteria will happily chew up that same food, producing embarrassing and uncomfortable results.

Terrance Smith
Urbana, IL

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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In AD 2090, many armies shoot their prisoners, set them free, or simply abandon them. But in the Jublunkov Pass of Czechoslovakia, near the ruins of Ostrava, one of the old POW camps still operates. Its commandant, Col. Vladimir Vorokov, realizes that his prisoners have become an invaluable pool of slave labor.

With his camp in the ore-rich mountains of Sudetenland, Vorokov could open mines and smelt unlimited quantities of steel in a time when most foundries depend on what scrap they can scavenge. He also established machine shops to reload spent ammunition and produce small manufactured goods.

Vorokov has built an industrial complex which services warlords throughout Central Europe. The inmates call his complex Black Siberia.

Black Siberia

By Thomas M. Kane

The PCs must break out of—or into—the prison camp known as Black Siberia. The referee may start an escape adventure by having Vorokov's men kidnap the adventurers or purchase them from other captors. Or the party might decide to break in upon hearing of prisoners who warrant a rescue, or to steal from Vorokov's hoards of weapons, supplies and gear. Referees can use Black Siberia for a single adventure, or a recurring feature of the campaign. Therefore, the text does not follow a single linear storyline. Simply choose an opening from the Approach section, then consult Refereeing This Adventure to determine what happens next.

APPROACH

The following section provides different lead-in encounters which you may use to start an adventure in Black Siberia.

Auction Block: After the adventurers lose a crucial battle, instead of killing them, whoever captured the PCs can sell them to Vorokov.

Round-Up: The adventurers stumble into one of Vorokov's traps on a hillside road, preferably as they limp away from a gruelling battle. A pair of directional mines sit uncamouflaged in the road. Two felled trees lie behind the explosives, forcing vehicles to stop. As the PCs stop, gunfire clatters from the side, aimed directly over their heads. A bullhorn blares from the firing position, "Freeze, scumbags, or we'll waste you right here." The speaker uses heavily accented English if the adventurers wear American uniforms. Otherwise, he speaks in Polish. If the party seems not to understand, he tries German and Russian. Directed by the megaphone, the party members should lie face down in the dust, under the muzzle of the machinegun. Five armed men search the prostrate captives, remove all items but basic clothing, and herd them over a ridge, where a battered truck waits to carry them to the mines.

If the adventurers make any immediate attempts to fight or flee, use the Round-Up Ambush Map to cover the tactical situation. This ambush consists of 15 Experienced NPCs in well-camouflaged individual foxholes along the ambush site. Ten have AK-74s; three have Vz-59 medium machineguns on tripods; and two have RPG-16 rocket launchers with AK-74s as secondary weapons. In addition, a T-60 stands hull-down on the ridge, also concealed by brush. Two Novice drivers armed with PM Makarov pistols guard the pair of trucks.

Underbrush and forest cover the northern sides of the hills, but the southern sides are bare. Adventurers who wish to run away must climb uphill in the open, under fire. The elevation of the ambush site allows its gunners to fire down from above such obstacles as smoke clouds.

Rescue: This storyline begins with the party at a moderately organized town in southern Poland. The normally stable town is a stir, with farmers carrying shotguns in the marketplace and militiamen on the corners. Raiders from Black Siberia seized a large party of citizens in a midnight attack. Among others, they kidnapped Father Krewinski, prewar activist for the Peasants' and Agriculturalists' Party and unofficial leader of the town. The town council offers 1000 gold coins to anyone who rescues him.

Refugees: The PCs find a stranger huddled by their campsite. Blond, gaunt and clad in tattered fatigues, Viktor Fitz looks like any refugee, except for the number tattooed upon his hand. Viktor begs the party for food, speaking Polish with an obvious Bavarian accent.

Once fed and given a place to warm himself, Viktor shares his story freely. He fled the mines to scout an escape route. Now, he faces the more daunting task of returning to lead his friends to safety. He knows that a larger escape cannot possibly work as smoothly as his first one, and he hopes the party will help him get his companions out.

Viktor knows the positions of most sentries and several ambushes Vorokov has set for wandering stragglers. Furthermore, his friends can reward rescuers with supplies stolen from the prison factories, and if the PCs help them, these prisoners will forever remain allies of the party.

REFEREEING THIS ADVENTURE

Black Siberia is a business. This section describes how Black Siberia operates and what happens to those within it.

New Arrivals:

When new prisoners arrive at Black Siberia, the guards strip them and steal their possessions. Trusties (prisoners trusted as assistant

guards) delouse the newcomers, using a garden hose with a lawn fertilizer attachment full of insecticide. Randomly appoint each new prisoner a barracks and a job (usually as either a miner or factory worker). The trusties drive newcomers to their assignments with truncheon blows and shouted admonitions. Then, abruptly, the chaos of arrival ends. The newcomers find themselves treated as simply a few chattel among the many in Black Siberia.

Interrogations: When the guards suspect a prisoner of knowing something of interest, a trio of guards snatch him from work, without explanation. They take the prisoner into the lower mineshafts and tie him to a stool. Then Vorokov interrogates the prisoner, while an assistant keeps a shotgun barrel brushing gently against the victim's temple. Vorokov always interviews prisoners individually, trying to make them think their comrades have told him what he needs to know. Often, Vorokov asks no questions at all. Instead, he perfunctorily splashes a bucket of icy water over his victim (making his gunman step back with a curse). Then, without a word, Vorokov clamps alligator-clip electrodes onto his victim's skin. If a prisoner knows something useful, this often persuades him to blurt it out.

Discipline: Punishments in Black Siberia are harsh. The guards treat each crime as an opportunity to exercise their imaginations, and they keep punishments secret, except for a rare public example. An inmate in Black Siberia gradually acquires the feeling that no other prisoner even dreams of breaking the rules. The inmates cannot guess what the penalty for crime might be, and they have no way to calculate whether a certain transgression might be worth the price.

Minor offenses include insolence to guards, shoddy work, possession of trivial luxuries and unarmed altercations with other prisoners. The guards punish them with a few blows (which cause one point of damage each). Repeat offenders might lose a day's rations, or receive a few days in the punishment cells.

More serious crimes include refusal of orders, active black-marketeering, bribery, attempts to contact people outside the camp, possession of weapons and preparations for escape. Anyone caught in these crimes receives 1D6 weeks in the punishment cells, often combined with beatings worth 3D6 points of damage. Guards also use electric cattle prods, cigarette butts and pliers for purposes best left to the imagination.

Anyone who actually tries to escape, rebel or harm camp personnel risks execution or severe beatings which may permanently cripple the victim. (Use the normal combat damage system.) Months in the punishment cells usually follow.

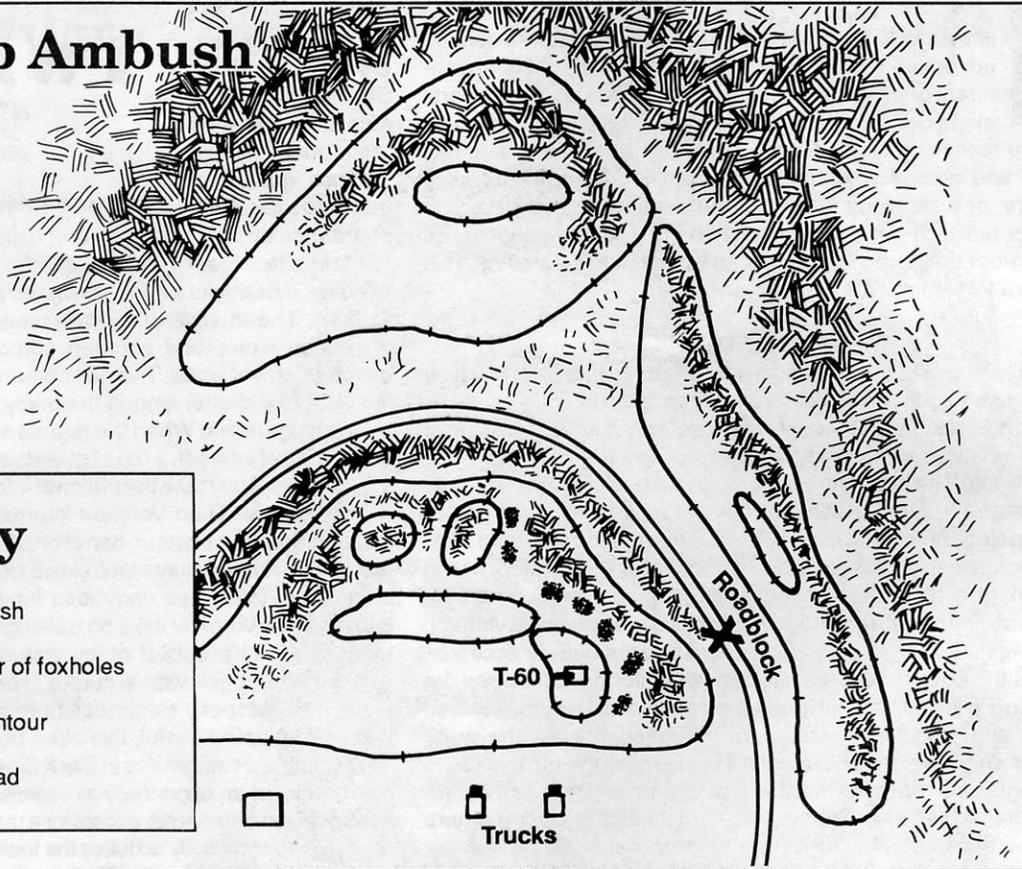
After an escape, rebellion or other significant crime, Vorokov selects a trustie to take the blame and has him shot. One of the other trusties performs the execution. The ordinary prisoners are not informed, but all trusties must watch the ceremony.

TIMETABLE

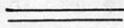
Time	Event
0500	Reveille.
0515	Roll call.
0530	Off-duty guards eat breakfast in the common barracks. Prisoners begin work.
1200	Guards eat lunch in their common barracks.
1300	Prisoners assemble in prisoners' mess for lunch. Roll call.
1330	Prisoners resume work.
1900	Guards eat supper in common barracks.
2000	Prisoners assemble in prisoners' mess for supper.
2030	Prisoners resume work.
2300	Prisoners end work. Roll call.
2330	Prisoners sleep.

TWILIGHT: 2000

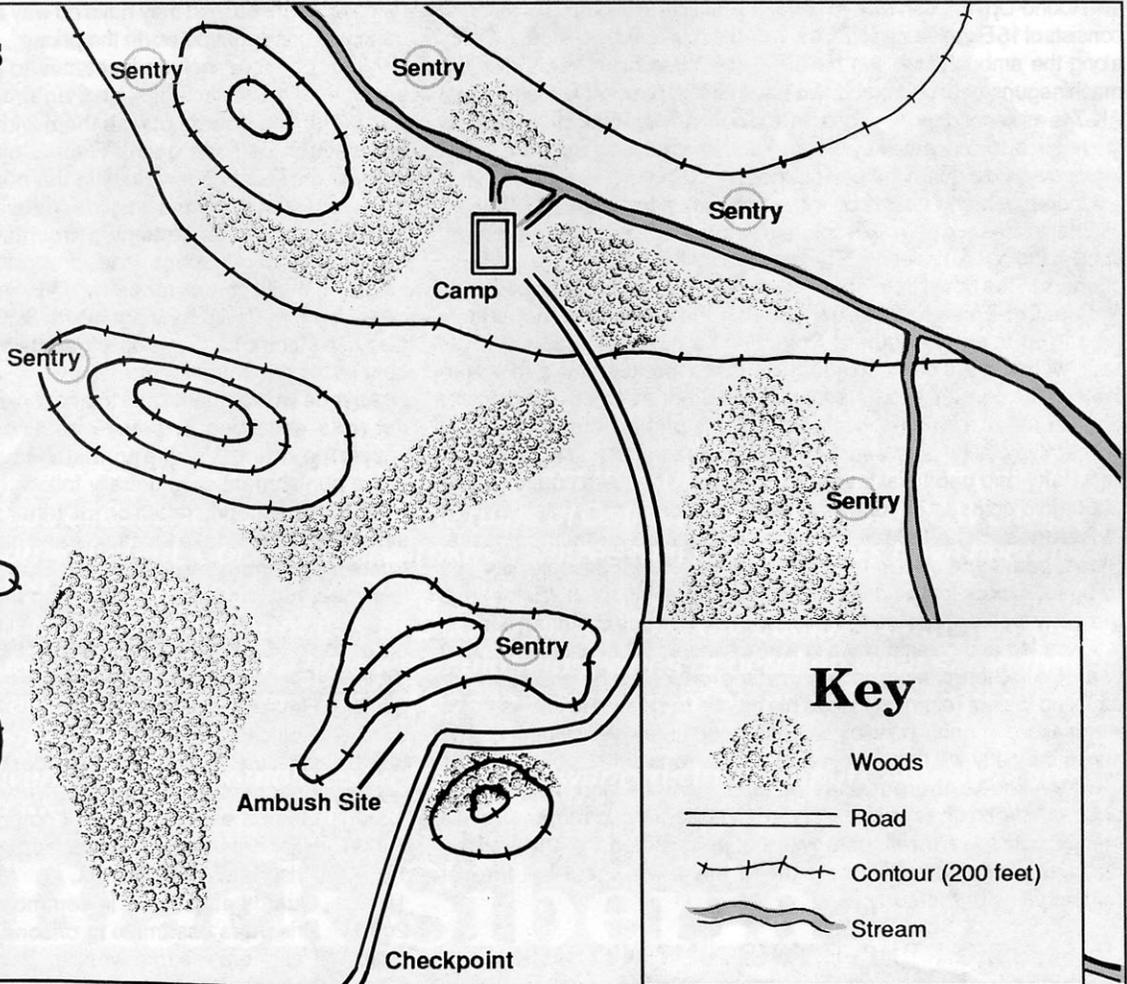
Round-Up Ambush



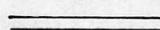
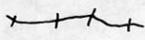
Key

-  Brush
-  Pair of foxholes
-  Contour
-  Road

Environs



Key

-  Woods
-  Road
-  Contour (200 feet)
-  Stream

Prisoners receive two meals per day. Miners receive a full ration, usually beans, meat scraps and locally produced vegetables. Factory workers receive a watery gruel which counts as half rations. This keeps them alive, but little more. Factory workers accrue one level of fatigue, which they cannot regain until they eat full rations for a number of days equal to their length of time in captivity. All prisoners treasure anything edible. Even guards may accept bribes of food.

TRUSTIES, COWARDS AND COLLABORATORS

Vorokov considers prevention to be his best weapon against escapes and riots. He seeds his camp with spies and rumors of escape plots, creating a psychological minefield. If the adventurers try to conspire with NPCs, they inevitably meet Vorokov's informers. The guards also watch adventurers and try to determine their psychological profile. They may attempt to recruit player characters as collaborators.

Trusties: Trusties wear red caps and carry truncheons. Vorokov gives them heated barracks and feeds them as well as his own men. The trusties consider themselves an elite group, free to treat their fellow prisoners with contempt. Most prisoners know the trusties as club-swinging tormentors who hope to enforce discipline through terror. They dare not tolerate any form of disobedience since Vorokov holds them responsible for any disruption which occurs under their command. Vorokov picks the most spirited prisoners as his trusties, sometimes appeasing prisoners who might otherwise have tried to rebel. This alienates them from the remainder of the camp, thereby hampering those who nourish thoughts of freedom.

When Vorokov selects a new inmate guard, he has Kaus, his chief trustie, order that person forward at roll call. Then Kaus announces the "honor" before the whole camp, then escorts the new trustie to his new barracks. There, the new recruit meets 10 veteran trusties. One of them approaches him. "Welcome to the Pit. Let's see if you're ready to be one of the predators." An assistant reveals an improvised branding iron, made with electrical tape, a Zippo lighter and the tab from a soft-drink can. The iron has the shape of a grinning skull. Then the trusties take turns searing the skull into the newcomer's back and buttocks. After initiation, Kaus explains the recruit's duties. A trustie must keep order in the barracks he is assigned to oversee. If he permits an escape or rebellion, he pays with his life. In return, he receives absolute power over the camp's "meat," or ordinary prisoners. Regular guards will always be present—no trustie ever gets to watch a place alone.

Cowards: Most prisoners do not collaborate with Vorokov. They also do not try to escape. They hope only to live, to avoid beatings, and to avoid attention. Cowed by the trusties and numbed by years in the mines, they have neither courage nor hope. Ordinary prisoners incessantly indulge in minor crimes, such as hoarding cigarettes and pilfering rations, but the idea of escape or rebellion seems utterly unreal. If they learn of a serious plot against Black Siberia, they stare with disbelief, then later blurt what they know to a guard.

Spies: In addition to trusties, Vorokov uses inmates as spies. He currently has one champion secret agent—Major Robert Brockwater, leader of the prisoners' secret escape committee. Fourteen other prisoners belong to Brockwater's committee, including the NPCs Viktor Fitz, Lt. Col. Pernell and Francis Shmidt. Brockwater often arranges ploys for entrapping the camp's real escape artists. His favorite trick for finding malcontents works as follows: He arranges for guards to interrogate a prisoner about an inmate named "Peters" who supposedly makes homemade knives. The night after the interrogation, the escape committee corners the prisoner in the barracks. Brockwater accuses his victim of collaborating with guards and claims that the interrogation was merely a cover story. The prisoner must prove that he is not a collaborator by revealing his best plots to the escape committee.

Koskgyn also works with Vorokov. He sends the commandant information and beats up malcontents. In return, the trusties overlook his misdemeanors and reward him with chocolate and cigarettes.

ESCAPE

To get outside, one must pass through a maze in which the guards control the key passages. Beyond that, a fugitive comes to a pair of

fences, with concertina wire coiled between them. A cleared zone commanded by machinegun towers completes the barrier.

Corrupting a Guard: The party may

try to corrupt a guard. Most guards would trade with prisoners or overlook minor rules infractions for a "gift," such as soap, toilet paper and any other trinkets they consider innocuous. However, even the most corrupt guards fear escapes or revolts, which could bring Vorokov's wrath upon them, or lead to a battle that might end their jobs or their lives. Thus, they do not hesitate to report any offer which frightens them. The adventurers have no chance to purchase real help unless some friendly prisoner arranges for them to meet Rybalko.

Disguise: Adventurers may try to steal the guards' clothing. All Vorokov's personnel wear Soviet or Czech uniforms with black armbands, and anybody in similar attire could pass for a guard at a distance. However, adventurers must pass an Average: Disguise roll to fool guards in any actual encounter. Any foreigner who actually speaks with guards must also pass an Average: Russian or Czech language roll to remain disguised. And even guards do not have free run of the camp. If the adventurers try to climb fences or evade checkpoints, no disguise can help them. They can expect questions from sentries whenever they approach gates, vehicles, heavy weapons or warehouses. A stolen uniform can help adventurers on furtive trips from point to point, but by itself cannot get them out of Black Siberia.

Tunneling: As miners, the inmates of Black Siberia have special opportunities to escape by tunneling. However, this requires planning and probably cooperation from other prisoners. The tunnelers must find a place to conceal both the cave entrance and all dirt they remove. PCs must pass Stealth rolls to camouflage their tunnel mouths or dirt piles. Each time anyone investigates the area, the players must attempt these rolls again at whatever penalty the referee considers appropriate.

For a truly overwhelming bribe, a lone guard may overlook inconclusive evidence of a tunnel once. A PC would need to pass a Difficult: Persuasion roll to complete such a bargain. However, the guard would certainly check later to make sure nobody continued the project.

With real tools, a tunneler may excavate four cubic feet of dirt per hour. Improvisations halve this total. Furthermore, whoever supervises a tunneling project must pass an Easy: Mining Engineer roll each day of work. Those without this ability may attempt Average: Civil Engineer checks or Difficult: Education checks. If this roll fails, part of the tunnel caves in, filling 2D10 cubic feet of passage. Those underground may attempt an Easy: Observation check to notice the signs of collapse in time to escape. If this check fails, everyone in the passage suffers 1D6 points of damage and becomes trapped behind the fallen earth.

Treat tunneling as hard work for purposes of fatigue.

Guard Reaction: The referee must decide how long it takes Black Siberia's guards to notice an escape. Consult the section on Daily Routine to determine when the prisoner should next appear at roll call, mess call or work. After the guards discover a prisoner missing, they waste 3D10 minutes before determining that an actual escape has occurred. After an escape, the guards silently arrest and interrogate anyone who might know anything about the fugitives. Meanwhile, five patrols began sweeping the area. Each patrol consists of 10 Experienced camp guards with AK-74 rifles and one fragmentation grenade each. Although camp policies encourage them to capture prisoners alive, they do not hesitate to kill.

Prisoners of war often harry their captors by hiding at roll call, thereby creating false escape panics. Black Siberia punishes such tactics mercilessly. However, if prisoners maintain a campaign of hoaxes which includes over three missed roll calls in one month, the referee should double the response time after a genuine escape.

Minor Disturbances: If the PCs incite a minor uproar, guards rush to the scene at a rate of 1D6–3 every combat turn.

TWILIGHT: 2000

Prison Uprising: Any revolt in Black Siberia must be quiet and sudden. The prisoners need to neutralize key guards, arm themselves and break out before the commandants realize what has happened. If given a chance to react, the guards suppress uprisings by concentrating their forces and pounding rebellious prisoners with the maximum firepower available. This may include mortars and tank cannon. Vorokov fears nothing as much as a riot, and he does not hesitate to massacre his workers to prevent one.

The referee may direct guard maneuvers in response to a revolt. Remember that the guards take any sign of an uprising seriously, and gunfire or shouts alert them immediately. If the rioters take hostages, Vorokov may negotiate, but he has no intention of keeping his promises. He might allow a few prisoners to leave in return for the lives of camp personnel, but once the hostages are released, he sends patrols to kill the rebels.

VISITORS

Occasionally, visitors interrupt the life of the camp. Each day, the referee should roll 1D6: On a roll of 1 or 2, a convoy arrives from one of Vorokov's customers. A convoy includes either 4D6 pack mules or 1D6 trucks, protected by 2D6 Veteran NPCs. When a convoy arrives, the trustees hustle prisoners from every task to help unload food, fuel and miscellaneous items. The day after a convoy arrives, Vorokov sends it away with a cargo of metal ingots, ore or munitions, which the prisoners must load. Convoy escorts will not knowingly smuggle out prisoners, but they might carry messages for bribes worth at least 200 gold coins.

Adventurers might infiltrate the camp disguised as a convoy. Sentries do not resist intruders—they report the invasion by radio and track the intruders' motion toward the camp. If the sentries see up to six enemies on foot, Vorokov sends 12 soldiers carrying a 5/25-kilometer radio, armed with one AK-47 and one grenade each. It takes 2D10 minutes for the patrol to set out. The squad advances in a staggered line, with one point

man 50 meters in the lead. It attempts to maneuver intruders into an unfavorable position and force them to surrender.

In an actual assault, it takes 4D10 minutes for the camp to organize for a counterattack, not counting time required for travelling to the battlefield. Black Siberia has five Wojo Combination mortars, which can open fire with 1D10 minutes' notice. The counterattack force includes 20 riflemen carrying a 5/25-kilometer radio, armed with AK-74s and one fragmentation grenade each. Two more soldiers carry RPG-16 rocket launchers with. If confronting enemy armor, the force slows its pace to ensure that the confrontation occurs at close range in woods or hills, where RPG-16s can be effective. Ten of the riflemen proceed 200 meters ahead of the main force, serving as a screen. They attempt to bring their foes under mortar fire and rout the attackers by indirect fire. Then they break up into teams of four and hunt the fugitives down.

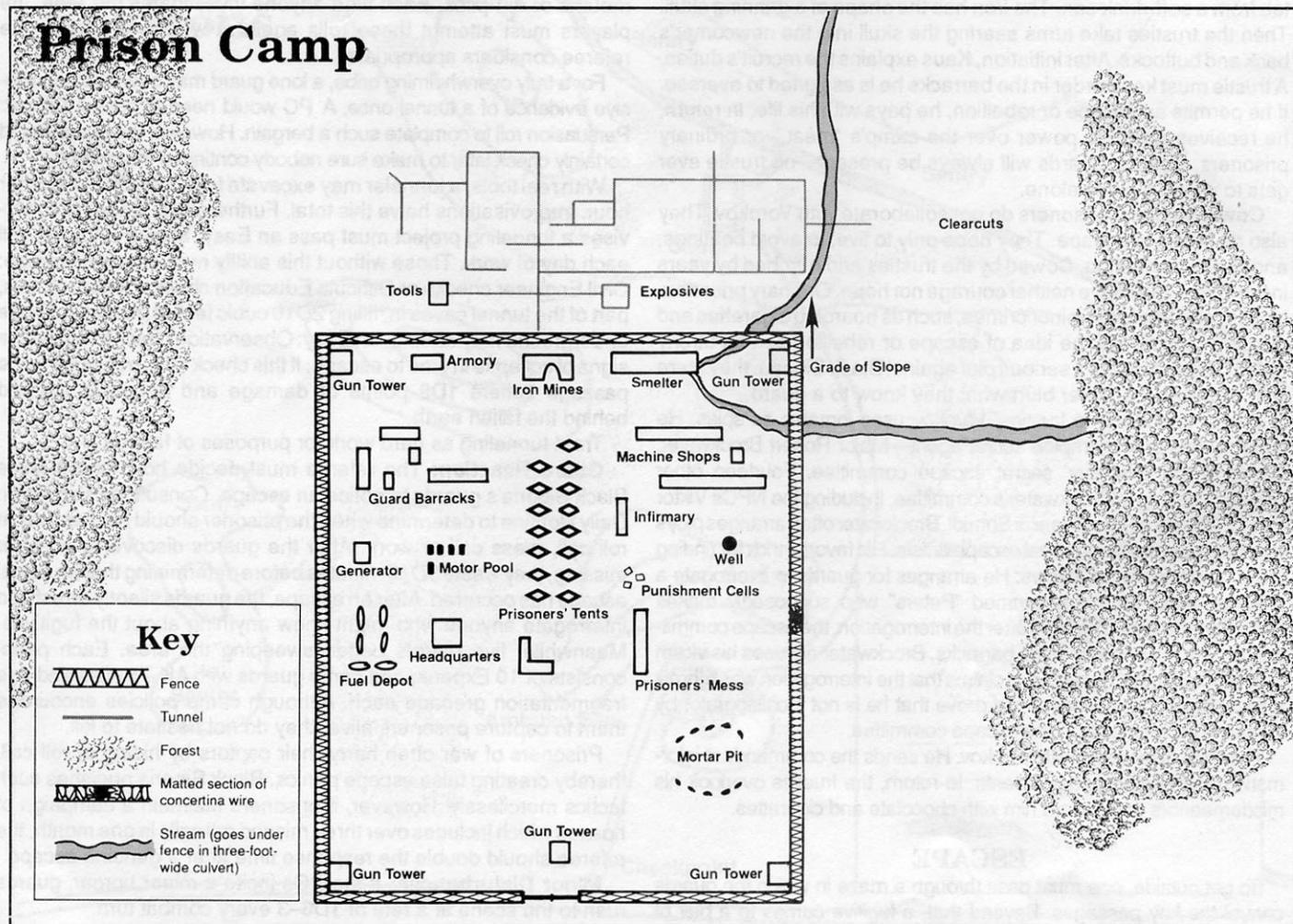
If determined attackers force this team to engage in real combat, the 10 scouts fire from cover, attempting to keep their foes busy while the rest of the team maneuvers for ideal firing positions.

PRISON CAMP

Checkpoint: The road to Black Siberia leads through the ruins of a crossroads town. Brown grass grows among the unroofed foundations, and jagged girders point toward the sky. Vorokov has a pillbox here, where five Experienced sentries greet visitors. These guards treat most visitors with respect since Black Siberia sustains itself by trading with cantonments and local warlords, but they do not allow vehicles mounting heavy ordinance to proceed. They radio news of any visitors to the main camp, and turn away anyone Vorokov does not wish to receive.

The pillbox contains a DShk machinegun, which the guards may fire through a narrow slit if attacked.

The sentries have two other fortifications hidden in the foundations of ruined buildings 100 meters in front of the pillbox, with firing ports and a foot-thick concrete roof. Each contains two Experienced soldiers, one



TWILIGHT: 2000

with an AK-74 and one with a AT-5 Spandrel launcher with one load.

Anyone who drives off the main road into the rubble risks stumbling into an old foundation or pit traps. Treat the area as a minefield with a density of 0.1—anyone who "triggers a mine" actually falls into a 10-foot-deep hole. This causes 1D6 points damage to one leg. A vehicle becomes stuck and requires 1D6 hours of work to remove.

Sentries: Vorokov posts sentries around Black Siberia in a ring three miles wide. Each of these foxhole positions contains two guards. Experienced NPCs with level 6 Stealth and Observation skills. A watchman uses a 25x image intensifier to scan the approaches to Black Siberia and has an AK-74 with two extra clips. A radio operator uses a 5/25-kilometer radio and has a Tokarev pistol. If the adventurers scan the treeline, they can notice the guards by passing Average Observation checks. Otherwise, the sentries remain unseen.

Ambush Site: A trap for unwanted guests.

Fence: The fence consists of two 15-foot-high chain-link fences 10 feet apart. Coils of concertina wire run between them. Pushing through the wire takes 1D6 minutes and causes 2D6 points of damage to the arms and legs. Anyone equipped with wire cutters may cross the wire without damage in 3D6 minutes. However, the guards in the gun towers can fire at prisoners crossing the wire.

Gun Towers: These roofed wooden platforms stand on 20-foot-high frameworks. Each contains a spotlight and a single guard with a Vz-59 medium MG. One gun tower overlooks the main gate. The gunners here serve as gate wardens.

Generator: This building contains three 500-kilowatt generators. One guard usually stands watch at the door.

Fuel Depot: A row of cylindrical tanks here contain 5000 liters of fuel. Three large stills produce more nearby. Two guards stand watch with AK-74s, while five prisoners tend the stills.

Trustie Barracks: The camp's 50 trusties live in this pair of wooden bunkhouses. Anyone who walks into one feels a blast of heat from the grimy wood stoves. At any given time, 1D10 trusties are lounging here.

Well: Black Siberia obtains its water from this well. Green jerrycans lie scattered around the concrete mouth.

Prisoners' Mess: A long, tar paper-roofed building. There is no furniture inside except for two small counters—one dispensing ordinary rations, the other intended for those performing heavy labor.

Prisoners' Tents: Each tent contains 20 prisoners and two trusties (and could accommodate 30 people). The 15 olive-drab tents stand on crumbling concrete pads. They keep out most rain and some wind. Inside, one finds crowded rows of bunks, with no bedding but the blankets and extra clothing prisoners can line their pallets with. A stench of moist bodies and mildew pervades every tent. During winter, guards allow small fires outside the mouth of each shelter.

Guard Barracks: The camp guards live in this complex of seven corrugated-steel modules. Guards have semiprivate apartments kept orderly but hardly clean. Some have improvised stoves and personal supplies of food. The camp contains a total of 70 guards, employees and camp followers. At any given time, 2D10 are in the barracks.

Motor Pool: The camp parks its vehicles in this sandy patch. Three guards with AK-74s stand here at all times. Black Siberia owns five 2.5-ton trucks, two BMP-3 APCs and one T-60 tank.

Infirmary: One guard with an AK-47 always stands watch at the door to the infirmary. This hospital shack contains 15 cots and enough supplies to stock two doctors' medical kits. Surgical-green curtains seclude a small operating theater.

Headquarters Buildings: These concrete buildings have sandbags stacked against the sides and an iron blast door on top. Five camp guards with AK-74s watch the entrances. They have shoulder arms, plus a Vz-59 in a sandbagged emplacement. Anyone who descends through the blast door enters a dingy conference room, equipped with a map, four chairs and several filing cabinets. The cabinets contain Soviet orders for the establishment of a prison camp, geologists' reports on the mineral resources of the area and business accounts for Black Siberia. Also here are apartments for Vorokov, his local mistress (Frau Reiner) and two ex-captains from the Czech Army who manage Black Siberia. The headquarters also contains 10 man-days of dried rations, the equivalent of a doctor's medical kit, five gas masks and

protective suits, a Geiger counter and a chemical sniffing device. A vault contains \$20,000 worth of gold dust. One must pass a Difficult: Lockpicking roll to open the combination lock.

Mortar Pit: Sandbags line the rim of this shallow dugout. Inside are five Wojo Combination mortars. The six crewmen play cards in a tent adjacent to their weapons. Each has a Makarov pistol for emergency use. The tent also contains 20 rounds of 82mm HE, 1 round of 82mm Illumination and 50 rounds of 81mm HE ammunition.

Armory: Three guards with AK-74 rifles pace outside the armory. This is a low building of corrugated steel. Two padlocks swing from its door (each requires an Average: Lockpicking check to open). Inside, are the camp's spare weapons and ammunition: 15 AK-74 rifles, 15 Makarov pistols, four RPG-16 rocket launchers, three Vz-59 medium machineguns with tripods, five cases of fragmentation grenades, one case of WP grenades and one case of antitank grenades. Ammunition supplies include 10 cases of 9mm Makarov ammo, 30 cases of 5.45mm ammo, 10 cases of shells for pump-action shotguns and five cases of 7.62mm L ammo.

Machine Shops: Two guards with pump-action shotguns patrol the machine shops, assisted by two trusties. These rows of tar paper shacks contain lathes, presses, workshops and assorted machinery. Twenty-five prisoners reload spent ammunition, repair machinery, and manufacture simple items. Vorokov only produces what he knows he can sell, so there is not much inventory. However, there are machine tools, 100 pounds of gunpowder and \$15,000 worth of engine parts, gunsmithing equipment and assorted ammunition.

Smelter: Twenty-five prisoners labor in the smelters, supervised by two guards with pump-action shotguns and two trusties. Fifty tons in 100-kilogram iron ingots stand boxed outside the smelter, awaiting shipping. Half outdoors and half covered by corrugated steel, this array of contraptions refines iron from the mines and has few safety features. Water wheels turn enormous wooden gears; blue methane flames lick towers of fuel drums; dirty water sluices through troughs; an improvised blast furnace sends waves of heat for hundreds of yards. The first time anyone tries to work with this equipment, he must attempt an Easy: Mechanic check. If the roll fails, the machinery scorches the character, causing 2D6 points damage to a random body location. Prisoners assigned to work in the smelter must make this roll once per week.

Iron Mines: Rusty iron rails run into the mountain here. Laboring in the tunnels are 175 of Black Siberia's prisoners. They do all work by hand, breaking rock with chisels, pushing ore out in carts, and shoring up the tunnels with rough-hewn timbers. Eight trusties supervise the work, and five guards with pump-action shotguns patrol the mines in a body, never allowing themselves to be split up underground. A locked chamber contains explosives for breaking difficult stone. Its stocks include 14 complete engineer demolition kits, 30 kilograms of plastique, 100 cases of dynamite and 1000 electric blasting caps. A pair of guards with pump-action shotguns stand by the door.

Punishment Cells: These corrugated-steel boxes are five feet high and three feet wide. The interior becomes scorching hot in sunlight, but rapidly cools at night. Time in a punishment cell causes as much fatigue as hard labor.

Clearcuts: Tracks of ochre mud slash through this forest, linking wastelands of stumps. In one clearing, prisoners toil over a hand-operated sawmill. Vorokov details 50 prisoners to cut wood and saw it up for fuel and mine timbers. The prisoners work in chain gangs of five each, fastened to one another at the waist by 10-foot lengths of chain. Two trusties supervise this project, and 10 guards watch the perimeter, armed with AK-74 rifles.

NPCS

The following are important NPCs who might be encountered in or around Black Siberia.

Father Krewinski (Experienced)

Father Krewinski is at once a village leader, hog farmer, politician, union activist, businessman and priest. In the camp, he encourages the despondent, intercedes with guards for those suffering punishment and embarks on hunger strikes against special injustices. Nevertheless, Vorokov tolerates him, because Krewinski knows not to actually suggest a rebellion. Krewinski collaborates with the camp personnel but only to win kinder treatment for the prisoners. Krewinski comes from a nearby village, which would pay 1000 gold coins to anyone who rescued him. Krewinski has a narrow face with drooping jowls. He looks frail, but he never seems to tire, and speaks in a booming voice.

Skills: Computer: 3, Civil Engineer: 3, Instruction: 3, Persuasion: 4.

Initiative: 3.

Kaus, Chief Trustie (Experienced)

Before the war, Kaus lounged in the squatters' paradises of Hamburg. A self-styled rebel, he spent the early 1990s as a sometime mugger and dealer in hashish. Then the war came, and Kaus found himself in the army. When Soviet forces overran his unit, he used the opportunity to surrender, hoping to wait out the war in relative safety. Upon seeing life in a Czech prison camp, Kaus became quite depressed and even considered suicide. Vorokov, however, saw uses for a man of Kaus' talents and assigned him to lead the camp trusties. Kaus tackled the project with zeal, having finally found an outlet for his drive to bully and give orders. He constantly punishes the other prisoners for his misfortunes. Kaus is a tall man, prematurely bald, with a mass of scars on his right hand.

Skills: Melee Combat (unarmed): 6.

Initiative: 4.

Trusties (Experienced)

Skills: Melee Combat (Unarmed): 6.

Initiative: 4.

Guards (Experienced)

Skills: Melee Combat (Unarmed): 5, Small Arms (Rifle): 5.

Initiative: 4.

Koskyn (Experienced)

Koskyn deserted from the Soviet Army too soon: His unit recaptured him before discipline broke down throughout Europe. He managed to keep postponing his execution, though, until his captors gave up on the war and sold him as a slave to Vorokov. Koskyn prospered in Black Siberia. He quickly organized a prison gang of 10 like-minded inmates, who enjoyed intimidating the other prisoners. This gang demands chocolate, toilet paper and other minor treasures from the rest of the camp. It beats and humiliates those who fail to appease it. Koskyn has a greasy mass of black hair. He is a little man with gleaming eyes.

Skills: Melee Combat (Unarmed): 6, Persuasion: 6.

Initiative: 4.

Major Robert Brockwater (Experienced)

A product of England's best public schools, Brockwater seems the archetypal British officer. To him, it is the "sporting thing" for prisoners of war to try to break free, and accordingly, he leads the camp's rugby enthusiast's club and escape committee. The committee contains 15 other members, including Viktor Fitz, Maria Polbyansky and Molly Barneweather. Brockwater's tunnels and schemes never come to much because he is actually a spy for Vorokov. He serves Vorokov out of acute terror: He values his own survival and comforts above everything else. A gray-haired man of about 35, Brockwater wears spectacles and has rather large ears.

Skills: Melee Combat (Unarmed): 4, Disguise: 6, Persuasion: 5.

Initiative: 4.

Maria Polbyansky (Elite)

No task seems too strenuous for this stoic veteran of Poland's anticommunist resistance. She works as hard as anyone in the mines.

With her fellow prisoners, she always seems cordial but never warm: Polbyansky intends to escape, and she has no interest in any entanglements. She sees no use for any of the prisoners but the silent German, Viktor Fitz. However, she also feels sorry for the British nurse Molly Barneweather, and she helps her when she can. The adventurers might win her friendship if they exhibit sufficient determination to escape. Maria belongs to Brockwater's escape committee, but she feels frustrated with its lack of progress, and she and Viktor are developing their own escape plan. To date, nobody else knows of their ideas. However, Maria might invite others to join her plan if she trusts them. This could lead to disaster if someone convinces her to include Major Brockwater. Maria is blonde, with a round face and steel-gray eyes.

Skills: Melee Combat (Unarmed): 4, Small Arms (Rifle): 4, Thrown Weapon: 3, Observation: 4, Foraging: 5, Scrounging: 4.

Initiative: 5.

Molly Barneweather (Novice)

No prisoner wishes to share a tent with Molly Barneweather. She manages to smell even worse than the typical inmate of Black Siberia, and she suffers a chronic case of dysentery. Furthermore, she constantly complains. Molly feels utterly miserable and is an expert at making everyone else that way too. Molly considers Maria Polbyansky and Viktor Fitz her friends because they seldom tell her to shut up when she complains. However, Molly senses that they have some plan underway. She feels hurt that they have not told her about it. If she is left to nurture her grievances, she may uncover Maria's plans and report them to the guards. Molly has straw-colored hair and milky blue eyes. She was once plump, but her flesh now hangs in doughy folds.

Skills: Medical: 5, Biology: 3, Chemistry: 2.

Initiative: 1.

Rybalko (Experienced)

Obese despite years of war, this jovial guard suffers from a remarkable lack of willpower. He does not really mean to betray Vorokov, but he cannot turn down the offer of a small bribe. And after doing little favors, he does not dare refuse larger ones. Rybalko stands guard at the headquarters.

Skills: Melee Combat (Armed): 5, Small Arms (Rifle): 5

Initiative: 4

Viktor Fitz (Elite)

Years of slavery have left Viktor numb, and he regards the world with a silent, glassy gaze. However, Viktor's mental faculties remain intact, and he has a will of iron. He and Maria Polbyansky recognize each other as kindred spirits and have developed an escape plan. Although both nominally belong to the camp escape committee, they trust each other far more than Brockwater and have told no one of their intentions. Viktor has bribed Rybalko for a Makarov pistol and a careful description of the camp defenses. With Rybalko's assistance, Viktor has matted-down an escape route through the concertina wire.

Skills: Persuasion: 4, Small Arms (Pistol): 3

Initiative: 4

Vladmir Vorokov (Experienced)

Vladmir Vorokov knows an opportunity when he sees it. Before the war, he studied geology, intending to become one of the first Soviet oil barons. As war became more likely, he reenlisted in the army, obtaining a colonel's rank by the time the war began. He was among the first to foresee the breakdown of civilization in Europe. At that point, Vorokov requested and received authority over the prison camp in Czechoslovakia which became Black Siberia. Work consumes Vorokov day and night. The commandant does what his project requires, without regard to himself or others. He runs Black Siberia, not as a means of personal profit, but out of the drive to make an organization work. With his bald forehead, perpetual scowl, booming voice and dark glasses, he intimidates even his own officers.

Skills: Persuasion: 4, Leadership: 3, Small Arms (Pistol): 1

Initiative: 4 Ω

Standard Operating Procedures

By Capt. Thomas E. Mulkey, US Army (Ret.)

The time is twilight; the full moon is still low in the sky. You have been moving north for several hours, and everyone is dead tired. The voice of the guy watching the party's rear comes up on your two-kilometer, unsecure radio headset.

"We got company—at least two unfriendlies following for about an hour now. They're well back, just staying close enough to keep me in sight. What are our orders?"

"SOP 1-17; go right. Let's do it to it!"

The ensuing ambush works because everyone knows what SOP 1-17 is: "If somebody is trailing you, make a circle and come back on your own tracks and ambush the folks that aim to ambush you." By using a previously agreed upon set of SOPs, the ambush is executed without further radio traffic or voice commands to alert the enemy.

You and your party can develop your own standard operating procedures (SOPs). The key to success is to ensure that everybody knows the SOP and that you have sealed it with a KISS (keep it simple, soldier!).

Following is an example from 1756 during the French and Indian War. Rogers' Rangers were American colonial backwoodsmen, as familiar with stalking game as their British professional counterparts were with the slow-paced, deliberate maneuvers of the European style of fighting of their day. In rough buckskin hunting smocks, the Rangers must have seemed a sad joke to the brilliantly polished red-coated regulars. Then the bullets began to fly.

The truth of war is that weapons, uniforms and equipment will often change, but men will always win with the fundamentals. Colonel Rogers gave America's first Rangers these basic principles, which are as valid in 2000 as they were then, even if your character doesn't own a hatchet (SOP 1-19)!

STANDING ORDERS OF ROGERS' RANGERS: FRENCH AND INDIAN WAR (1756)

1. Don't forget nothing.
2. Have your musket clean as a whistle, hatchet scoured, 60 rounds, powder and ball, and be ready to march on a minute's warning.
3. When on the march, act like you would if you was sneaking up on a deer. See the enemy first.
4. Tell the truth about what you see and do. There is an army depending on us for correct information. You can lie all you please when you tell other folks about the Rangers, but never lie to a Ranger or officer.
5. Don't never take a chance you don't have to.
6. When on the march, we move single file, far enough apart so one shot can't go through two men.
7. If we strike swamps or soft ground, we spread out abreast so it is hard to track us.
8. When we march, we keep moving 'til dark, so as to give the enemy the least possible chance at us.
9. When we camp, half the party stays awake while the other half sleeps.
10. If we take prisoners, we keep them separate 'til we have time to examine them, so they can't cook up a story between 'em.
11. Don't ever march home the same way. Take a different route so you won't be ambushed.
12. No matter whether we travel in big parties or little ones, each party has to keep a scout out 20 yards ahead, 20 yards on each flank and 20 yards in the rear, so the main body can't be surprised and wiped out.
13. Every night you'll be told where to meet if surrounded by a superior force.
14. Don't sit down to eat without posting sentries.
15. Don't sleep beyond the dawn. Dawn's when the French and Indians attack.
16. Don't cross a river by a regular ford.
17. If somebody is trailing you, make a circle and come back on your own tracks and ambush the folks that aim to ambush you.
18. Don't stand up when the enemy is coming against you. Kneel down, lie down, hide behind a tree.
19. Let the enemy come 'til he's almost close enough to touch. Then let him have it, and jump out and finish him with your hatchet. Ω

TWILIGHT: 2000



Kiraag

Research Station

By Jonathan Crocker



When she told us she wanted the cargo of top-of-the-line medical analysis equipment delivered to the mainworld of system 728-907, I scratched my head. According to the directories, the only inhabitants of the system were six monks who had religious objections to anything more advanced than quill pens. The lady smiled and said everything would be made clear, provided we took the contract. My first impression was that she was an agent for some tenth-credit company, out to run a fast one past some poor monks. I couldn't have been more wrong.

A woman working for the megacorporation Hortalez et Cie approaches you to deliver cargo to the mainworld of system 728-907. Hortalez has underwritten the construction of a research station on 728-907 (1214 Spinward Marches, D95500-2 Lo Ba Ni 601Im, Vilis subsector), a location close to Regina but off the beaten path. Most ships working the J-2 route from Regina to Frenzie and Vilis go through the Mirriam system, which has a much higher population and tech level, and more trade goods.

Kiraag Research Station was commissioned in 1109, well before the Rebellion. It was designed as a high-energy research station for a consortium of universities and corporations in the Spinward Marches, and construction was almost complete when Dulinor struck. The domain government, preparing for the worst, ordered the station's facilities upgraded to handle weapons research, making available the best in equipment and personnel. The work was completed 10 weeks ago, and the station is currently in a fine-tuning phase, mere weeks from going to operational status. With its comprehensive support, Kiraag is assured success.

Such success is not wanted by many foreign powers. Naval Intelligence has learned of a plot to disable the station before it can achieve operational status. The last food shipment to the station was contaminated with a bioagent, and the infected food is still en route. Hortalez will put analysis equipment and specialists on board the PCs' ship and expedite the ship's departure, so the PCs will be in jumpspace in 12 hours.

If the PCs can safely transport two tons of freight (medical analyzers, medical supplies and food) and two specialists to 728-907, and return with proof of delivery, they will receive standard payment, plus a bonus.

REFEREE'S SECTION

Naval Intelligence officials discovered the conspiracy to shut down the station. But considering the seizure of Corridor and the Aslan encroachment, they would rather not use any of their vital military ships, already committed elsewhere, unless absolutely necessary. The navy passed the information along to Hortalez et Cie.

Naval Intelligence isn't definite on this point, but it seems likely that food poisoning isn't the only weapon the saboteurs have. A

computer doctor will be sent with the medical doctor, to give the computer systems a complete checkup. The characters will be quietly warned to stay alert.

The PCs should be contacted on Frenzie or Denotam, one jump away from 728-907. The group should have its own jump-2 capable ship. A lab ship would be ideal, but anything that can carry cargo through jumpspace will do. If the PCs don't have their own ship, they can be crew on the vessel making the trip.

If the group has its own ship, the Hortalez specialists will offer standard freight and passage costs (two tons freight, two middle passages), plus a bonus. The bonus is up to the referee, but Hortalez would probably give them a service that they can write off or call in as a favor rather than straight cash or credit. For example, Cr25,000 or Cr50,000 worth of cargo for their next run, a sandcaster or two that was crated up in a warehouse they seized, or a free annual overhaul at the starport of the referee's choice (a good way to pull your group by the nose to the site of your next adventure). If the PCs are crew on someone else's ship, they'll have to dicker with the captain/owner for loss of leave bonus, hazardous duty bonus, etc. In any event, at the end of the adventure, the referee should make certain that the PCs understand that they must keep silent about the existence of Kiraag, the people there, and its activities. If they aren't, Hortalez, Naval Intelligence, and the government of Archduke Norris will come down on them like Vargr corsairs from hell.

PREPARATIONS

When they arrive at the ship, the PCs will find it surrounded by a flurry of activity. It will be refueled if necessary, free of charge. Dozens of dockhands will be swarming in, out, and around the ship, prepping it for lift-off, stowing the cargo, and getting priority clearance from the portmaster—all of which will take about an hour. All the PCs have to do is strap in, power up, and raise ship.

Specialists: When the activity is at its peak, the two specialists will arrive. One is Dr. Yasmin Kaz, an MD, capable of isolating the food contamination and developing counteragents. The other is Dr. Vladimir Zoriz, computer specialist, sent to look for viruses or logic-bombs in the computer. Both will permanently join the Kiraag staff.

Journey: Getting to Kiraag will be uneventful—unless the saboteurs get wind of the operation. If so, thugs could jump the group on the way back from the first meeting with their employers, resulting in a running gun battle. Nothing serious should result, just an indication that this might not be the simple operation intended.

SCENIC 728-907

The mainworld of system 728-907 has a gravity of 1.17 std and an atmospheric pressure of 0.67, so any activity more strenuous than a slow walk soon leaves most unprotected sophonts exhausted.

MEGATRAVELLER™

Kiraag Station: The buildings of Kiraag are airtight, and internal pressure of 1 standard atmosphere is maintained. The external atmosphere, while thin, is breathable, so it is compressed and circulated throughout the station. The station is also fully equipped with grav plates tuned to reduce the effective gravity to 1.0 std.

The four buildings on the Kiraag site are the main building, hanger, outlab, and checkpoint. Each building has at least one floor above ground level (level one), and one floor below ground level (sublevel), and most internal rooms are airtight. The hanger and main buildings are adjacent. Checkpoint is 300 meters due north of main, and the outlab is 200 meters due west of checkpoint. The outlab is almost half a kilometer distant from Kiraag main, and a mountain spur shields the outlab from the rest of the station. The outlab computer is not yet on-line.

Link: All buildings are connected by links, tunnel/building combinations. Above ground level, links are long airtight corridors. At the sublevel, they are tunnels. At both levels, the link is split into two long corridors, each three meters wide, with a two-meter-thick wall between them, carrying air, water, and power lines. Each small corridor is devoted to one direction of traffic. Personnel use small air cushion vehicles to travel the half kilometer of corridor, each vehicle carrying up to four people and a few kilos of cargo. The one exception to these dimensions is the link connecting the main building and the hanger: Both the upper and lower corridor pairs are seven meters wide. Airtight doors seal all junctions of buildings and links.

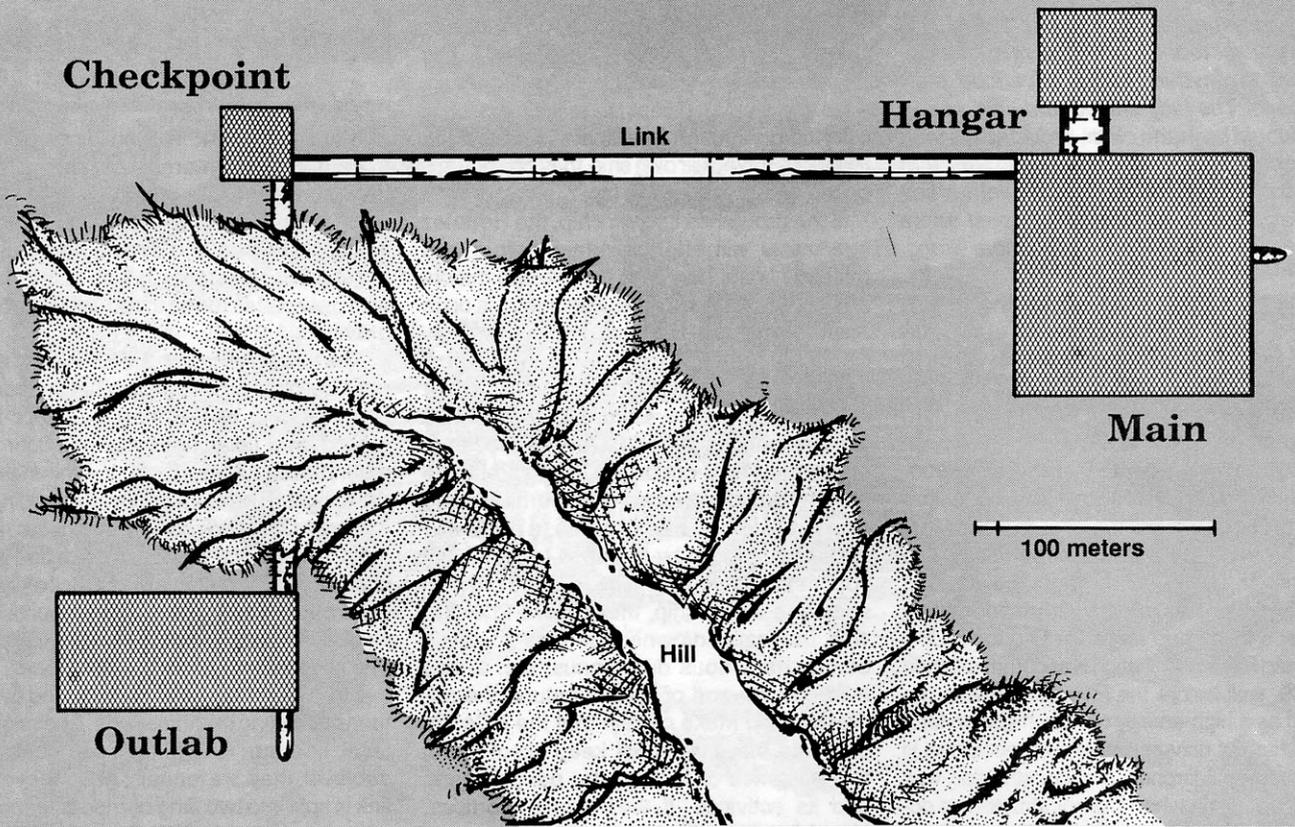
WITH OPEN ARMS

Kiraag approach control will not respond instantly when the group attempts to hail it: The PCs will have to give the code signals before Kiraag will respond with vector and coordinates over the encrypted channel. Kiraag will ask the group to rush right down: Several people are deathly ill, including the only MD at the base. The landing will be uneventful. The group will be met at the hanger after the door is sealed and the bay repressurized.

Welcome: The heavy door will open, revealing a human male, two Vargr males, and two Aslan females. The human will introduce himself as David Yamani, security chief. On his left are Oezti Zakharrgh of administration and Kresshar Virrakh of engineering. On his right are Llunioatroah Allelentas and Eoiashiew Soaullunt, both of engineering. Yamani will then come right to the point: "Who's the doctor here?"

Yamani will head off with Kaz and Zakharrgh to the hospital. Any characters

Kiraag Research Station

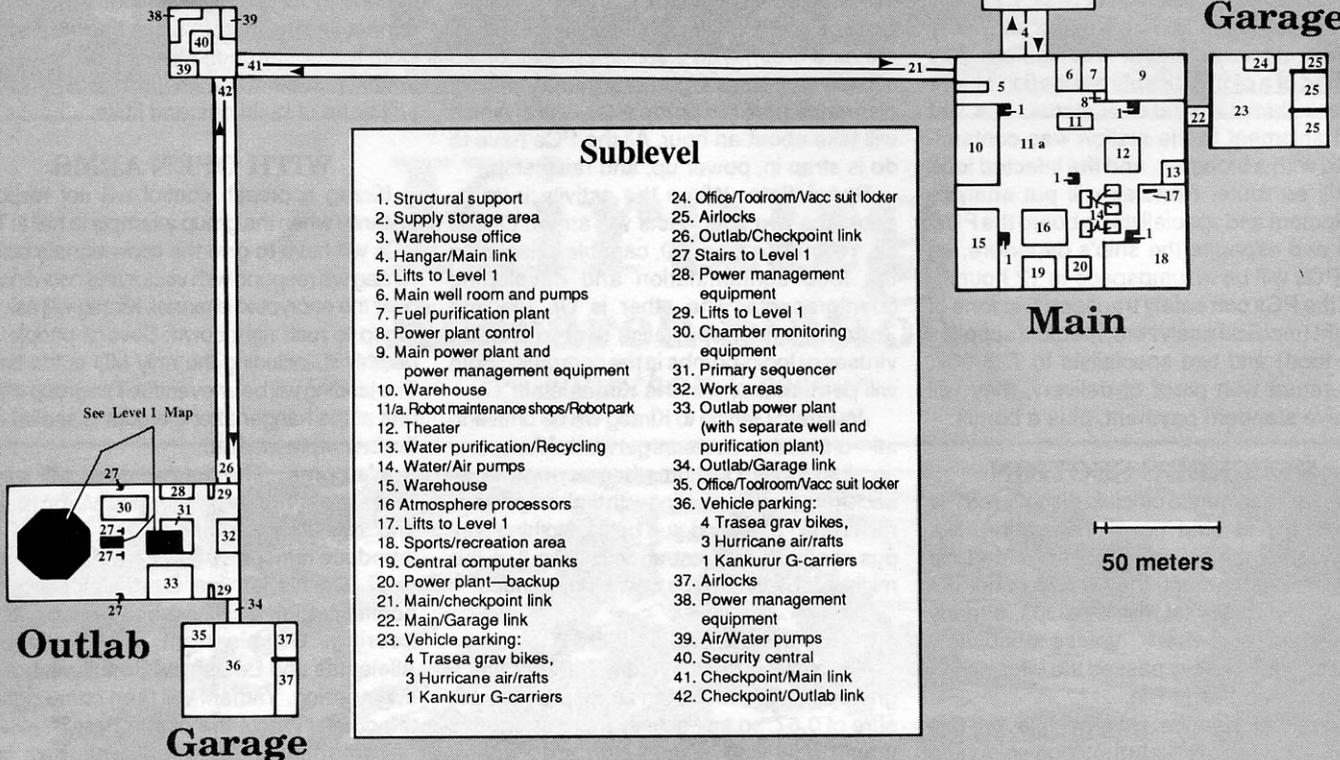


Sublevel

Checkpoint

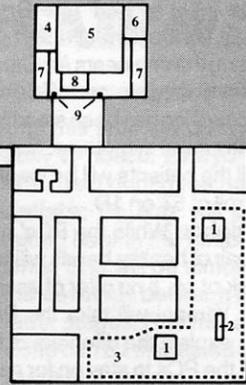
Hangar

Garage



Level 2

Hangar



Main

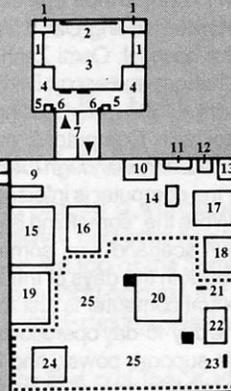
Level 2

1. Power management equipment
2. Lifts to level 1
3. Parkspace (within dotted line)
4. Power management equipment
5. Hangar bay
6. Vacc suit locker/Airlock to hangar roof
7. Communications and sensor equipment
8. Approach control
9. Lifts to Level 1

50 meters

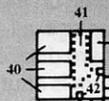
Level 1

Hangar



Main

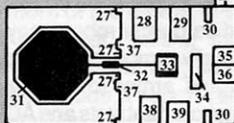
Checkpoint



Level 1

- | | |
|---|---------------------------------------|
| 1. Equipment rooms | 22. Central library |
| 2. Hangar doors | 23. Lifts to Level 2 |
| 3. Landing area | 24. Recreation area |
| 4. Storage area and
grav platforms to sublevel | 25. Parkspace
(within dotted line) |
| 5. Warehouse offices | 26. Outlab/Checkpoint link |
| 6. Lifts to Level 2 | 27. Stairs to sublevel |
| 7. Main/Hangar link | 28. Secondary labs |
| 8. Main/Checkpoint link | 29. Chamber control |
| 9. Lifts to sublevel | 30. Lifts to sublevel |
| 10. Water purification/Recycling | 31. Test chamber |
| 11. Power management
equipment | 32. Beam control/booster |
| 12. Waste disposal | 33. Initial accelerator |
| 13. Power management
equipment | 34. Power boost
equipment |
| 14. Atmosphere
processor/Compressor | 35. Storage |
| 15. Warehouse | 36. Power management
equipment |
| 16. Admin complex | 39. Outlab computer banks |
| 17. Maintenance and shops | 40. Apartment blocks |
| 18. Office complex | 41. Parkspace
(within dotted line) |
| 19. Hospital complex | 42. Cargo lifts to sublevel |
| 20. Restaurant/Dining area | 43. Checkpoint/Main link |
| 21. Lifts to sublevel | 44. Checkpoint/Outlab link |

Outlab



50 meters

tagging along to the hospital will be ignored, unless they also have medical skills. The engineers will supervise the unloading of medical gear by the cargolifter robots.

Hospital: Sick in bed are Dr. Sandra Channing, MD, Dr. Marilyn Jefferson, engineering director, and the engineers Arr Garrak, Alain Mensel, Samir Atteah and Erla Zwingle. Everyone's condition has been steadily deteriorating since the initial symptoms, first seen two days ago. All the patients will be weak, unconscious on a roll of 5+ on 1D.

White Knights: While the PCs' mission is over, every pair of healthy hands will be vital for the next week or so. If no offer of assistance is forthcoming, Yamani will take the PCs to an empty office, explain the direness of the situation, and ask the PCs to stay on for now. If they refuse, he will appeal to their patriotism. If they still refuse, he will not give them the proof of delivery they need to collect their pay—unwilling help is better than none.

Treatment: Dr. Kaz will examine the patients, do some research for 2Dx4 hours, and announce that the infectious agent was a virus tailored to destroy the victim's hemoglobin. Synthesizing a vaccine will take an additional 4Dx2 hours. (If any assisting PC has Medical-2+ or Biology-2+, divide times by 2.) Until the vaccine is ready, blood transfusions will help. Healthy PCs will be suitable blood donors on a roll of 7+ on 2D. (No human/Vargr cross-species donations are possible.) If any ill person has no suitable donors, roll 2D. On 11+, the patient slips into a coma and requires intensive medical care for 2D weeks. Any PC donating one unit of blood will suffer a loss of one point from Strength, Dexterity and Endurance. All values return to normal after one day.

Bug Hunt: After seeing David Yamani and Dr. Kaz to the hospital, Oezti Zakhsarrgh will return to the hangar and escort Dr. Zoriz to the computer room, on the main building sublevel. Any character with Computer-2 or higher is invited to come along. Although Oezti is uncertain whether the computer is infected, it seems a good bet. While the "something is wrong with the computer" scenario was somewhat of a cliché even back in the days of the First Imperium, the central computer is just that: central and vital to the day-to-day operations of Kiraag. It controls life-support, power, and lighting for the whole installation, as well as the small army of cargo, security, maintenance, research and steward robots. Any serious attempt to destroy the station would almost certainly involve the computer. For every PC and NPC attempting to find a booby trap in the files, roll the following:

Attempting to "sanitize" the computer:

Formidable, Computer, Intelligence, 30 min.

Referee: Success indicates that one copy of the virus has been found and destroyed. Allow three tries per eight-hour work day. Anything over eight hours, and the person becomes too tired to notice if he has found the virus or not.

Nothing happens during the first few days. The virus can't be discovered, as that much

time must be spent "getting the feel" of the computer files and directories. The virus can't be triggered, as some time must elapse for the right atmosphere to develop.

On a superficial or minor fumble, the computer experiences a glitch, and a service to some part of the base is affected. (For example, the showers will only give cold water, the fresh air flow is shut off to the garage, etc.) These accidents must be discovered and corrected, a Routine task. On a major or destroyed result, the virus is triggered early. If not set off, the virus will activate itself six days after the group lands.

Daily Life: Dr. Kaz works in the hospital, caring for the patients as they slowly recover. Her small amount of free time is spent isolating further samples of the virus and preparing them for shipment to Hortalez and Naval Intelligence via the characters. Dr. Zoriz will attempt to find the supposed computer virus. Any characters not helping either of them will be asked to help prep the station, as it is now behind schedule. Equipment must be checked and calibrated, vehicles must be maintained, and a number of odd jobs need attention.

Suspicion: All will proceed normally, until someone finds and destroys a copy of the virus. Then, the situation takes a turn for the worse. Questions of how the virus got into the system surface: Did a workman slip it in, or was it someone at the station? Questions of loyalties will be levelled at PCs and NPCs. (Vargr will be especially prone to accusations, quite unfairly.) Morale will plummet as the tension builds. Someone should mention that an enemy agent could be hiding out at the base. After all, there are hundreds of rooms, thousands of hiding places, and only a few inhabitants. Paranoia should leap off the scale. Sidearms and body armor will be worn, and a fistfight or two might break out. Yamani might ask the PCs to make sweeps of the base to search for any spies. Only biosniffers will be effective, as the grav plates will render any neural activity sensors useless. Red herrings would be effective during the search for the mythical saboteur. By the time the virus is triggered, overactive imaginations, fear, and false leads should have everyone convinced they're in an Alfred Hitchcock movie, slated as the next victim.

OOPS

No matter how diligent the group is in tracking down and eliminating the copies of the virus program, sooner or later one of two things will happen: Either the virus will be triggered accidentally, or its internal timer will run down, and it will activate itself.

Lights: Six days after the group lands (or sooner if the virus is triggered accidentally) internal lighting all over the base will drop to 50% standard. In the resulting dim gloom, visibility is not more than 10 meters. The airtight blast doors will drop into place, sealing off each building and link from all the others. The blast doors will have to be forced (unlocked, then opened) one way or another—power has been cut to the door motors.

To "hotwire" the door lock:
Difficult, Computer or Electronics, Int, 45 sec.

To physically force the door open:
Formidable, Strength, 30 sec.

Referee: Up to two people can combine their strength modifiers. Any additional people only get in each other's way. A pry bar gives a +1; maximum two pry bars.

Air: After a paranoia-inducing pause, the computer starts venting the air in the main building to the outside atmosphere and increasing gravity to 1.5G. After five to 10 minutes, the low air pressure and high gravity will have any unprotected person glued to the floor and puffing like a beached whale. Buildings and links connected to the main building will quickly feel the effects. The exception is the hospital: It was designed to maintain integrity even if the main building was somehow breached. There are portable oxygen masks in the hospital, duration two hours, and emergency breathers distributed throughout Kiraag, duration 30 minutes.

Communications: The intercom system will go dead. Unless carrying hand communicators, individuals will be cut off.

Security Robots: Everyone still in the computer system should make the following roll.

To spot the computer reprogramming the robots:
Difficult, Computer, Int, 30 sec.

If everyone fails this roll, the first warning of trouble will be David Yamani calling them on a hand communicator from security central. Two security robots parked in checkpoint when the computer virus took over opened fire on Yamani as he went out to check the blast doors.

The 12 security robots have declared open season on the station and will not stop hunting unless all sophonts are killed—or until they are disabled or the computer controlling them is shut down. Two robots are in checkpoint and 10 in main. In addition, 12 cargolifter robots and 20 of the 30 maintenance robots are all in main's sublevel.

Security robots have ACRs and grenade launchers (normally loaded with tranquilizers). Determine ammo for each robot randomly, or, if you are feeling nasty and your group is up to it, use discarding sabot rounds and high-explosive grenades. The maintenance robots all have laser welders which are very effective at close range, and the loadlifters are quite capable of bashing down barricades—or people.

The robots will concentrate fire on the PCs. If the security robots have trouble, the maintenance and cargolifter robots may assist.

The security armory on checkpoint sublevel has arms and armor to outfit everyone with combat environment suits and ACRs or SMGs, as the paranoid NPCs may have discovered by now. Anything heavier is up to the referee. Of course, if the characters can get to their ship, they're welcome to use anything they have, as long as Kiraag isn't blown up with the robots.

COMPLICATIONS

Aside from David Yamani, it will be rare for any other station personnel to have a weapons skill higher than 0. Only a few will be willing, but inexperienced, fighters once their initial fear is overcome. The PCs will need every advantage they have, using Leader, Persuasion, or like skills to overcome the paranoia built up over the past few days.

The patients' safety is another problem. All the medical gear is in the hospital, except for a few first-aid kits, but hospital walls aren't as strong as the PCs would like. Either the alterations in atmosphere or combat or both could rupture them, threatening the lives of the bedridden patients.

DEBUGGING

The characters may by now be drawing some conclusions regarding their situation. By the heavy-handed method of the virus, they might guess that no one on the base is the traitor—this is strictly an outside job.

Also, someone may realize that since the outlab computer isn't on-line yet, it is almost certainly free of the virus. With a little work, it could be used to override the computer and restore normal life support.

PCs should be encouraged to attack the root of the problem—the computer. If they simply destroy the robots, the computer will probably try to overload the power plant, or use the test chamber as a gigantic meson gun to wipe out the station. While programming away the virus is possible, it would be a Formidable task. A more likely solution is to break through the robot lines and shut down the power plant, and therefore the computer. The robots will still be programmed to exterminate humans, but with the computer down, the smaller computer in outlab will be able to bring them under control, something not possible while the computer is up and running.

To reestablish control of the robots:

Routine, Computer or Robot Ops, Int, 2 min.

LAST SHIP NOW LEAVING

No PCs should be vaporized outright, unless they do something stupid, but neither should the robots. Casualties should be fairly light, but make the PCs earn their pay.

Unless they do something terrifically stupid, the player characters will be hailed as heroes by the Kiraag staff. Yamani will ask them to stay a few days more, until they are certain the situation is under control.

At the referee's discretion, Yamani could ask one or more of the characters to stay on as part of the staff. Failing that, he will provide the receipt of delivery so they can be paid, and will include a report recommending giving the PCs a bonus suitable to their actions.

The trip home will be uneventful. The PCs should deliver the samples, report and proof of delivery to their contact. After a few days, they will be paid in full.

MEET THE NPCS

David Yamani: An ex-IRIS member (see **Challenge 34**), or an ex-marine or ex-army man). He is in charge of security for Kiraag station, and is the only member of security at the present time. Additional staff are due to be shipped in in four weeks.

Yamani has a long and impressive service record and is a very capable individual. He has Admin, Interview or Interrogation skills, and several combat skills in the level two or three range to reflect this. Medical and Computer should be at a maximum of 1.

Normally quite friendly, and as easy-going as one could reasonably expect a security chief at a top-secret installation to be, Yamani is unnerved by recent events—tailored bioweapons and computer viruses are out of his league.

Oezti Zakhsarrgh: The only administrator currently at Kiraag, Zakhsarrgh will be somewhat standoffish toward the group at first. Computers fall under his jurisdiction, and he feels that having to bring in outside help will lessen his charisma. If the characters recognize this and attempt to dispel his fears (i.e., publicly ask his advice on matters, etc.), he will do what he can to help. Otherwise, he will probably avoid the group entirely.

Engineers: With all senior engineers incapacitated, Kresshar Virrakh has become acting head of the engineering department. Unfortunately, Lluniothroah Allelentas and Eoiashiew Soaullunt continue to treat him as they always have. This, added to the stress all Kiraag personnel are under, has made Virrakh quite irritable and prone to chew out his subordinates at the slightest excuse. In turn, Virrakh has not endeared himself to either of the Aslan, and they ignore him whenever possible. Both sides in the quarrel will attempt to "win over" the group during the first few days. Virrakh will start loud arguments with any characters whom the Aslan "convert," and any taking Virrakh's side will be ignored by the Aslan. Neutral parties are likely to be set upon by both sides.

Afflicted Personnel: Everyone laid up in bed will be too busy concentrating on staying alive to show any personality. After a few days, some will have improved to the point of smiling and talking for a minute or

MEGATRAVELLER™

two, but by this time the party will probably be too busy to notice. Everyone will still be too weak to help during the battle.

Specialists: Dr. Kaz will spend almost every waking hour in the hospital, caring for her patients. She will be almost oblivious to the rift that develops between the personnel until its latter stages. She has a dry sense of humor, if she can be distracted from her work long enough to use it.

Dr. Zoriz will spend most of his time searching for the virus, and in his free time he plans the next day's search. He has an aggravating habit of humming off-key tunes under his breath, just the thing that could start a scuffle when tensions are high.

Security Robots: Twelve Sentinel-class security robots are parked on main building and checkpoint sublevels. They have an integral 9mm ACR and grenade launcher, IR, and optic and auditory sensors. They are programmed with ACR-1, Grenade Launcher-1, and Tactics-1. The robots are blocky, about a half-meter wide, and roll on treads about as fast as a human can jog. Inop/destroyed values should be roughly as follows, taking into account the weapons the characters have with them or have easy access to: Hull, 200/350. Power, 30/60. Loco, 50/100. Armor should be at least 5. Ω

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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. The Nullian League was implicated, and 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 (a.k.a. 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 and could greatly jeopardize future operations if it reached the right hands. Cirtas had acquired the fiche, then apparently passed it off to a visiting relative (Avered 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 apparently pieced 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 for any followup units Elam Taangard might send. The characters realized that Sharpic had gone to Essex and that travelling to this primitive planet was the next logical step in their investigation.

Arriving on Essex, the PCs followed the trail of the fiche to Werres' former stronghold in Ular. There they learned that although the league had killed Werres, it had been unable to find the fiche. The group met Tembré (a witch), who revealed that the only person who had the secret of the fiche was a young girl by the name of Nianna Talor. However, Tembré suppressed her memories and sent her into hiding; even the witch doesn't know where she is. For the PCs to find her and restore her memory, they must travel across the continent to Nintair. They are preceded by Sharpic, who has the same information—along with the priceless Star of Ilarir, a sapphire capable of restoring Nianna's memory.

As the PCs near the conclusion of the long trek, a mist had risen, obscuring their first view of Nintair...

Episode 3





nianna, now Tura, arrived in Nintair with her "aunt and uncle" after an adventurous journey with a merchant caravan. Shortly after her guardians settled in, they arranged with Azurob for her to be taken to the safety of the Adasina freeholding in the north. Azurob, an undercover Freeman in Nintair, works for Sroarc, one of the most influential Freemen on Essex. He has his base in Adasina and intended to see to Nianna's protection himself.

However, Sarkan's privations grew ever-closer in the form of Compactor troops. The intensity of their activity led Sroarc to realize that he had to establish a new freehold in the Eastern Islands if his people were to be sure of surviving. However, he also realized that Tura's secret (whatever it might be) was an asset that he and his freeholding could not adequately protect, even if they were to relocate further from the Compactors. With the passage of time, it would become more likely that Sarkan's forces would discover Sroarc's people—and the parentless Tura. Although Sroarc had no idea of Tura's real lineage, he deduced that she was sought by Sarkan, and he might well expect her to be secreted amongst Freemen. Sroarc realized that there was only one place where Tura could be hidden—in plain sight of her pursuer.

Sroarc chose four of his most able people and had them take Tura to Polistar Down. Once there, they found her an apprenticeship as a scullery girl—in Lord Sarkan's own castle. Thus the source of Sarkan's—and the league's—worry is sitting right under their noses. Upon succeeding in this mission, the operatives released a homing bird that returned to Sroarc, indicating that they had accomplished their task.

However, on their journey back to Adasina, Sroarc's four operatives were killed by mercenaries bounty hunting Freemen (a silver head). Therefore, Sroarc only knows that his operatives were successful in their mission; he doesn't know exactly how they seeded her into Sarkan's castle. Such details would have been relayed only in direct conversation, not entrusted to a note on the messenger bird.

As this intricate chain of events evolved around the unknowing Tura, Sharpic was attempting to follow the trail of the fiche. When Olec Cirtas disappeared from Riies mere hours after news of violence on Essex (the Werreskeep massacre) hit the airwaves, Sharpic played the hunch that the fiche was on Essex and that Cirtas knew where it was (or at least where the trail began). Sharpic couldn't follow Cirtas without trying to learn about what travel arrangements he had made, and Sharpic couldn't do that without attracting attention to himself, since Cirtas was being closely watched. Therefore, along with two Riiesan underground agents, Sharpic booked passage to Essex to hunt for the microfiche himself.

Sharpic and his men arrived on Essex a day later, used a false identity to glide through customs, and eventually arrived in Ular. There, through selected interviews, he quickly recon-

structed the events leading up to and following the massacre, finally uncovering the identity of the merchant couple to whom Werres had entrusted Nianna. Other pieces of information suggested that these two people might be connected with Tembré, whom he sought out. After some intensive questioning by her (aided in no small part by her telepathic abilities), she entrusted Sharpic with the name and location of the "aunt and uncle" and the code word to gain their trust (blue eye), but no more. She pointed out—and he agreed—that he should not be told more than he needed to know at any given time. Sharpic and his men set out for Nintair.

Arriving there weeks later, he located the "aunt and uncle," gave them the password (blue eye) and received the Star of Ilarir, as well as the name of a Freeman sympathizer in Nintair who could tell them where they had to journey. Sharpic found the individual in a seedy tavern and showed him the Star. Sharpic was given a private rendezvous for the following night; his contact in the tavern was a front-man. The real Freeman contact, Azurob, was in hiding.

On his way to that second meeting, Sharpic and his men were waylaid by thieves; sly eyes in the tavern had seen the gem. The only survivor was one of the Riiesan agents (Colif Rammar), who was left for dead.

NEARING NINTAIR

There is only one "mandatory" encounter that the PCs will bump into during their long journey to Nintair—an Explorer team. A day before the group anticipates crossing the final stretch of desert that separates them from Nintair, a gentle breeze will bring in a heavy, hanging, fog from the sea that cuts visibility to 30 meters. The PCs will note the sound of horses—muted snortings and the soft sibilance of hooves grinding into coarse desert sand. The Explorers hear the group at about the same time and come to a halt.

This team of Explorers is out looking for trouble—a dozen or so mounted Freemen who conducted some clandestine business in Nintair and are rumored to be heading back to the Adasina freeholding. Upon hearing the PCs coming toward them, the Explorers will leap to two conclusions: that they have caught up with the Freemen, and that the Freemen have caught on to the Explorers and have turned to conduct an ambush.

Consequently, the Explorers split into two groups—one continuing ahead *slowly*, with the other moving out to the right flank and circling back in to catch the Freemen from behind.

The PCs will hear some of this and, if they continue forward, will see the Explorers ahead. If they try to engage the Explorers in conversation, the Explorers will offer noncommittal banalities as they wait for the other team to attack from the rear. The Explorers will not believe that the group is comprised of off-worlders—this could be a ruse to delay the Explorers from attacking, enabling the "masquerading Freeman" to get closer before *they* attack.

The group's first warning of an attack will be the rolling thunder of hooves from the

MEGATRAVELLER™

rear. Appearing like ghost-riders out of the mists, the Explorers' ambush team will inflict as much damage as possible and will charge straight through the group, rather than becoming involved in a melee. How this combat resolves is up to the referee and the group's actions, but the overall feeling should be one of confusion, dimly seen foes, friends vanishing into the mist, and disembodied cries and commands emanating from somewhere out in the enveloping grayness.

ARRIVING IN NINTAIR

Nintair, a desert city, has felt little of the new wealth of Essex—it has fallen behind since it does not produce anything that attracts off-world credits. It is rife with thieves and pickpockets, and a government steeped in corrupt and useless bureaucracy. Areas that have declined are wrangled over by petty urban warlords.

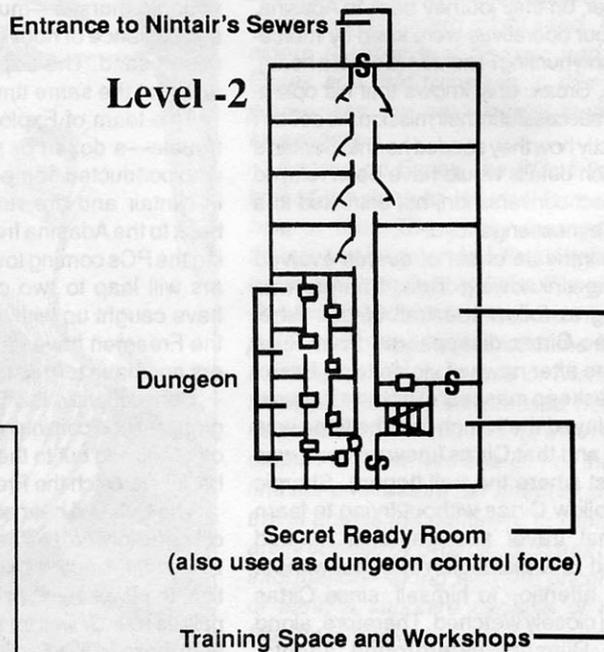
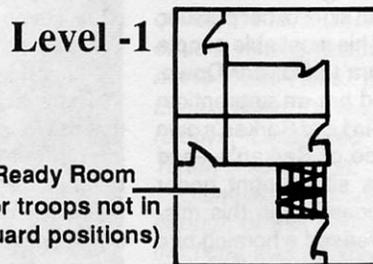
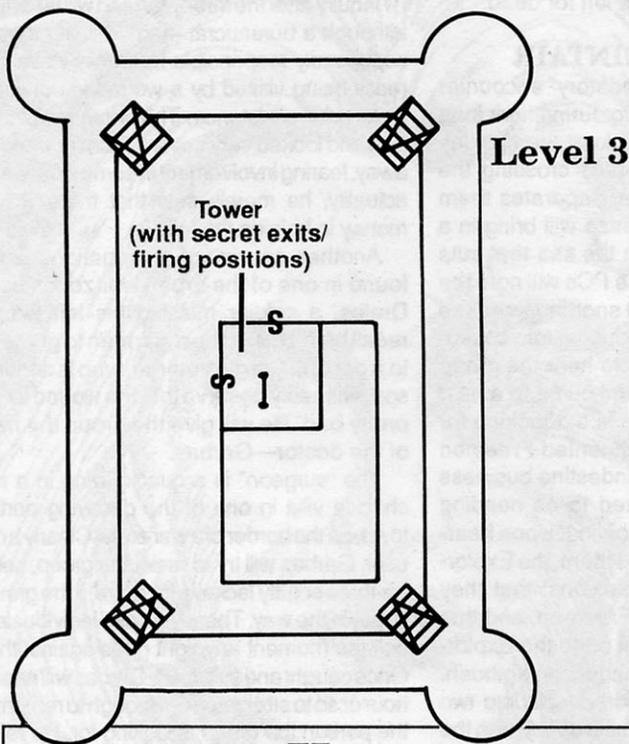
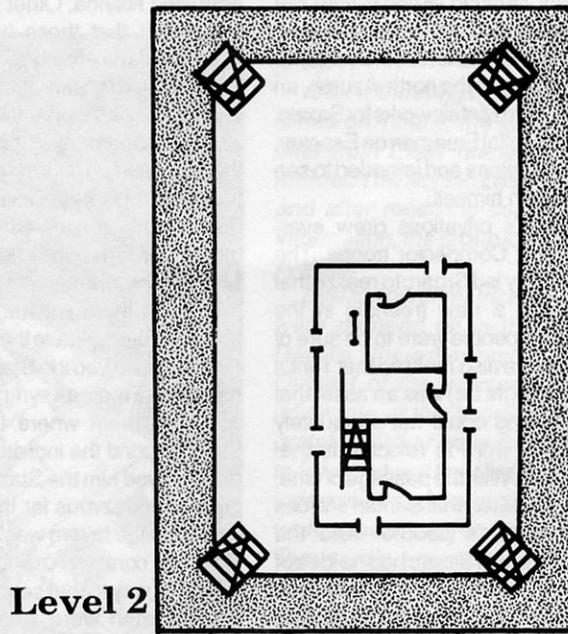
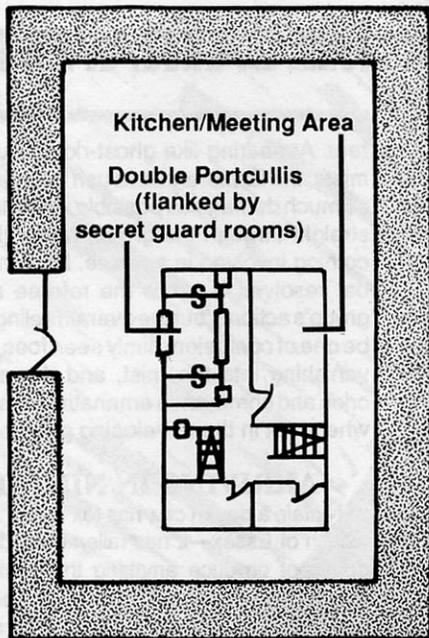
Inquiry after the three star-men will be difficult, although a bureaucrat (named Karfar) who is supposedly responsible for public welfare will recall being visited by a wounded outworlder looking for assistance. The wound was in the arm and looked very severe. Karfar turned him away, fearing involvement in some local war. (In actuality, he merely saw that there was no money in helping the fellow.)

Another source of information can be found in one of the urban war zones. Here, Dreles, a soldier missing his left leg, will recall being asked by a starman to guide him to a doctor. The old veteran, who is a friendly sort, will sadly observe that the wound looked pretty bad. He will give the group the name of the doctor—Gerbas.

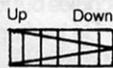
The "surgeon" is a quack, living in a ramshackle villa in one of the decaying parts of town, on the border of a war zone. Clearly a drug user, Gerbas will try to resist the group, setting his three scruffy lackeys (or more, if the group is large) in the way. These noxious individuals will bolt the moment any fight goes against them. Once caught and subdued, Gerbas will need an hour or so to straighten up enough to remember the person the group is looking for. He recalls the case—a rather serious wound to the right elbow, a deep infection. No choice but to amputate, just above the elbow. He performed the operation five or six days after the wound had been inflicted, according to the patient. He has tried to go back to see the fellow on two occasions, but there was no answer.

Using the doctor's directions, the group can search out the seedy room that Sharpic's last team member—Colif Rammar—has holed up in. Apparently, the doctor lied—he never tried to follow up his surgery with a visit. Rammar is clearly dying; gangrene has invaded the tissue above the amputation

Thieves' Guildhall



Key



Stairs



Door



Wall



Ladder



Heavy Wall



Small, Reinforced Door



Solid Rock



Secret Door

Level=1.5 meters

Unmarked areas are quarters and/or storage

This floor plan is intentionally constricted to reflect the extreme parsimony of low-tech stone construction.

site. In any event, the surgery was a hatchet-job. Any individual with as little as Medic 1 will see that Colif has less than two days to live and that the only way to save him would be to get him to a high-tech medical facility within a day. (The gangrene has invaded the trunk, and his weakened condition has allowed a marginal case of septicemia to intensify.) An excellent doctor could conceivably extend his life by removing the right arm and shoulder. This would add a week to Colif's survival time, but he would be unable to travel by any of the local methods.

Colif will tell the group that the "aunt and uncle" told Sharpic to find an underground Freeman named Azurob. The "aunt and uncle" steered them to a seedy tavern, the Lecherous Lord, where they were contacted by an intermediary who set up a meeting with Azurob.

Sharpic's group was on its way to meet with the underground Freeman when they were ambushed by thieves. Colif was knocked unconscious moments after his arm was wounded and was left for dead. He had no money and did not know where to find the "aunt and uncle"; they relocated immediately after Sharpic got the Star of Ilarir from them.

Colif confirms that the "blue eye" codeword was what convinced the "aunt and uncle" to give Sharpic the Ilarir and that the gem seems to be a security pass that must be shown to Azurob. He also explains that the thieves took their weapons, the gem, and their money. These weapons were two 9mm autopistols and one 9mm submachinegun. Each weapon had a silencer and three clips. He believes that the thieves were members of the local guild; they were all wearing black armbands and seemed to be accustomed to working together.

Unless heroic medical measures are used, Colif will die in 24 hours. In the last 16 hours, he will slip first into delirium, then into a coma. The referee is urged to make this death poignant (though not grisly) by portraying Colif's pluck, dedication, and refusal to indulge in self-pity. If the group has any reservations regarding its work on behalf of the antileague underground, this event should solidify their resolve.

If individuals with Streetwise attempt to learn of the details of the thief attack by doing a little bit of gutter research, they may learn that the guild recently came into possession of a gem of great value. It is also rumored that final negotiations are under way to sell it to the lord of the island kingdom of Turobar (to the east of Nintair). If the group does not move quickly (and they should *not* be told this), the Star of Ilarir will be sold and transported to that island. In this case, they will have to travel there and deal with Lord Folcor, his city of Indigal, and his huscarles.

For a referee who wants to extend this adventure into full-fledged campaign, the Star of Ilarir should be sold by the time the group tackles the thieves. The possibilities for play on Turobar include aiding the Freeman there to acquire a large enough force to

wrest the gem from the lord. For gaming groups that enjoy a more military challenge, here is an unusual opportunity to try to manage a TL1-2 military campaign which borrows from the flavor of Jerry Pournelle's *Janissaries* series.

The thieves' guildhall is where the Star of Ilarir and the weapons were taken. It is a smallish stone fortress above ground, with a large underground area, and it connects with a sewer/tunnel system that emerges into various places within the city. Twelve thieves are on guard duty, with another 10-35 in the complex (5+5D6). An attack that is properly timed and concentrates on surprise, speed, and local numerical superiority should work (although some casualties must be expected). The Star of Ilarir and Sharpic's weapons are in a locked and trapped (poison needles) safe far underground.

If the combat at the guildhall has been long or loud, other thieves and mercenaries will converge, and the group will have to exit via the underground tunnels and escape through the claustrophobic and crude sewer system that writhes like a rat's warren under Nintair.

If the referee has determined that the Star of Ilarir has been sent to Turobar instead, Sharpic's weapons will *still* be in the guildhall. The thieves will not use them in combat, for they don't know how and are afraid of the devices—although they'd never admit that.

THE LECHEROUS LORD

I looked at it just once, right before we went into the Lecherous Lord. I moved aside the pouch flap and let the glow of the white and pink gas giant Commonwealth spill into the little cowhide bag. The stars may have been clear in the heavens that night, but none were so bright as the two that shone at the heart of the Star of Ilarir. The sapphire was a little piece of absolute, pure, elemental blueness—the eye of some fallen god, perhaps. Or of a giant eagle, as its name suggested. I almost jumped when a soft voice dripped words right into my ear. "Like it, huh?" There was a smile in Shellene's voice. I shrugged. "Seen one, seen 'em all." She snorted. "Yeah. Sure. Mr. Superspy." She grinned and went in. I tucked the flap back into place and flexed my fingers as we entered the Lecherous Lord. The crowd did not look, sound, or smell pleasant. Anshuguur, the youngest of our group, almost slid to a stop when he caught an eyeful of the clientele. "Keep moving," I muttered as I grazed past him and glared at some of the ruffians who were already glaring at us. Anshu did as he was told, and the local roughboys got a little flustered by my aggressive stare. They backed off the vicious looks and returned to their wooden mugs of ale. "Great place for a meet," muttered Shellene as she found a seat against a wall. I smiled. After 20 years in covert operations, this wasn't so bad. We just might get out alive.

MEGATRAVELLER

With the Ilarir in hand (figuratively speaking), the group will need to proceed to the Lecherous Lord to locate Azurob. After sitting there for a few hours, the characters will be contacted by a laborer who asks them if they've seen blue eye. If the PCs show the Star of Ilarir to the fellow, he will advise them to be on the entrance to the harbor's eastern quay just past sundown on the next day.

Here at last they will meet Azurob—whose name means blue eye in the local dialect of Nintair. Since his eyes are hazel, it's a fair guess that his name is just a code word. Azurob wears a longish, hooded garment. Given the fairness of his skin and rangy, rugged build, the characters would guess he's from north of the desert.

After seeing the Star of Ilarir and interrogating the group, Azurob will reveal that he took Nianna/Tura north to the Adasina freehold. He will give its approximate location, but he cannot say if it is still in the same place. The Compactors have been active in that area, probably hunting for Adasina. If they were getting too close, the Adasina he knew may have been moved and started up again elsewhere. Azurob will leave quickly and without farewell—blending back into the gray dustswirls that drift through the streets of Nintair at twilight.

TRAVEL NORTH

Once again, the characters must journey out into the wild backlands of Essexar, although they have less free choice in determining the best course of travel from now on. In this case, a direct northern passage through the desert is clearly the best route.

ADASINA FREEHOLD

The group will arrive at Adasina just as a company of 100 Compactors (and 50 mercenary auxiliaries) is ravaging it. A breach has been made in Adasina's palisade by some form of petard, and most of the settlement is aflame. Most of the Freeman are scattering, as the Compactors and mercenaries haggle over booty, slaves, and what to do next. They are making some attempt at pursuing the fleeing Freeman, but not much; they seem confident of tracking them down eventually. Even so, the area is dangerous and it is a Difficult task for the Compactors and their minions to distinguish the group from Freeman. However, unless they roll a critical failure, they will pause for a few moments before launching into their headlong attack. The number of Compactors and/or auxiliaries seeing the group is up to the referee, but the availability of silenced firearms *should* represent a major handicap on the PCs' behalf.

In the aftermath of the pillaging and combat, one of the Freeman survivors will tell the group that he remembers something about a young girl such as they describe—but that was a matter Sroarc kept to himself. Sroarc, he explains, was their former leader, but he left Adasina shortly after the child arrived, feeling that the freeholding's days were numbered. Many Freeman—almost half—followed him. The Freeman isn't sure where he went, but he knew it was Sroarc's intention to establish a freehold in the eastern islands. And that alone should make him easy enough to find—he either has to make, steal, or buy boats to get his people to whichever island he has in mind.

SROARC

The group will discover Sroarc's trail in the nearby coastal town of Tostul (a very small town due east of Adasina). Apparently, Sroarc arranged for a number of bargelike boats to be constructed weeks before he began his exodus. After asking questions around the docks and the harborside inns, the PCs will be contacted by a master of a small fishing boat who offers them a ride "to an island that might interest you." If they take him up on this offer, they will be taken on a two-day sea voyage to Sroarc's new freeholding—Cultor City.

Cultor City, on Tseo Island, is a well-defended port town. Unknown to many, it is built atop an ancient underground tunnel

complex dating back to Essex's technological age (before the Long Night). Sroarc has already developed fairly extensive harbor facilities. An observer with Combat Engineering or Education C+ will find it a Routine task to realize that everything looks *too* well developed for the few months the Freeman have been here to work on it. The harbor is too angularly arranged, too efficiently laid out in relation to the community. Sroarc, in earlier travels, discovered this abandoned harbor and realized that it needed relatively little work to become extremely useful and defensible—since most of that work had already been done by technological ancestors many centuries ago.

The group will be ushered in to meet Sroarc immediately, who will become friendly *only* after the group shows him the Star of Ilarir. He will then explain what he has done with Tura and why he decided it was best to hide her in plain sight of Sarkan. His team members sent the homing bird back, so he knows they were successful, he has no ideas regarding the specifics of their success because they never returned. All he knows is that they somehow seeded Tura into the householding of Sarkan. Sroarc will supply whatever aid he can to the PCs and will ask them to remember him when they return to space; he guesses that in the years to come, he will need off-world help if the Freeman movement is to triumph.

ACROSS THE CONTINENT

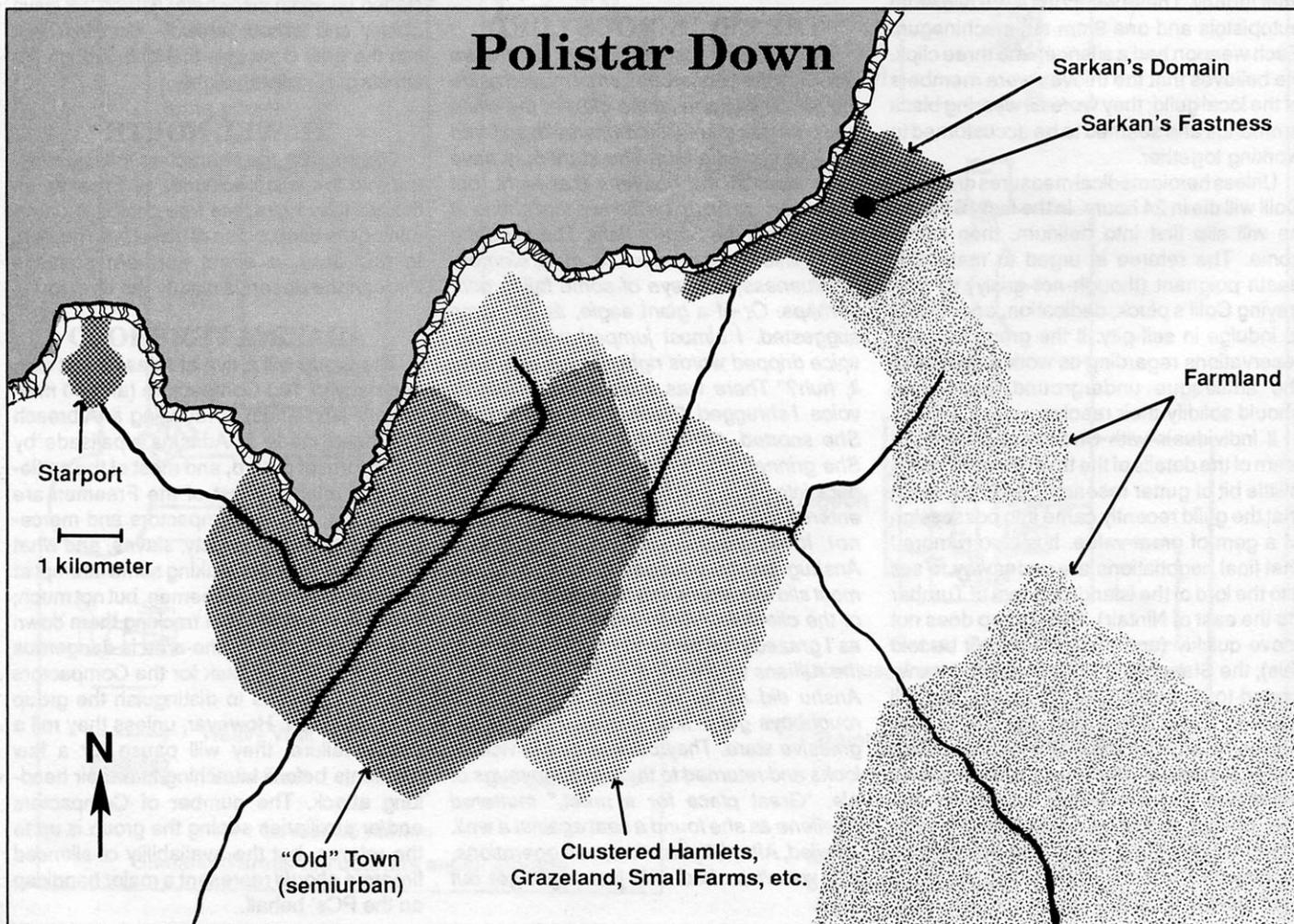
The return journey to Polistar Down should proceed fairly rapidly (though it will encompass a lot of calendar time). The PCs can cut back south to the Harvor road and take it all the way west to their final destination. Travel will be swift and fairly safe along the road. Referees should not bog the game down with too many encounters at this point, unless they have decided to turn the adventure into a full-blown campaign.

POLISTAR DOWN

The PCs will find the city dirtier, grimmer and more sullen than they left it. However, they'll have to use it as a base of operations until they figure out how to find (and carry off) Tura.

Access to Sarkan's castle is extremely difficult. Sarkan holds open court once a month, but there is a weapons check and an extremely heavy guard. Also, a powerful telepath checks for any hint of extreme malice or homicidal intentions in the crowd. If any are detected, the court is canceled (and very often, suspects are rounded up).

However, money speaks strongly to some of Sarkan's guards. And Sarkan is always interested in meeting off-worlders, particularly those *not* from the league. He knows the Explorers give him a distorted view; he likes to balance their propaganda with fresh opinions. Last, a number of lower servants have Freeman friends or sympathies—most prominent among these



is the jester, Camoran.

A thin man in his late 40s, Camoran was Essex's greatest scholar (and foremost Freeman advocate) until Sarkan's ascension to the high lordship. Camoran was then convicted of treason and given a choice between execution or an existence as Sarkan's jester. When he opted for life as a jester, he immediately became a source of Freeman ridicule. Most do not realize he hopes one day to help others strike back at Sarkan.

Should the PCs gain access to Sarkan's castle by revealing that they are off-worlders, Explorer teams will increase their presence at the castle—just in case. Usually, only one or two teams are on the grounds—mostly on business rather than for security purposes.

Tura works as an apprentice scullery girl, scouring pots, collecting utensils and plates from barracks, etc. Upon seeing the Star of Ilair clearly, she will go into a near-comatose faint for about a minute. When she emerges from this state, she will have complete recall of her identity and the secret of the microfiche—and as an added bonus, she'll even know where the Werres battle standard that conceals the fiche is hidden.

But there's a problem. The banner of the House of Werres hangs head down in Sarkan's courtroom, in a trophy alcove to the rear of the throne. There is always an honor guard in this alcove (1+1D6 Elite huscarles at night, twice this number during the day). And when Sarkan is there, it usually includes a score of his personal retainers—the cream of his huscarles. The other contents of this alcove are the banners of other traitors and the despoiled standards of fallen freeholds. The Adasina standard is the newest addition to the grim collection.

Whatever the PCs do with this situation must be well-timed and well-conceived in order to succeed. They must somehow get the eye from the standard (or the whole standard), then escape the castle. If such a disturbance is detected, the alarms will cause the Explorer teams to investigate. After considering the facts, their guess will be that this is not random vandalism or even a symbolic Freeman act—this is a purposeful act that has larger implications. Consequently, they may also surmise that off-worlders are involved and that they'll be trying to hijack a ship. The Explorers will assume this to be the case if any advanced technology or guns are used during the theft.

A PLAN

During this long and arduous adventure, the PCs should have improved in tactical skill and innovation—they're going to need it in order to get Tura, the fiche and a ship, and go home. But before they undertake any of these challenges, they must first *find* Tura.

Sarkan's castle is actually a sprawling fortress. There are over 10,000 troops stationed there, and their discipline is not lax. Sarkan's fastness is a choice assignment and a major personal honor. If the PCs try any overt or

obvious means to get in touch with Tura, they're going to find themselves detained and interrogated; Sarkan doesn't believe in loose ends, nor do his closest servitors.

However, Sarkan's fastness requires the labor of literally hundreds of workers every day: stevedores, diggers, stablehands, tradesmen of all types, wagon drivers, just to name a few. With a little planning and maybe a few bribes, a characters could easily slip in as part of this innocuous miniarmy and conduct a fairly unimpeded search for Tura (as long as they constrain their search to the workers in the fastness). The nobility will be all but unreachable, and the soldiers will be difficult to canvas in any appreciable numbers). It will probably take a few days to stumble upon Tura, even given Tembré's mental image of the girl.

Getting Tura

We made our move when she went to feed the baker's scraps to the chickens. We'd watched her for the past two days, and the pattern was clear. First, she'd scrape all the scraps together, then dump almost all of it alongside the chicken coop. Then she'd go into the coop to hand-feed some bashed-up, half-grown rooster that hadn't known when to give his hormones a rest.

Like clockwork, she dumped the scraps, circled around to the front of the coop and went in. No one was around. I gave Gunthar the all clear. The big ex-marine slipped into the coop like a shadow and picked her up in a single firm—but gentle—sweep of his arm, one hand locked over her mouth. I was in right behind him, drawing the door shut. He turned her around, and I almost fumbled the Star into the hay. Those eyes of hers; just as blue as the Star of Ilair itself. Wide and fearful now. I shook my head and smiled. Either the kid's gullible or my face is as honest as they say it is; she quieted down a bit, but she remained watchful and tense. I raised my right hand and opened it. She saw the Star, blue eyes meeting blue eye. It was like she was falling into that little gem, her eyes going wider, wider, wider. And then she went as limp as a sack of hydroponic potatoes.

The PCs will have to choose under what conditions they want to show the Star of Ilair to Tura. When she sees it, she will (as promised) fall down in a deep faint (more like a coma). When she awakes she will know that she is in fact Nianna and knows a terribly dangerous secret, and she will be scared stiff. She will want to leave with the group *immediately*.

The PCs would be well advised to take her, since her behavior will be altered, odd, and skittish after her recollection. If she disappears from the fastness *after* she is observed acting like this, it may attract some attention, particularly if she blurts out something revealing. Remember—Sarkan still has not found the fiche. Therefore, any word of Nianna, Avered, or anything vaguely connected with them will immediately get his (or his lieutenants') attention.

If Tura departs with the group immedi-

MEGATRAVELLER™

ately, her departure will hardly cause a shrug; plenty of laboring youngsters (particularly those entering puberty) run off for all sorts of reasons. Tura was well-enough liked that the only consequence of her departure will be the wellwishing of her coworkers.

Getting the Fiche

I didn't like doing it; it was like grenade-fishing in a bathtub. But we had to be fast and sure. The first one went down like a poleaxed ox, his chainmail making a SHHRRUNKA sound that was someplace between a thump and a clank. His buddies went to check him, but the three of them were pretty cautious about it. I brought down another one before they saw me in the shadows and charged. A shout of warning was rising in the little one's throat. But Essexans are used to crossbows; they had no reason to think of taking cover instead of charging. They assumed that their friends had been brought down by a crossbow, which they believed was now unloaded. Which was exactly what I knew they'd think. The silenced 9mm stopped the little one's warning cry, then stopped the other—but he took two shots. He was a big guy, but that's no excuse; I'm losing my touch. Gunthar and Shellene emerged from another entrance. Good—that meant the guards who had tromped off to get their midnight snack wouldn't be troubling us. I crept over to the alcove where Sarkan kept his bloody prizes—mostly Freeman flags, torn and despoiled. But at the center, mounted upside down, was the battle standard of the House of Werres. There was a blue-eyed eagle at the end of that standard, looking up at me. Jackpot. We didn't have even one extra second, but I couldn't help it—I winked at that bird. His blue-paste eye glimmered back dully. No sense of humor, I guess.

Getting the fiche will not be as easy as getting Tura, which the group will realize as she tells them where it is and how it's guarded. But if the PCs are thorough, they can get a tremendous amount of detail out of Tura regarding the precise timing of the guards, regular rosters, peculiarities and weaknesses of the different guards, when they're fed, and more. An overt assault will *not* work, although the PCs have probably acquired enough firepower by this time to make a memorable last stand.

Instead, finding the right combination of guards and weaknesses, and perhaps drugging the food is what will make it possible to steal the battle standard of the House of Werres. If the PCs act within a few days, Tura will not be questioned if she is seen in

the kitchen area. Getting into the castle will be the hardest part, and could involve either scaling the walls with climbing gear or (more simply) entering disguised as laborers, then hiding and waiting to strike at nightfall. Exiting will be a great deal easier and require much less subtlety. By Tura's estimations, the group can expect 20 minutes before the dead/drugged guards are discovered and the search for the standard is mounted.

Given all the silenced weapons that the PCs have been able to lay their hands on (if they've come this far), most of their other problems should be solvable in that fashion. Any melee that lasts more than two rounds will be *sure* to result in the raising of a general alarm.

Getting a Ship

If the PCs have questioned Tura closely and listened carefully, they should realize that they're going to become the targets of a major manhunt less than half an hour after they steal the standard. Consequently, it is probably best to consider travel arrangements off-planet *before* carrying out the heist. If the PCs have a large enough group, they may want to secure a ship and get the standard at the same time. But a little common sense should suggest the following:

- Even though the guards will be found and the standard will be noticed as missing, the full plot is not thereby revealed to Sarkan and his Explorer assistants. It may take them a little while to piece things together.

- If for some reason the attempt to get the fiche has to be called off, then the PCs have tipped their hand by trying to seize a ship. At that point, it will be too late to stop; they'll have to leave planet then—or never.

- The PCs should remember that their pickup is biweekly. If they leave the planet, they should anticipate being just ahead of pursuers. In that event, they'd better be able to make a quick rendezvous (i.e., they'd better time their attempt for just before their ride home arrives in-system). Therefore, the move to get a ship should be dependent upon the successful outcome of the attempt to steal the standard. Ships can be found in two places near Sarkan's castle: Polistar Down Starport and a secret defense base.

Polistar Down Starport: The security forces there are considerable—and probably a bit too tough for the characters and whatever/whomever they've picked up over the course of the adventure.

The starport inner perimeter is defended by a company of second-rank troops from Meadow (1123, Bruia sector/Hinters). They are equipped with outdated material (TL6, whereas Meadow's standard is TL7). But given their potential local opponents (TL1-2), this hardly matters. They have a number of discreet pillboxes with heavier support weapons around the inner perimeter. The outer perimeter is comprised of two stretches of wire, the outer being a simple barrier. The second is razor-sided concertina. Just inside this second perimeter, guards from Meadow walk their patrols. The outer fence is electronically sensed, so a breach can be detected and localized by both the Meadow company CP (command post) and the Explorer CP.

The Meadow company is comprised of four platoons of 40 men each. Each platoon is made up for four squads of 10. Each squad includes:

- Squad leader: 9mm SMG, 9mm revolver, 2 HE grenades, flak.
- Fire team 1: 1x7mm autorifle, 2x7mm semiautomatic rifles.
- Fire team 2: 3x7mm semiautomatic rifles (one with rifle grenade adaptor).
- Fire team 3: 3x7mm semiautomatic rifles.

The four bunkers are equipped with one LMG and one HMG each. In addition, the two bunkers closest to the approaches from Polistar Down are each equipped with an 80 mm recoilless rifle, flechette and HE rounds only. In the event that the off-world presence becomes pointedly unwelcome, and angry Essexans begin to move toward the starport, these weapons will certainly dampen the patriotic ardor of an unruly mob.

There is only one gate in the fence, 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.

If the group has a number of highly proficient military/covert types who can get in, get some weapons and keep the whole thing quiet, then the group may be able to sneak onto the pad and steal a waiting vessel. Most

LONE WOLF SDB

CraftID: *Lone Wolf*-class System Defense Boat, SB, TL9, MCr152.544
Hull: 135/338, Disp=150, Config=2SL w/VTOL, Armor=50D, Unloaded=2732.2, Loaded=3520.524
Power: 1/1, Btty=5Mw/hrs, Fusion (from Loco, see following)=234MW, Duration=80/240
Loco: 4/8, FusionRkt=3.324/11,700Tt, Duration=as above, NOE=130, Cruise=1670, Top=2225, Agility=0
Commo: Radio=Systemx3, Laser=Systemx3, Maser=System
Sensors: Radar=FarOrbx2, Ladar=FarOrb, Radar Dir Findrx2, RadarJmr=FarOrb, 2ndGenLasrSnsr, RadioJmr= Systemx2, EEMx2, AdvImgEnhnc, PssvAudio, EnvSnsr, RadiationSnsr, MagSnsr, VideoRcdr, HvyRbtArm, ActivObjScn= Routine, ActivObjRin= Routine, PssvEnrgyScn=Difficult
Off: Mssl=002 (100 Btty rounds)
 Batt 1
 Bear 1
 50MwTacLaser*=00- Pen:55 to 50Kkm
 Batt 2 Pen:27 to 1 AU
 Bear 2
Def: AntiLsrAeroslx5, TacLasr has PDF
Control: Computer=3fibx3, Panels=Complink, Envir=bsc env, bsc ls, ext ls, Airlockx2
Accom: Crew=7 (Bridge=2, Engin=1, Maint=1, Gnnr=2, Commd=1) Small Stateroomx4. (Section-sized troop module may be emplaced in cargo bay.)
Other: Cargo/Craft Bay=458Kl, Fuel=576, ObjSz=Avg, EmLvl=no emssn, fuel purifier and scoops.

*For rules regarding the use of the 50Mw TacLaser in space combat, see "One Small Step" in **Challenge 45**.)

The *Lone Wolf*-class SDB is a pirated design tracing its origins all the way back to early Solomani designers who were scrambling to find every edge they could over their newfound Vilani rivals. Now built locally by the league planet Sigur, these vessels are fading into obsolescence and have been "bumped down" to patrolling secure systems, rather than front-line use.

However, the *Lone Wolf* is still a valuable design and enjoys some significant advantages over its more advanced counterparts. Its unusual endurance, ample magazine, large cargo hold, integral refueling capabilities and low-energy tactical lasers give it an almost unprecedented capacity for extended operation. In cases where the vessel may lie doggo, the onboard batteries can be periodically charged with a brief, low-power flare of the engines.

Total life support and EEM costs less than 10 Mw, making this a virtually invisible ship. The cargo hold can be used for deadfall ordnance, away vehicles, troop modules (either active or low berth models), expanded magazine capacity, or space mines.

While not a hard-hitting vessel by SDB standards, it can perform a wide variety of missions and has an impressive (and heavily redundant) electronics suite.

Last—and at Early Interstellar tech levels, this advantage cannot be overemphasized—its fusion rocket drives allow it to operate at consistent performance levels, regardless of its distance from a planet's gravity field.

of these are TL9 grain boats that can just barely pull 1.5 G inside of 10 diameters. A few other traders are in port, but their crews are on board, and a fight would be sure to ensue. The other ships are TL10-11 Explorer boats (ship's boats, cutters, and a shuttle), but these are under close guard and are watched by security cameras. It would be a tough and risky job to get them.

Secret Underground Defense Base: There is another answer, which the players should recall if they've kept their information from the first part of "Behind Blue Eyes." If you check back, you'll find that the group obtained a satellite map of Essex's starport, and that an interesting thermal anomaly was noted on that chart—a faint heat trail in the water emanating from under the ocean cliffs that form the northern dropoff of the starport's landing pad area. A look at the cliffs suggests that this isn't simply reactor thermal wastes. The cliffs are almost 200 feet high—why dig through solid rock to put in that size of a reactor? And according to a note on the sheet, the sighting of that thermal anomaly was quite infrequent, whereas a power plant would put out a more or less constant signature.

A little scouting in a rowboat at low tide will reveal the faintest hint of a subterranean opening at the water line at the base of the cliff. If the characters get too close, they will be instructed to move off (via bullhorn). If they do not (or pretend not to) hear this warning over the surf, the Explorers will scramble one of their TL10 G carriers to the scene and "scare off the locals." If the PCs had any doubts about something being under the cliff, they should now find themselves believing otherwise.

Night swimming in the area of the cliff is a little risky, but with inflatable skins (which is just another word for "large water skins full of air"), a safe approach is a fairly easy task. If the characters decide to reconnoiter the opening before carrying out any operations, they'll have a few fairly simple tasks to get the information they're after. They'll have to swim underwater for a few rounds (leaving the skins behind with someone waiting outside). After swimming for two rounds in near absolute darkness, they'll see a faint glimmer of light through the night-black water above and ahead of them. In another few rounds, they'll break the surface (quietly would be a good idea) and find themselves in a large underground cavern.

They'll observe the details indicated on the map of the underground defense base, and observe 1D6 guards keeping a leisurely eye on the facility, walking about, chatting, and smoking the occasional noncarcinigette. Discipline down here seems pretty lax. And best of all, there's a ship here that someone's experienced eye will assess as being a sleek 150-ton, TL9 SDB with a lot of fusion rockets. Just the right craft for a quick, hot getaway.

With this much information at their disposal—and assuming they don't tip the guards off to their presence (sound echoes in caverns and carries well across water),

the PCs should be able to put together a plan for assaulting the underground defense base. With silenced weapons, they can cut down enough guards to get to the ship, power her up, and get away.

The only surprise is that the actual guard contingent is 2D6; the other half are hidden among the crates and boxes. The moment any of the guards raise the alarm, one of these hidden individuals will summon the Explorer standby security squad (combat environment suits, ACRs and laser carbines) as well as the standby platoon from Meadow. These troops will start shuttling down the elevator at top speed.

If the PCs manage to get the ship under their control before getting too embroiled in a firefight with these forces, they ought to get away. And although the PCs may be enamored of the wonders of gravitic thruster drive, they may relearn just how effective a quick aftward blast from fusion drives can be in taking care of pesky defenders.

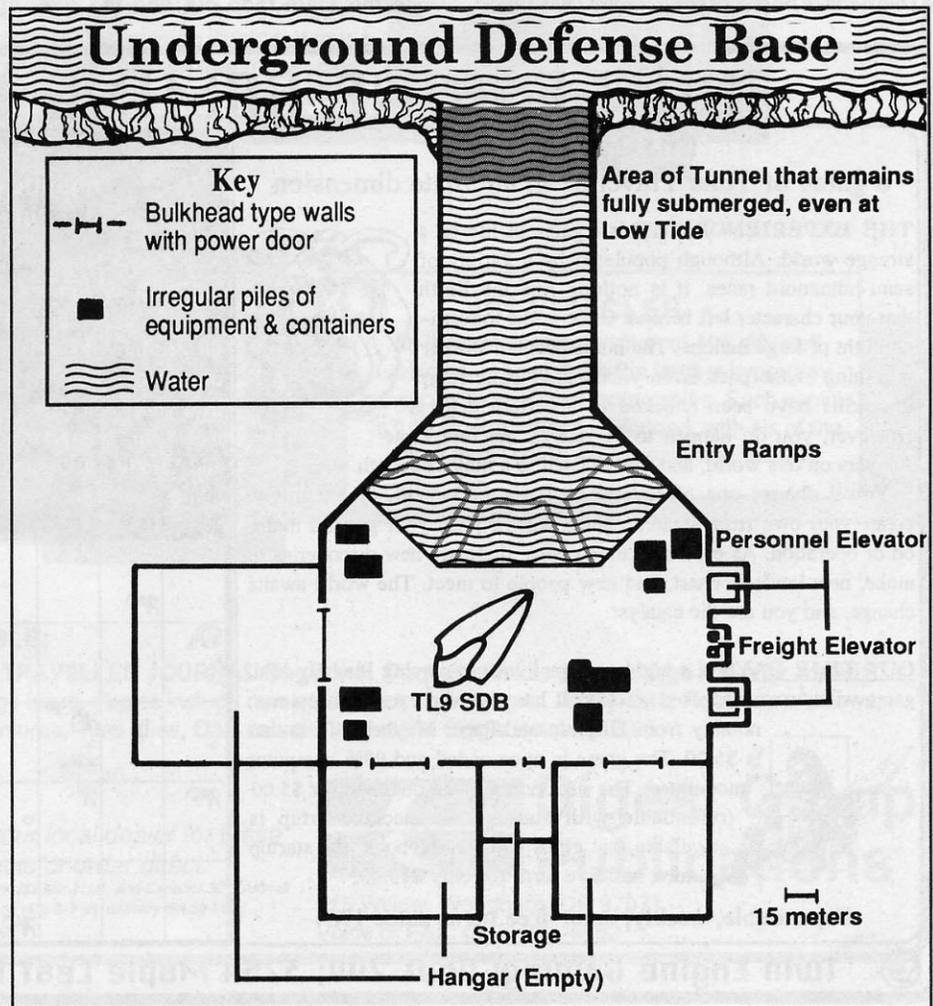
GOING HOME

The last and final task of "Behind Blue Eyes" is to rendezvous with the exfiltration vehicle that will allow the PCs to put some parsecs between themselves and their now-plentiful league adversaries. However, even as the PCs' newly acquired SDB is roaring up out of Essex's atmosphere, their sensors will indicate that their departure has excited some local activity. Sev-

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eral sensor contacts are breaking out of orbits around Riies and are arrowing toward Essex. And 20 minutes (one space combat round) after having cleared the atmosphere, they'll note a vessel identical to theirs rising out of the ocean off the west coast of Hedestor. The com channels are bustling with orders instructing the characters to stand to and prepare for boarding, businesslike threats of utter destruction as the penalty for noncompliance, and a few less official (and less printable) suggestions.

The pursuing ships can all be identical to the *Lone Wolf*-class ship the PCs have hijacked. Or (if the referee decides that a little extra challenge is in order) one might be a top-shelf TL13 Nullian SDB (referee's design). Either way, the PCs have some space combat ahead of them. Even if they get to the rendezvous point far ahead of the other ships, they must decelerate to a full stop in order to dock with the exfiltration ship. And remember, "bailing out" of the SDB at the last second won't accomplish anything useful; individuals will retain the momentum and vector they had while on board the boat—and consequently, will go shooting past their rescuers.



The rendezvous point is one million kilometers from Essex. Unlike the group, the league forces in pursuit have no need to slow down. Their objective is to close the gap and bring weapons to bear. This will probably mean that the closest pursuer (the SDB from Essex) overshoots the group's vessel after a single round of fire, but that is in accordance with the league's plans. As the more distant pursuers who started from Riies close in, the overshooting boat will decelerate and return from the opposite side, thereby catching the PCs in a vise.

The appearance of the exfiltration ship (a far trader with its cargo hold converted to extra tankage) should change things. However, the PCs will still have a fight on their hands, and if they plan poorly or waste any time, they'll find the second wave of attackers bearing down on them before they can dock, transfer over, cast away, and finally jump out-system.

THE END OF A BEGINNING

I spent the first few days back on Tiffany reading and relaxing. The others went off to pursue more frenetic forms of recreation—except Shellene, who was puttering with her collection of pre-contact Solomani memorabilia (you couldn't really call those 9th hand repros artifacts). One day she knocked on the door and breezed in. (No, she didn't wait for a response to her knock. She never does. This habit of hers has occasionally produced

some embarrassing moments—and some memorable fun.)

She plopped down on the foot of the bed. "Look what I found." She tossed something that landed on my chest. I fumbled after it, still half in the grim world of Macbeth. "Old man," she laughed.

"What is it?"

"An audio cassette—made of magnetic tape."

"That big? Just for audio?"

"Yeah." She retrieved the two-wheeled antiquity and popped it into a small playback device on her belt. The sound of Rocclassic music wowed out plaintively.

"Hmmm... Veedback?"

"Noooooo, silly," she remonstrated. "This is real rock. The old stuff. The stuff before Veedback or any of the Rocclassic groups." "So?"

"So, I thought you might find this song interesting." And it was about then that I noted the lyrics sliding past: "No one knows what it's like to be the bad man, to be the sad man—behind blue eyes."

I snorted. "Whichever I am—bad or sad—I've had enough of blue eyes for a while, thank you."

She shut it off with a shrug. "So which are you—sad or bad?" She smiled at me, and I wondered why I'd never noticed it before—she had blue eyes too.

As the stars faded out and the gray of

hyperspace swallows them up, the "Behind Blue Eyes" adventure (at last!) comes to an end. If the referee has done a fair job, there should be virtually limitless opportunities for play in the Riies system. Riies' companion worlds (moons) have not all been visited, and plots are afoot on every one. The resistance—both on Riies and Essex—needs help more than ever, and the PCs are now the only established conduit between the local forces and the Imperial-backed efforts originating out of Tiffany and Taangard's office. And if the Stalkers do decide to help the antileague movement, who'll be able to coordinate efforts with them? "Behind Blue Eyes" is merely the beginning of a much longer, much richer campaign that can be shaped according to the referee's individual desires and tastes. Ω

Thus ends "Behind Blue Eyes." For additional information, refer to the first three segments of the adventure in Challenge 48 and 49 and 50.

The author gratefully acknowledges the suggestions, repeated playtesting, and general assistance of Thomas MacCarrol, which was integral to the refinement of "Behind Blue Eyes."

The author also wishes to acknowledge Rob Caswell for his general concepts of the Stalkers. And finally, a large thanks to the NY playtesters who spent many a night exploring the Riies system.

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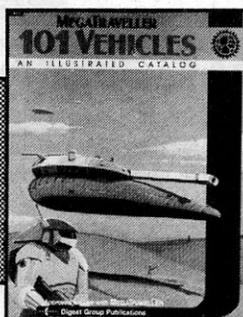


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TRAVELLER *News Service*

Anaxias/Delphi

Date: 187-1121

¶In her first official public appearance since the birth of her children, Margaret announced that after two years of negotiations, a major trade agreement had been reached with the Hivers.

¶This agreement is said to have a net value of over 100 trillion credits annually and is rumored to involve the acquisition of advanced communication technologies and medical automation.

¶Tukera Lines has been contracted to ferry Hiver buyers from their homeworlds in Spica sector through the Hinterworlds and finally on to Massilia as they gather shipments bound for Hiver markets.

¶This represents a major diplomatic coup for Margaret—it affords her new economic power in the region and effectively sidesteps the Imperial-Hiver trade route via Beyerly's Path, which was lost due to Solomani gains in the Old Expanses.

¶Trading in the Anaxian Securities Exchange was suspended three hours early, closing with a gain of 572 points. Economic experts observed that the steep climb in trading was likely to continue unabated the next day.

¶Tukera stock closed at an all-time high of 194.32 credits per share.

Medurma/Dagudashaag

Date: 199-1121

¶After a week of scattered reports, it seems that the forces of Emperor Lucan have dealt a major defeat to the remaining naval assets of Strephon's Imperium.

¶Captain Pradnir Kulshugirii of the 50,000-tonne armored cruiser *Skagerrak* (which recently arrived for repair and refitting), was given permission by the Imperial Censor Bureau to recount several incidents of the fighting that he and his ship had been in.

¶"Squadrons were going away in bunches," Kulshugirii said, "and most of those bunches belonged to the enemy. Strephon's traitorous thugs are losing heart. Even their officers are starting to admit that they know the real Strephon is dead. They weren't willing to stand their ground and die fighting—that's the sign of a lost cause."

¶Captain Kulshugirii refused to comment on rumors that suggested that Lucan's forces enjoyed a numerical superiority of more than 3:1 in the engagements, which were mostly fought along the spinward edge of the Dagudashaag sector.

Anaxias/Delphi

Date: 206-1121

¶Treason within Tukera Lines has dampened the high spirits and even higher securities trading that has spread throughout Margaret's domain since the so-called Hiver Deal concluded last month.

¶The empress' nephew, Tancred von Harrer, explained that an assassination plot against Margaret had come to the attention of Blaine Tukera, owner of the megacorporation and Margaret's husband.

¶Although no further specifics were offered, expert observers speculate that the conspirators were members of the Vermene, the Tukera intelligence agency.

¶The Vermene has fallen into increasing disfavor here at court on Anaxia, and the empress has expressed an interest in disbanding the agency in favor of a new intelligence service.

Muan Gwi/Solomani Rim

Date: 225-1121

¶Solomani sabotage may be involved in the shortage of the important Vegan spice *mwob*, according to a statement from the Imperial Ministry of Justice, in cooperation with Vegan nationals.

¶Chemical analyses of the natural *mwob* sources began when it was determined that the lack of the spice would reduce the number of Vegans entering the technically oriented *tuhuir*.

¶By influencing the selection of *tuhuir*—the Vegan equivalent of an extended family—Solomani operatives may be trying to breed a more easily conquered, more pliant Vegan society.

Dlan/Illelish

Date: 236-1121

¶After being locked in debate for more than a year and a half, leaders of the Virasan faith of Dlan has decreed that dying a nonviolent death on Dlan itself is no longer a requirement that must be met if a believer is to attain full revelation in the afterlife. They designated as martyrs all Virasans who have died off-planet while conducting essential business.

¶Many members of the Synod have denounced the 457th Khanu and claimed that they no longer speak for the true Virasan faith.

¶Despite being a native Dlani, Emperor Dulinor is not a member of the Virasan faith. However, rumors mount regarding his interest in its tenets.

Vaward/Old Expanses

Date: 244-1121

¶An undisclosed task force has intercepted the approaching Solomani thrust from the Twenty-One Worlds subsector and defeated it. Reports confirmed that the Solomani task force—said to include one batron and two crurons—was ambushed by a numerically superior force of Imperial craft.

¶Solomani losses were said to be heavy, whereas friendly forces were said to have suffered only minor damage.

¶Undisclosed sources within Margaret's military organization suggested that the task force was not a reserve or secret unit retained for this purpose. The same source also admitted to some nervousness, observing that this friendly mystery fleet might not be so "friendly" next time.

Warinir/Daibei

Date: 263-1121

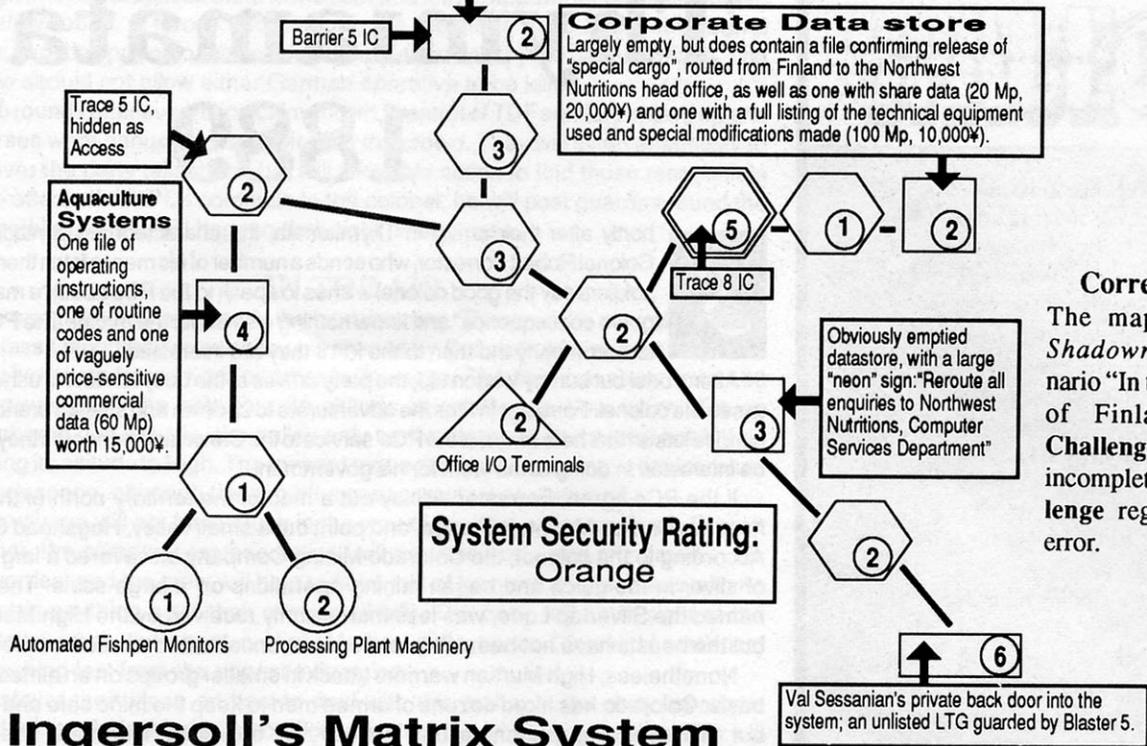
¶Daibei Federation spokeswoman Adlea Marignault announced today that piracy was once again on the upswing in the Reaver's Deep sector and that travellers were advised to postpone travel into that region.

¶This announcement comes as a severe blow to the government of Duke Craig, who hoped his diplomatic overtures to the elusive raiders would result in an alliance against the Solomani Confederation.

¶Unfortunately, rumors suggest that the Solomani have had the greater luck in this regard and have vested almost a score of the major raiding groups with letters of marque.

Marignault refused to speculate on the validity of these rumors, although she did mention that new diplomatic initiatives "were under way with new potential allies and are proceeding in a promising fashion." Ω

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Correction
The map to the *Shadowrun* scenario "In the Name of Finland" in **Challenge 48** was incomplete. **Challenge** regrets this error.

Ingersoll's Matrix System

NED NEUTRON - Limos-n-Lizards!

NOTES FROM NED'S "AFTER TH' WAR" JOURNAL

IT TURNED OUT THAT OUR MUTANT (NAMED ALEX, THE ONE WITH TH' TAIL) FRIEND WAS ALSO AN EXPERT CHEF! TOO BAD WE BEAT THE CRAP OUT OF HIM IN THE EARLIER STRIP. HEY, IF IT WAS ME, PERSONALLY, I'D BLOWN THE BOZO'S TO KINGDOM COME, BUT... THAT'S JUST ME.

HEY, THIS FETTUCINE ALFREDO'S GREAT! HOW DID YOU DO IT WITH NOTHING EDIBLE AROUND HERE!

YEAH.

TRUST ME, YOU CAN DO VERY AMAZING THINGS WITH OLD MOLDY CHEESE AND LEFTOVER CLOTHING PARTS.

GRRR!

SUDDENLY!

WHAT THE?!

HELLO, PROF WIENSTIEN HERE TO EXPLAIN WHY A DINO SAUR HAS ATTACKED OUR PARTY!

SAY GUYS, THIS WASN'T IN MY CONTRACT.

BUT WAIT...

MY RESEARCH SHOWED THAT DINOS WERE ADDICTED TO CHEESE PRODUCTS (WHICH WAS THE MAIN INGREDIENT IN THE FETTUCINE DISH OUR LIL' GROUP ATE). WITH THIS IN MIND, I RETURN YOU TO THE STRIP IN PROGRESS.

THEN...

YOU BET!!

HEY SLOBS, COULD YOU AT LEAST NOT DROP FETTUCINE ON MY GENUINE CORINTHIAN LEATHER OPHOLSTRY!

WOOF

TO BE CONTINUED...

Thymiamata: 1889

Shortly after their arrival in Thymiamata, the characters are contacted by Colonel Robert Forrester, who sends a number of his men to fetch them. The soldiers say the good colonel wishes to speak to the PCs about "a matter of grave consequence" and know nothing else about the matter. The PCs are to accompany the men to the fort if they are interested.

After a brief but bumpy wagon trip, the party arrives at the busy fort and is ushered in to see the colonel. Forrester invites the adventurers to sit down and share a brandy with him. He lets on that he is aware of the PCs' service to the Crown and wonders if they might be interested in doing some work for his government.

If the PCs agree, Forrester will lay out a map of the territory north of the city, near the Chryse Mountain Range, and point out a small valley, Hogshead Gulch. According to the colonel, the Colorado Mining Company discovered a large vein of silver in the gulch and began mining operations on a large scale. The vein, named the Silvertap Lode, was less than warmly received by the High Martians, but the beasts have not been able to mount a concentrated assault on the mine.

Nonetheless, High Martian warriors attack in smaller groups on an almost daily basis. Colorado has hired dozens of armed men to keep the mine safe and open, but this does not guarantee that nobody will be killed. The mine has been maintained on very shaky grounds, but the silver yield has always produced enough profit to make it worth the effort—at least until the onset of the strike.

Last month, workers apparently decided they'd had enough and staged a sit-in. Silvertap's foreman, Robert Sharp, tried to force the miners back to work, but he was too pressed with fending off the High Martians to do much of anything. The mining camp has fallen into disarray, and the lives of many US citizens are at risk, meaning federal intervention is a must. The US Army has too few resources on the planet to mount a military relief force, so Colorado has decided to meet with the miners to discuss a pay raise. That is where the PCs come in.

Forrester and Colorado Mining would like the party to assume the roles of federal representatives and mediate the dispute. Ordinarily the US has little to do with foreigners, but because the PCs are foreigners, they have no bias in the matter. Too many government officials in Thymiamata own stock in Colorado, making them somewhat less than objective in the matter. Forrester can be assured of a strictly neutral mediator with the adventurers.

The characters will be provided with legal documents, a copy of the company charter, and whatever small arms and equipment they feel is necessary for the job, and a representative from Colorado Mining will accompany the party to the camp. Transportation, assuming the characters have none of their own, will be provided aboard an ore galley belonging to the mining company. As for payment, the US government will pay 10 British pounds per day plus expenses, with a bonus of £100 upon successful completion of the mission.

MIDNIGHT MADNESS

The ship will be ready to leave at sunrise, and the colonel will put the characters up for the night in a small inn near the high port. The rooms are nothing fancy, but are clean and have a good view of the high docks.

After the PCs have bedded down for the night, the entire block is shaken by a loud explosion only a few dozen yards from the inn. From their window, the PCs can see that a large wagon is being consumed by flames, and several bystanders were injured.

Characters coming to the aid of these unfortunates will find that a large crowd of spectators has assembled around the scene, making it difficult to get back to the rooms. The injured Martians can be patched up with an Easy task roll against Medicine.

Any PCs still near or in the rooms will be attacked by four Martians (more if the party is large) armed with knives, clubs and blackjacks. The thugs will not try to harm the PCs, but will wrestle them to the floor, perhaps pointing a dagger to their throats to keep them still. Moments later, two human men in white field suits will enter the party's rooms and search for something. Any PC making a successful difficult roll against Observation will notice that the two men are speaking German. Once they find the papers the colonel gave the party, they will shuffle

Episode 3: A Lode of Trouble *By Neil V. Young*

through them quickly, toss them to the floor and leave, apparently dissatisfied with what they found. If forced into combat, the Germans have heavy multibarrel pistols, but they prefer to run, leaving their Martian lackeys to do the fighting. The referee should not allow either German operative to be killed.

1D6 rounds after everything calms down, a patrol of TDF soldiers shows up and disperses what hangers-on are left from the crowd. They will listen attentively to whatever the party tells them, but will take little action to find those responsible for the attack. If the PCs complain to the colonel, he will post guards around the inn—nothing further will happen that night, in any case.

IN THE AIR

The ore galley will leave early the next morning. The vessel is a surplus *Small-Bird*-class Oenotrian screw galley purchased by Colorado Mining and fitted with underslung nets to carry ore or other bulky cargo. The ship can carry up to 168 tons in weight in the nets, but its altitude is reduced to Low when it is so encumbered. On this trip, the galley only carries cargo in its internal hold, thus reducing its altitude to High. The forward rogue gun has been removed to increase the deck space, although the two aft sweeper guns were retained.

The voyage will not have much in the way of scenery or atmosphere. Everett Barrister, the company representative, will be unsociable and immersed in his own worries, and the crew will be a tedious mix of humans and Martians with no interest in anything save their own small talk. The party will be in sight of the mountains when they spot a High Martian galley (use *Clearsight* statistics) approaching fast from the opposite direction.

Whatever their ideas on how to deal with this menace, the party members should realize their ship cannot outfight or outrun the other ship, and that they will have to act quickly if they are to survive. One alternative (have the galley captain think of it if nobody else does) is to dump the cargo, thus enabling the ore galley to climb to Very High altitude, something the *Clearsight* equivalent cannot do. Barrister will loudly protest this damage to company property, but will concede when shown the alternative. It will take 1D6 rounds for everyone on board save the bridge crew and turncranks to dump the cargo, with an extra round added for each two individuals who want to trade potshots with the beasts instead. Once at the higher altitude, the PCs can proceed to the camp with no further complications.

WELCOME TO SILVERTAP, POPULATION ZERO?

The party will find the mining camp deserted. Exploring the small enclave will reveal that while no one is there, nothing seems to show any signs of an attack. The company store is completely emptied, except for a few broken crates and boxes, and the same can be said for the mining office, which has had its maps, survey equipment and technical manuals removed. The mine is intact, but characters making an Easy task roll for Observation will notice that someone left the shaft in an awfully big hurry. A half-eaten sandwich still rots where it was left; tools are leaning against the wall; even a poker game was apparently left unfinished, with the chips still on the table. On another Easy: Observation roll, the party will notice a faint but cool breeze coming from the depths of the mine.

The mine extends several hundred more feet into the mountainside, branching off occasionally to follow the vein, until it stops in a wide shaft that plunges into the darkness. The shaft is 20 feet wide, and characters shining a light source down it will see only darkness. The breeze felt earlier is very strong here and is definitely coming from somewhere down below. Oddly, there are tracks for an elevator of some kind, but the pulley and all associated machinery that would be used to raise and lower such a device is absent. There was a ladder extending down the side of the shaft, but it has been hacked apart and is now unusable.

Getting down the shaft will require several hundred feet of rope, held or tied to a cross beam so the party can slide down. Characters must succeed in a roll against their Agility, though Mountaineering skill gives a +1 for every level of the skill the character has. A character failing the roll will plunge several hundred feet to the bottom of the shaft, which is filled with water from an underground river the miners accidentally tapped into last month. The uninjured character will find himself travelling down this river until it dumps out in a waterhole near the mining camp.

Roughly 50 feet down the shaft is a crosscut, and they characters will notice a foul smell as they get close. Four ore carts pushed to the ledge here all hold rock waste, but one also holds the body of a High Martian. This poor fellow has been here a couple of days and has slash marks on his neck, apparently the cause of



WILLIE BOGGS (EXPERIENCED NPC)

Att.	Skills
Str: 5	Fisticuffs 4, Throwing 2, Close Combat 3 (edged)
Agl: 2	Stealth 1, Marksmanship 2 (rifle)
End: 4	Wilderness Travel 3 (mountaineering), Fieldcraft 1
Int: 2	Observation 3, Engineering 1 (structural engineering)
Chr: 3	Eloquence 2, Bargaining 2, Linguistics 2 (Na-Gaaryani, High Chryse)
Soc: 1	Riding 1 (horse), Medicine 2

Willie is the sole miner who escaped enslavement. His plans to get help have failed, and now he survives in a hidden nook in the mine. Willie arrived on Mars a year ago, though he has seen little but the subsurface through his mining job. Willie is not overly bright, but is observant and has a keen memory.

Motives: Steady, honest, just.

Appearance: Willie is in his mid-30s and is unkempt due to the situation. Overweight though he is, Willie is surprisingly strong. He has a knife and breech-loader he took from a High Martian guard, and he is proficient with both, though he has but six rounds for the gun.

WARZUK (VETERAN NPC)

Att.	Skills
Str: 4	Fisticuffs 4, Throwing 2, Close Combat 4 (bashing)
Agl: 3	Stealth 2, Marksmanship 4 (bow)
End: 4	Wilderness Travel 3 (foraging)
Int: 3	Observation 2, Gunnery 1 (MLC)
Chr: 1	Linguistics 1 (English)
Soc: 5	Leadership 3

Warzuk is the High Martian subchief of the area in which Colorado Mining has its operations, an area constantly depleted of warriors and slaves by Overlord Kurge for his campaign against the rival kraags. The resulting frustration led to Warzuk's part in the plot. Warzuk is ambitious. He murdered the subchief before him and plans to murder Sharp, though he wants to keep Cole alive for future trade agreements. Warzuk hopes to challenge Kurge and believes that the Germans are the most direct way to securing superior off-world weapons.

Motives: Ambitious, ruthless.

Appearance: Warzuk is not old by High Martian standards, but sports an impressive mane. His stature is short for his race, but he more than makes up for that with his ability to fight. He wears his necklace of rank proudly at all times, and has a fair collection of weaponry about him, including a Martian great sword, a Winchester 86 Repeater and a Mauser light revolver.

EVERETT BARRISTER (TRAINED NPC)

Att.	Skills
Str: 2	Fisticuffs 1, Throwing 1
AgI: 2	Stealth 2, Marksmanship 1 (pistol)
End: 1	
Int: 5	Observation 4, Engineering 1 (structural engineering)
Chr: 4	Eloquence 4, Theatrics 2, Bargaining 4, Linguistics 1 (French)
Soc: 4	Riding 3 (horse), Leadership 2, Medicine 1

Barrister is the Colorado Mining representative sent to negotiate the strike. He is very talented and has a promising future. Barrister is a member of America's middle class and reflects an optimistic view about his country. He has a healthy regard for the British, though he won't admit it, and a great respect for French culture. He has been with the company two years, but already has the confidences of his superiors. Barrister fears that the strike will not be easily solved and that he will look like a fool. He will spend his time going over his notes.

Motives: Responsible, cautious, ambitious.

Appearance: Barrister dresses conservatively so as not to outshine his superiors. His hair is short and blond. He is 27 years old, but looks younger. He abstains from violence, but carries a heavy revolver in his briefcase just in case.

ROBERT SHARP (TRAINED NPC)

Att.	Skills
Str: 3	Fisticuffs 2, Throwing 1, Close Combat 2 (edged weapon)
AgI: 4	Stealth 3, Marksmanship 2 (pistol)
End: 2	Wilderness Travel 1 (mapping)
Int: 3	Observation 2, Engineering 3 (structural engineering)
Chr: 2	Leadership 2, Piloting (mole drill) 1
Soc: 4	Riding 3 (horse)

Sharp is the foreman of the Silvertap Lode—and the last person anyone in the Colorado Mining Company would think would betray them. Sharp's failed efforts to get rich have made him increasingly bitter over the years. He wrongly blames the world around him for failure that is due to his impatience and bad planning. Sharp will double-cross practically everyone in the valley, though he doesn't know how yet. It hasn't occurred to him that others may be planning to do him in. He spends most of his time day-dreaming about how he will spend his money.

Motives: Greedy, spendthrift.

Appearance: Bob Sharp is a tall man, with dark hair that is always tossed by the wind. His clothes are those of a common miner, and he would be hard to tell apart from the other miners were it not for his clipboard, which he hangs onto as a symbol of his authority. He has a rare Colt 1878 model Navy double-action revolver (treat as a heavy revolver) that is his pride and joy, but he is not above using it in a firefight.

his demise. Also visible (with appropriate lighting) is a trail of deep boot prints leading up to the cart, then back into the crosscut. They lead back and abruptly stop, apparently without a trace. It will take some prodding about and a difficult Observation roll to discover a series of handholds carved into the side of the mine where the prints leave off and an improvised ladder that leads to a loose piece of stone in the mine ceiling that can be pushed up, revealing a room.

This hidden area is actually a raise that was left when its silver gave out and was subsequently used by the miners as a place to hide contraband goods from the foreman. It contains an assortment of goodies, including two casks of water, a case of Jack Daniels' No. 7, four knives, a rifle, several cases of canned food and a sleeping miner. Once awakened, the man will be frantic, until he comes to the realization that the party will not harm him. His name is Willie Boggs.

THE STORY UNFOLDS

About this time last month, Willie says, he and the others were working the mine when the alarm whistle went off. Fearing a cave-in, the miners rushed to the surface, where they were surrounded by two dozen or more High Martians. Their foreman, Bob Sharp, and his men seemed at ease with the beasts, talking to them as if it were a big plan of some sort. Bob and the savages made the miners pack up their belongings and head for the bottom crosscut, recently dug with the company's new mole drill.

The workers did as they were forced and found that the crosscut led to a small valley filled with liftwood trees. The miners were given saws, shovels and other tools and told to harvest the mature trees. For weeks, they labored under the guns and pikes of their captors, until the miners tried to stage an unsuccessful and bloody revolt. In the ensuing confusion, Willie escaped into the mine and began the long and difficult climb up the main shaft. He reached the surface but found no way to escape, so he hid in the old raise, living off the canned goods and JD ever since.

Willie knows nothing about the strike, and it should be obvious that it was just a ruse concocted by Sharp to cover up what is really going on. What led Sharp to sell out his people is unknown, but Willie recalls seeing several German-speaking men about the grove and thinks they may be connected. At any rate, rumors have been circulating about a Zeppelin being en route to the site, rumors which could be true given the fact that several workers were made to clear a large landing area in the far corner of the grove.

Willie asks if the PCs have seen any High Martians in the mine, and is surprised that they did not. They had apparently sent one or two warriors to patrol the shaft every day, one of which ran into Willie and was subsequently dumped in the ore cart. Willie has the dagger and breech-loading rifle he took from the warrior, and will readily take them to lead the party to the grove.

The lowest crosscut extends only a few hundred feet, then ends in a large natural cavern. Immediately to the side of the opening is the steam-powered mole drill with "Colorado Mining Operations" stenciled on the side. Also present are the components to the elevator, as well as the elevator car itself. The cavern is close to a quarter mile in length, and its opening overlooks the liftwood grove. Below, a hundred or so miners can be seen cutting and hauling (well, maybe towing) liftwood logs, while 20 High Martian and human guards watch them from a distance. As Willie mentioned, there is a large patch of open ground in the north end of the valley.

FREEING THE MINERS

Freeing the miners will no doubt present problems. There are, however, several methods resourceful players might come up with.

- There are far more workers than guards, and if an armed party starts something, the miners might join in, and the cave entrance the PCs are in is a good vantage point from which to zero-in on the guards. Unfortunately, this is also a good way to get many of the miners needlessly killed.

- The miners are housed in a large corral-like pen, and Willie remembers the guards as being lazy and few in number at night. Darkness is only a few hours away, and the PCs could wait until then to slip in and release the miners quietly. Most of the guards would be sleeping, so the element of surprise would definitely work to the advantage of the PCs.

- Last, but by no means least, is the mole drill, sitting in the cave, fully functional. A surprise attack is out of the question, but the winds in the cave would hide the sound of the machine long enough for the players to get it into the grove. The mole is tough enough to withstand small arms fire, and has windows that would allow PCs to shoot back. A small amount of coal is in the machine—enough to move it for several miles.

The mole drill is the latest model from John Deere and Company and has a Reliability of 4. It otherwise corresponds to the mole drill listed on page 69 of the

Space: 1889 rulebook. Operating the mole requires some kind of steam vessel piloting experience, and is a Difficult task unless the PCs have toyed with a similar contraption in the past. Boggs has some experience with the machine.

No matter how things get started, the resulting confusion will allow the angry miners to rise up and destroy the guards. Sharp's men are more on the lookout for *numero uno* anyway, and will fall back shooting at the first sign that they might lose. The High Martian warriors will show their characteristic ferocity in battle, but are too few in number and too inexperienced with their modern weapons to turn the tide of the battle. For combat purposes, the human guards are Experienced troops armed with lever-action rifles, while the High Martians are Veterans. Half are armed with breech-loading rifles and half with pikes.

Sharp and Warzuk will offer a great deal of resistance, even if their men do not, but will flee as well when they see that all is lost. Cole will leave at the first sign of trouble to a prearranged landing spot and signal his Zeppelin. If the referee wishes, he could have one of the PCs in a position to pursue Sharp, Cole or Warzuk in a dramatic last fight, or have them escape entirely, no doubt to return later to stir up more trouble.

The Zeppelin will arrive 2D6 rounds after the fighting begins. It is well equipped, with five-barrel Nordenfelts on either side of the gondola and a rack of four bombs. After destroying everyone on the ground (except Cole and his henchmen, who will have left anyway), the pilot will set his airship down and deploy a squad of *Luftschifferabteilung* elites to clean up the survivors and load the liftwood. If the dirigible arrives after the battle is over, it will simply assume something went wrong and leave to pick Cole up at the prearranged spot.

If all goes well for the party, the kaiser's government will deny any involvement in the affair and make an extra effort to stay out of the Chryse area for some time. Kurge will get wind of Warzuk's attempted betrayal and begin yet another ruthless purge of his ranks, leaving the mine area free of High Martians for a good month or so. If the PCs do not nail Sharp, the man will no doubt show up at some later date to seek revenge on the people who spoiled his plans.

The party stands to make out all right, too. The colonel will pay the agreed-upon sum plus the bonus amount, and Barrister will have dropped the "unfriendly" act and will offer a small number of shares in his company to the group. These shares will net the party anywhere from £50 to £200 every quarter.

WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON

The foreman of the Silvertap Lode is an unsatisfied glory seeker. He came to Mars to seek his elusive fortune, only to fall onto bad luck and have to settle for a job with Colorado Mining. Bob performed his job with seeming eagerness, but inside he was ready to explode with anger and resentment. Naturally, he was attentive when a neatly dressed German agent came to speak to him about his future.

Subchief Warzuk was the other side of the figurative coin, frustrated by his King Kurge's constant demands on him to provide warriors and slaves for a meaningless and wasteful war. He had no slaves to work his groves anymore, and barely enough for his own chambers. All the while, the red men who encroached on his territory were getting stronger and stronger, even mining the metals he saw as his rightful property. The young subchief was so desperate that he even agreed to speak with the red man from Dioscuria when he came to request an audience.

In a tense, somewhat foolish, meeting, Cole brought Sharp and Warzuk together and proposed a plan to end their respective problems. Sharp would supply his miners as a work force to Warzuk's groves to harvest liftwood trees, and Warzuk would use his depleted forces to keep outsiders away until the harvest was complete. In return, Cole promised to pay an impressive amount of gold from his kaiser's vaults for the liftwood, gold the two bosses would split down the middle. To increase the richness of the deal, Warzuk and Sharp planned to sell the miners into slavery, not only to keep them quiet but to turn over even more *moola*.

SINGLE, DOUBLE AND TRIPLE CROSS

Each of the conspiring big shots intends to do in the other. Sharp plans to kill the High Martians, Germans and miners, and make off with his armed men and all the gold. He has not planned how this is to be carried out. Warzuk has similar plans, but will do in only Sharp and his men. The subchief has been given a quantity of weapons by the German, and wants to arrange future weapons-for-liftwood deals. With the miners, he has the slave force he needs to get things going again. Cole, as the mastermind behind the plot, has a surprise for both his "partners." The Zeppelin holds no gold—only machineguns, troops and bombs, which he will use to eradicate everyone so he can load up the liftwood logs his country so desperately desires. With such a success under his belt, Cole will have the prestige to climb even higher in the ranks of his kaiser's secret service.



FIELD AGENT WILHELM COLE (VETERAN NPC)

Att.	Skills
Str: 3	Fisticuffs 2, Throwing 1, Close Combat 4 (edged weapon)
Agl: 5	Stealth 4, Marksmanship 3 (pistol)
End: 3	Wilderness Travel 2 (foraging)
Int: 4	Observation 3, Engineering 3 (explosives)
Chr: 5	Eloquence 4, Theatrics 3
Soc: 4	Riding 3 (horse), Leadership 2, Linguistics 4 (English, Umbran, Dioscurian, Koline)

Wilhelm Cole is the gung-ho agent of the kaiser who came up with the scheme that enslaved the miners of the Silvertap Lode. In the end, he plans on killing everyone he has schemed with, all for the objective of bringing a shipment of liftwood to his country's enclave in Dioscuria.

Cole was born into an upper middle class family and knew he wanted to be a member of his country's elite almost from the time he could walk.

Toward this goal, he studied hard in school and joined the German Army as an officer, only to be drafted into the secret police soon after. This was a dream come true for Cole, as he finally felt he was rising to a higher social position.

However, his first taste of success only served to make him hungry for more.

Now posted to Mars, Cole sees unbounded opportunity for advancement, and will eliminate anyone—even his fellow countrymen—if they stand in his way.

Motives: Driven, ruthless.

Appearance: Cole even looks the part of a field agent. His field suit is always pressed and white, his hair trimmed, and his boots shined.

Cole has a fair amount of firepower—including a Zeppelin—available for this mission, and he carries a heavy multibarrel pistol and a throwing knife on his person at all times. Ω

*Thus ends the three-part adventure, "Thymiamata: 1889." For additional information, refer to the first two segments of this exciting series in **Challenge 49** and **Challenge 50**.*

Operation Back Door

Episode 3: Saboteurs and Skullduggery

By Charles E. Gannon

After a journey through unknown space, the mission team of Operation Back Door arrived in the home system of the Ylii. There they encountered a special envoy named Vishzuss'zruhna'zhii (nicknamed Vish), a Ylii who established communication with the group and then escorted them to an important meeting with Ylii leaders.

After some discussion, the Ylii decided they wanted to learn more about the humans and were interested in allying with them against a mutual foe—the Kafers. The PCs must return home with this information (and various other data they have gathered), and deliver a Ylii envoy safely to Earth. Vish was selected as this envoy.

This third episode of "Operation Back Door" moves away from exploration and first contact as the primary thrust and drama of the adventure. Instead, detective work and some fierce encounters with the minions of the treacherous Tricolor organization are all but unavoidable.

DISASTERS AND DOUBLE CROSSES

Where: Deep space, between systems DM-4 4225 and DM+5 3409.

What: Return voyage with envoy is sabotaged by Dumaine.

After departing Ssuushni'a with Vish on board, the mission team members should head back to human space via Back Door with all possible speed. The Ylii leaders will be glad to help them in this regard by providing the group with a full load of fuel.

All will proceed routinely as the characters retrace their steps through Back Door, L 989-20, and DM-4 4225. Once in orbit around Ploughshare, the naval and AIA staffs will quickly debrief the group members, make duplicates of all data, refuel the ship (the *Cat's Feet*), and send them out for a rendezvous with the unmarked *Meta*-class freighter that serves as this system's stutterwarp tug. The PCs will also be told to keep the presence of Vish a secret and to continue on to system DM+5 3409. However, they are instructed to wait at the edge of the system

when they arrive there, rather than continuing in toward the main world of Erie.

Upon rendezvous with the silent *Meta*-class behemoth, the characters' ship will be maneuvered into a huge modular cargo container. This will be handled by the freighter's remote manipulator craft (otherwise known as grabbers). Practiced naval eyes will realize that this outsized-container is actually the size of nine standard-sized modular freight containers, producing a contiguous cargo volume of nearly 6700 cubic meters. The *Cat's Feet* is maneuvered into a berthing cradle, and the module is sealed up.

As was the case when the group was ferried out of system DM+5 3409 by the unmarked *Hudson*-class freighter (**Challenge 49**), communication with the crew of the tug is minimal and restricted to audio only. After about two days of tug operations, the characters' ship will be offloaded by the now-familiar grabbers and sent on its way with terse wishes of good luck. Ironically, this is precisely where luck will take a turn for the worse.

With only one day to go to the DM+5 3409 system, any players on-duty at 1800 hours will be stunned out of their stargazing reverie by the shrill klaxon that announces emergency decompression. Simultaneously, they will feel the hull jar under the force of a muffled explosion from the aft section of the *Cat's Feet*.

The referee should not give the players a lot of time to think about what they're going to do next. Explosive decompression is exactly that—explosive. If your players seem to be unsure of what to do, the NPCs will provide excellent examples as they scramble madly for p-suits (or helmets, if they're already in suits). The next action will be to connect the suits' external c-clips to any sturdy handhold; explosive decompression will suck unsecured individuals out into space, possibly ripping their suits as they carom off bulkheads and through doorways.

All told, these precautions—punctuated by the savage pneumatic hiss of pressure-tight bulkheads sealing automatically—will take only 10-15 seconds. And those sec-

onds *should* feel like forever. Once everyone is secured and braced for the worst, they can start to think about what comes next: exploring the ship for damage and the source of whatever disaster has befallen them. The answer will be fairly quick in coming.

The characters will encounter Dumaine and the Ylii back near the engineering section. The yellow-and-black-striped emergency bulkhead is down, and the flashing red light next to it indicates that at least part of the engineering section beyond is in full vacuum. A sullen and uncommunicative Dumaine provides little help in the efforts to determine if Hannah—who was on duty in engineering at the time—is still alive or not. The players will have to use the next set of bulkheads to create a temporary airlock, enter engineering, and search for her in their p-suits as they wade through the wreckage of the stutterwarp drive.

Hannah is indeed alive: She was tending the power plant—which is in a separate, pressure-tight area—at the time of the disaster. However, her p-suit had been left in the same compartment as the stutterwarp drive and is now—undoubtedly—a piece of interstellar debris. She'll need someone to bring her a spare p-suit in order for her to move back to the main section of the ship.

However, it turns out that the stutterwarp drive wasn't the only thing lost; Morgan Lindstrom is dead. And according to Dumaine, that's just as well—for clearly, Lindstrom was a traitor. Dumaine will rouse out of his shock long enough to describe the events leading up to the disaster.

According to Dumaine, he and Vish were talking about human culture, and Dumaine suggested that Vish might learn the most by hearing *two* human perspectives. Dumaine paged Lindstrom, who had volunteered some of his free time to help Hannah check some power plant circuitry. The French xenosapientologist invited the American to join the discussion. Lindstrom answered that he'd be delighted and would head forward in a minute.

A few moments later, Dumaine suggested that he and Vish might as well go aft and meet Morgan in engineering; the Ylii had not spent much time looking over the human stutterwarp technology yet. Arriving at engineering, Dumaine was stunned to find Lindstrom fiddling around with what looked like a bomb near the stutterwarp unit. Dumaine told him to put it down. Lindstrom turned, smiled, and told Dumaine that he was about to die. Then Lindstrom focused his attention on the bomb once again.

Dumaine hit the emergency override and decompressed the engineering section by keying in the command to open the aft airlock. Dumaine pulled Vish back beyond the safety bulkhead that came slamming down to shut out the vacuum. But the sudden violence of the explosive decompres-

sion apparently caused the bomb to detonate—or Morgan managed to carry out his suicide attack before dying.

If questioned, Vish will corroborate Dumaine's story. However, if pressed for details, he will express some confusion regarding some of the final interactions between Dumaine and Lindstrom. As a non-human who's only been exposed to these perplexing, small-eyed sophonts for about a week, Vish still has huge gaps when it comes to understanding human body-language and vernacular.

Vish will reveal that to him, Lindstrom seemed very calm when they found him and was not at all surprised at being discovered. Lindstrom *did smile*—and humans do seem to smile for all sorts of contradictory reasons—but Vish himself did not sense any psychological imbalance or extreme emotion behind it—nothing that suggested impending suicide. Vish describes the smile as—maybe—one of satisfaction? It was a very unusual expression. Lastly, Vish (being so focused on human language these days) remembers Lindstrom's last words precisely. They might have been a threat on Dumaine's life, but Vish pleads ignorance of the use of colloquialisms: Morgan's last words were: "Dumaine, you're finished."

A clever player may begin to wonder if Morgan was a saboteur or was in fact attempting to undo someone else's act of treachery. His last words could be interpreted to mean that the bomb was proof-positive of Dumaine's treachery, and, hence, that the Frenchman "was finished." Characters with skills in Interviewing and Psychology may have some luck in confronting Dumaine, but not much; Dumaine's "stunned" state seems to predispose him towards extreme taciturnity when his actions or motives are questioned. However, a very high success result may lead a skilled observer to wonder if the post-crisis shock is not in fact a sham.

At any rate, the characters have more immediate problems on their hands, such as how to make repairs, since several key components for the stutterwarp drive have been wrecked. That will mean searching for replacements in the stores and seeing if the system has enough integrity remaining to hold up under jury-rigged operating conditions.

Suggestions to the Referee

Dumaine is (of course) the saboteur, not Morgan. As has been established in the previous episodes, Dumaine has been subtly working to set the stage for this single, potent act of treachery. And he has managed to make it look like Lindstrom was responsible—or at least make the other team members unsure.

With Vish on board, Dumaine had what he and his parent organization, Tricolor, always

wanted—a live Ylii. However, their plans are a little different than those held by the nations of the Alderhorst Alliance. Consequently, they couldn't allow Vish to remain in the custody of those nations.

Dumaine's plan was simple and elegant. In the initial transit out to Back Door, he sabotaged the navigational sequencer. Of course, during the recent return to DM-4 4225, the combined naval forces at that site now have record of this "system failure," since they have copies of the *Cat's Feet's* log.

Given the established history of navigational system failure that is logged against the *Cat's Feet*, there would be a logical explanation in the event that the ship never made it all the way to the AIA field headquarters in system DM+5 3409—a second sequencer failure.

So Dumaine had to find a way to make sure that *Cat's Feet* never finished its journey. He did this by planting a bomb near the stutterwarp drive while Lindstrom was working with Hannah on the power plant. Then Dumaine came back to strike up a conversation with Vish, asked Morgan to join them, and suggested that they go look for the American a moment later.

Dumaine knew that Lindstrom's trained AIA eye would spot the bomb and that he would immediately stop to investigate. Dumaine had a motion sensor imbedded in the bomb; when Lindstrom began to handle it, a control element in Dumaine's wrist-watch beeped twice.

In this way, Dumaine was able to time it so that when he and Vish (the only person on the *Cat's Feet* who is clearly above suspicion) arrived in engineering, they "discovered" Lindstrom manipulating the bomb. Counting on Vish's imperfect knowledge of human behavior, Dumaine played out the scene by "making the decision" to get rid of Morgan and the bomb via emergency decompression. However, the bomb's detonator was radio-linked to a command button on Dumaine's chronometer/calculator, so Dumaine was able to make sure the bomb detonated as planned, rather than getting sucked out into space. As Dumaine expected, Vish was so stunned at the unexpected turn of events—and the speed at which they moved—that the Ylii was not able to understand the finer nuances of what he saw transpire.

WITH FRIENDS LIKE THESE

Where: Deep space, just beyond Oort cloud of DM+5 3409.

What: A "pirate attack."

While characters with any skill in space drives, electronics and mechanical matters are trying to cobble together a quick fix for the stutterwarp drive (best estimates suggest that it will require as much as three days' work), the remaining team members

2300AD

will probably take turns sending out distress calls and trying to overcome feelings of terror and loss.

A day into the repair process, the person on communications duty will be rewarded with a response. A private research vessel named the *Questor* has picked up the distress call while conducting some astrophysical surveys out beyond system DM+5 3409's Oort cloud. Only moments after the characters receive the incoming message announcing their imminent salvation, the ship—a *Hamid*-class surveyor—will show up on sensors.

The *Questor* will move quickly into a boarding position. Any attempts to communicate with it will seem to be garbled by some sort of interference. If they are extremely suspicious, the PCs may try to reject or avoid attempts by the crew of the *Questor* to sync up a boarding tube to the airlock of the *Cat's Feet*. Seeing this, Dumaine will insist that the characters have become mad or paranoid. He will then surreptitiously sneak away to engineering to override whatever the PCs are doing to prevent the boarding. If Dumaine has been imprisoned, the boarding party from the *Questor* will use a breaching charge to enter engineering and seize control of the ship.

The PCs will quickly realize that the *Questor* boarders are not here to conduct a rescue. Eight large, p-suited individuals come storming onto the *Cat's Feet*. Four are carrying Brandt Audionique AS-3 stun pistols, and right behind them are another four with Mueller-Rivera F-19 lasers. This squad will sweep through the *Cat's Feet*, stunning everyone (except the Ylii). The lasers will only be used as a last resort in order to bring down any well-armed characters who might have holed-up in a near-impregnable defensive position (several such exist in the engineering section). The boarders are Veteran and Experienced NPCs.

The outcome of this sudden "pirate attack" should be pretty inevitable; the PCs will be overcome (most likely stunned) and left unconscious. Even if the first eight boarders can be defeated (good luck), another eight (similarly armed) are ready to finish the job.

Suggestions to the Referee

The crew of *Questor* is actually composed of agents of Tricolor, operating a vessel acquired through the grey market connections of (ironically) AmeriCo. The crewmembers have been waiting at one light-day's range from this rendezvous point

BEHIND THE BACK DOOR

The discovery of BD-111 094307 (Back Door) provided an accessway to the Kafers' rear flank. Also, this humble brown dwarf catalyzed the formation of an even greater military advantage—international cooperation. However, France, as world leader, would find its influence drastically reduced if that were achieved.

The seeds of strong international cooperation had been planted in July 2301. Joint victories in the Vogelheim system (at Alderhorst) and at Eta Bootis (the ambush at Laodemon and other engagements) created a sense of unity between American, German and Australian units. Their key role in those combats and their willingness to work together stood in sharp contrast to the aloof absolutism of the French commanders.

Consequently, Operation Back Door became a secret skirmishing ground for rivalry between French supremacists and the nations of the Alderhorst Alliance.

HIDDEN AGENDAS

Prior to the Kafer conflict, many nations—and colonies—grew tired of the French elitism. This hauteur became laughable as performance in the Kafer conflict suggested that France had become incapable of prosecuting a war with vigor. The American and German publics had particularly strong feelings. Germany had spent several centuries under the watchful eyes from across the Rhine. The proud nationalism that characterizes the German nation did not always suffer this easily or with good grace. The Germans are not interested in vengeance, but want to take their "rightful place" as a highly influential nation.

After the Twilight War, America relapsed into partial isolationism, emerging cautiously back into the family of nations. By sheer dint of its size, resources and geographical location, it quickly regained its status as a world power, but America was no longer interested in being a global policeman. The French return to imperialism marked the beginning of an unconscious counterswing in American attitudes. The traditional American dislike of autocracies (or monarchies) began to resurface in reaction to the resurgent French nationalism. There was an increased emphasis on military spending, colonization efforts and industrial capacity. Recent events have made Americans feel that the French no longer have any right to a position of international preeminence—if they ever did. And if no one else is going to—or is able to—challenge the French leadership, then America will. Few Americans want to their nation to usurp France's role; they just want to establish true equality between the nations of the Earth (and beyond).

Consequently, Operation Back Door became more than just a prudent strategic move; it evolved into an attempt to wrest control over the conduct of the war out of French hands. If it works, America, Germany, and (by proxy) Australia will have driven home their unspoken point that France is unfit to lead and that military matters should be turned over to individuals and nations who move decisively and with determination.

for weeks. A distress signal from the *Cat's Feet* meant that Dumaine had managed to acquire a live sample of the mystery race that was helping the Kafers. Using a scientific cover identity (the *Questor*), the ship was to recover Dumaine and the alien (without taking the risk of even stunning the alien). The remainder of the crew of the *Cat's Feet* was to be left alive if possible, and minimum damage was to be inflicted to the ship during the boarding action.

The reason for this very clean boarding approach is to provide a reasonable explanation for any forensics experts who might one day stumble across the wreck of the *Cat's Feet*. Whatever evidence of gunfire may be present, the cause of death will be anoxia, since the unconscious players are being left behind to die. Of course, the *Questor's* ruthless crewmembers ensure this by disabling a key component of the power plant and removing the spares from

the ship's stores. They also remove the spares (and repairs) to the stutterwarp drive. Then they leave the ship—and its crew—to its fate, drifting ever further away from frequented space lanes.

A SIGNAL FLARE AND A MESSAGE IN A BOTTLE

Where: Deep space, just beyond Oort cloud of DM+5 3409.

What: An attempt to attract rescuers.

When the characters awaken, they will discover that Dumaine and Vish are gone. They will also discover that now both the stutterwarp drive and the power plant are inoperative (and irreparable). Battery power can supply them with perhaps one day of air at normal consumption rates. A decision to thin the atmosphere will extend the supply to 2.5 days. The radios still work, but by the time the message travels even the slight fraction of the light-year that still separates

Cat's Feet from system DM+5 3409, the characters will be long dead. There would seem to be no options other than crossed fingers—until one of the characters remembers the SIM-14 missiles that are stored in the launching bay of the *Cat's Feet*. With the ship's communicators intact, it is still possible to launch and control the missiles. The only limiting factor is range, for as the missile goes beyond a distance of one light-minute, response time will be impractically slow.

However, if the players pursue this idea, they should quickly come to realize that a preplotted flight trajectory could be programmed into a missile's on-board navigation systems. In the final analysis, a missile could be programmed to follow a course that would take it over/under the Oort cloud debris and into the DM+5 3409 system. But would it be seen? And how would rescuers know how to find the *Cat's Feet* after the missile had drawn their attention?

Answer: Rigging the missile to detonate at a predetermined point on its flight. Such a detonation is sure to show up on the ever-watchful naval sensors. After attracting some considerable attention, a second missile could follow, travelling more slowly and coming to a dead stop a few million kilometers away from the coordinates of the first missile's detonation. This second missile's warhead could be replaced with a data tape describing the position and status of the *Cat's Feet*—as well as the apparent treachery that led to its condition.

Preparing the missiles for this mission will take about a day, as will the computation and programming of an optimal trajectory for the missiles. The referee should construct a number of task rolls and should remember that one missile-disabling mishap is permissible since the players have three missiles available. However, after 1.5 days in thin atmosphere, characters may start suffering from drowsiness, shortness of breath, short-term memory loss, and other anoxic symptoms that will make their last hours a dim memory at best.

Suggestions to the Referee

The flare-and-message plan will work, attracting the attention of numerous naval elements in well-patrolled DM+5 3409. Shamus Larkin (AIA deputy director in charge of security for Operation Back Door) already knows that the mission team is overdue for arrival, given messages that have been received from DM-4 4225 regarding their date and time of departure. Accordingly, it will be a vessel from the AIA headquarters in system DM+5 3409 that finds the *Cat's Feet* and rescues the dazed, semiconscious survivors. The characters will not remember their rescue due to their oxygen-deprived state. Consequently, this scene should end rather abruptly. No sud-

den blackness or unconsciousness, but rather a sudden entry into the next scene—thereby producing the sense of lost memory without the recollection of losing consciousness.

WHEELS WITHIN WHEELS

Where: American Intelligence Agency safehouse, Erie, mainworld of system DM +5 3409.

What: Larkin reveals the reasons behind Dumaine's treachery.

The next thing the players know, they are sitting half-propped up in hospital beds in a windowless medical center. In the room with them is Shamus Larkin, whom they have not seen since he hired them for this mission many weeks ago on Abernathy, King's most-developed moon.

It is highly likely that the players will be filled with questions—and possibly, anger—for Larkin. The deputy director expects this and will endure with patience and no small measure of empathy. When they're done venting and/or barraging him with queries, Larkin will explain that—unfortunately—Operation Back Door was never just a military operation to try to get an advantage on the Kafers. It was a political operation as well—a policy offensive against what many nations (particularly Germany, America, and Australia) considered to be French mis-

management of the Kafer conflict.

Apparently, however, some Frenchmen decided to take countermeasures into their own hands. Although Larkin does not have all the details, he is sure that Dumaine and the crew of the *Questor* did not act alone. Quite the contrary—Dumaine did not become a part of the mission team for Operation Back Door by applying for the job. Rather, he was recommended for the job by some very high-placed French officials. Larkin feels sure that somewhere in the French government there must ultranationalists who are behind the plot to ruin Operation Back Door—or worse yet, to pervert it into something of their own design.

This is a natural introduction to Larkin's explanation of the events and attitudes that give Operation Back Door its tremendous political importance. The referee may photocopy the Behind the Back Door sidebar and distribute it to the players; this will approximate the explanation given by Larkin. (See the sidebar on page 38.)

After his explanation of the frictions between the Alderhorst Alliance and the Empire, Larkin will try to explain the American Intelligence Agency's role in the operation. Even before Operation Back Door was finalized, the AIA had been the secure channel that was entrusted with all the facts, including the existence of the mystery race and the discovery of Back Door. It was logical to make AIA the operation's watchdog; that way, no new agency or bureau had to be involved and become a potential source of information leaks.

Morgan Lindstrom was assigned to the mission team as an insurance against poor judgments that could have threatened the entire mission. However, neither he nor anyone at the AIA suspected that there was a traitor in the mission team. Dumaine had come highly recommended from Paris, the IEX and the DGSE (the French intelligence service).

But the most disturbing fact is not that a French supremacist group has entwined itself into and around the vital organs of the empire's government. The critical realization is that these fanatics must also have a mole in the AIA—how else would Dumaine have known that Morgan was an AIA agent? And he clearly had that knowledge from the very beginning. Upon reconstructing Dumaine's subtle combination of ploys and strategies—starting with his disabling of the navigational sequencer—he always had things rigged so that if his handiwork was discovered, it was Morgan who would bear the brunt of any suspicion.

Clearly, this gives Larkin a huge problem; he can only be sure that a few people in his local headquarters are loyal—those who were unaware of Morgan's inclusion on the mission team and those who never had any means of communicating that knowledge

2300AD

(on deep-space patrol during the weeks it would have had to have been relayed, etc.). Following this reasoning, Larkin cannot trust any other AIA agents; the leak could have occurred anywhere between DM+5 3409 and Earth. Consequently, Larkin can't mount an internal investigation without tipping his hand to the French ultranationalists.

This deductive domino theory all boils down to one key certainty: The members of the conspiracy will know they have been found out the moment Larkin tries to open an investigation. And if Vish is to be saved—and relations with the Ylii to be kept amicable—the conspirators must not know that they *have* been found out. The ultranationalists must be taken by surprise, or Vish may disappear forever; he is the most incriminating evidence against them. *But*—explains Larkin with a sheepish look at the characters—he can't use any of his agents to trace Dumaine and retrieve Vish; he needs every agent he can trust out here near Back Door.

Larkin concludes with the inevitable statement: The only people who can put an end to this conspiracy are the characters. As far as anyone knows, they are all dead. Their retinal scans will be removed from data banks, as will their fingerprints. Larkin does not have to report their movements, and no one will be out looking for them. Additionally, their personal knowledge of Vish means that he is likely to trust them implicitly if they come to rescue him and require his unquestioning cooperation. The only character who is not suitable for this rescue mission is Helen Asweath; her newsworthy discoveries have made her too widely recognized. Larkin will offer the other characters another Lv10,000 each, but if the interaction between Vish and the PCs has been nurtured properly, they should be eager to get on with his rescue, regardless of reward.

Larkin can make their mission easier in a number of ways. First, he can issue them a limited number of helpful tools—including one Rottman LK-1 laser and two M-2 assault rifles. He can also provide them with one S&W ISP 106 and inertial armor vest per person. Second, he can issue them permits to transport all the weapons, including permission to carry the S&W ISP 106s. He can also arrange for an unlimited travel account with an international travel reservations agency and set up a Lv10,000 line of credit for each character with Financia, AG, an international banking cartel with a major outlet in Libreville. Last, he will provide them with new identities as security consultants

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While the PCs are off on their mission, Larkin will repair their ship, and—unknownst to the players—will also send two of his men and two “blind” (or unknowing) couriers to the FBI with all the information he has on the French ultranationalist conspiracy. As the internal affairs arm of the AIA, the FBI has had no reason to even be aware of the details of Operation Back Door and, therefore, is certainly *not* where the French mole resides. Consequently, the FBI could mount an operation against the conspirators without tipping off the mole. But this will take more time, since such an action will require unusual double-blind security precautions.

Larkin can offer the PCs one piece of advice—go see a gentleman living in Lubeck, Germany under the name of Herman Untener. The deputy director indicates that the characters should tell Untener how they know Larkin, answer *all* his questions with complete honesty, then ask his advice about what to do next—he has ears in the highest offices of the French government and may have heard rumors of the ultranationalist group.

Suggestions to the Referee

This is one of the best places for a referee to expand this adventure into a full-blown campaign. The players will have to travel to Earth, with occasional travel delays as they

wait out the period between their arrival and the next appropriate departure. During such times, they may decide to explore the planet they're on. Regardless of the plenitude—or lack—of adventures during the trip *coreward*, the PCs will arrive at Earth and be processed through the OQC clearance facility.

EARTHFALL

Where: Libreville, Gabon, Earth.

What: The group runs into hirelings of Tricolor.

After processing through OQC, the characters will ride the Beanstalk down to Libreville in the African nation of Gabon. It will take them several hours to arrange for travel to Lubeck, get their luggage and catch a quick meal. About an hour before they are due to depart, however, they will be attacked by a half dozen black-clothed gang members. These people will all be somewhat smallish, and armed with a melange of old weapons, including Wu-Beijing T-49 assault rifles, Arno 5-15 pistols, and an odd assortment of melee weapons.

The attack will take place when the characters move into a more deserted area, and the attackers will flee as soon as they find that they cannot immediately overwhelm the group. If the PCs stay at the scene of the attack for any reason (attempt to question any wounded attackers, etc.), they are likely to be caught by the police, who will delay them several days while questioning them

and confirming their story of self-defense.

Although the PCs may not be aware of it, this is not a random attack. The only way they can confirm this, however, is by attempting to discover who their black-pajama-clothed assailants were. This will require a delay of travel plans as the characters spend an evening in the Libreville slum area of Mudville. Here—after negotiating with a number of different gang members, snitches, and low-lives—they can learn that they were assaulted by one of the platoons of a gang called the Corpsmen. Each platoon is a subgang of sorts that adopts the dress characteristics of the uniform

of a given historic army. The black-clothed individuals are from the Charlie Platoon—patterned after the Viet Cong of the late 20th century.

It will take a little more work to determine that this wasn't just a random assault. Eventually, the group may be able to learn that there has been a bounty on their heads since early December 2302. Evidently, photo IDs of the characters were circulated around that part of the Libreville underworld that partakes in bounty huntings and contract killings. The pay advertised was pretty good, but the job details were sketchy. One gang member contacted will comment that he had gone to look into the job himself back around Christmas but that all the negotiations had been by phone, and the details on the targets and their location had been real slim—almost like the hiring party wasn't sure the marks were even in Libreville. He, like most others, had steered clear of the job—too many loose ends mean too many surprises later on.

No one is surprised to hear, however, that the Charlie Platoon was interested in the job and still on the lookout for the group. The Charlie Platoon has a reputation as a cash-poor operation that's getting real close to extinction: Some snitches estimate that as few as 12 members are left. Consequently, they're desperate enough to try anything. The good news is that the Charlies probably won't notify the moneymen behind the contract since they don't have any bodies to deliver.

In fact, this assessment is correct. Tricolor distributed the fliers more as precautionary flypaper than anything else, not expecting the characters to survive Dumaine's eventual treachery and return to earth. However, just in case the characters *did* manage to survive the mission somehow, and Tricolor did not learn about it, then they might hit this inexpensive tripwire alarm that had been left strung across the bottom of the Beanstalk.

If the PCs are foolish enough to try to stay in Libreville and follow the gang (or worse yet, try to locate the Tricolor moneymen), they will attract all the wrong sorts of attention—more gangs are going to remember the contract and come gunning for them. Tricolor is bound to get wind sooner or later and add its own considerable expertise to the general hunt. However, if the PCs take the next plane to Lubeck (or a reasonable connection), they will dodge all these life-threatening little hassles. ☺

Don't miss the final episode of "Operation Back Door," "The Tricolor Conspiracy," in Challenge 52. Uncover the Tricolor plot and return to Ssuushni'a, where your expertise and naval might is likely to be in high demand—the Kafers are on the move. For background information on this adventure, see Challenge 49 and 50.

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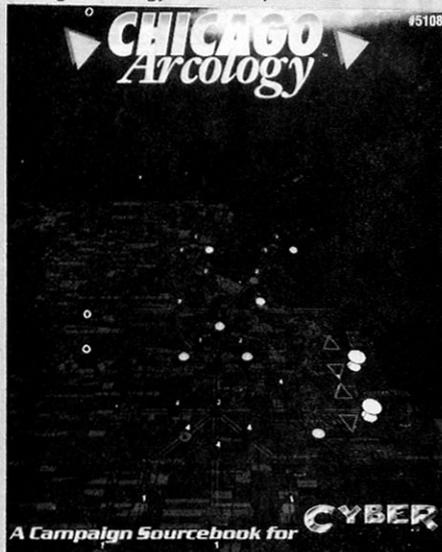


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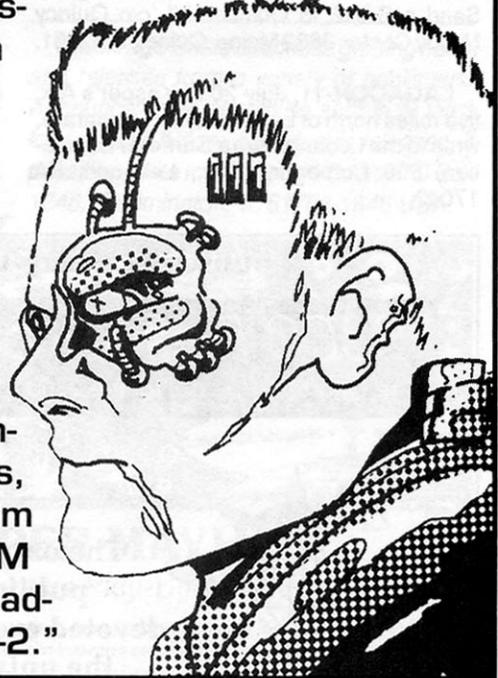


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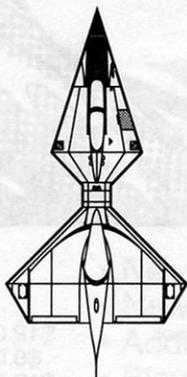
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By James L. Cambias

Damsel in Distress



It was a normal evening in the Razor Edge Club. Trog and Wolfboy were sucking down brewpaks and trying to outbelch each other; Alisande and Three Feathers were acting like they didn't know these two grunges; and I was scoping the crowd, hoping something interesting would happen.

Then this girl comes over, looking nervous. An Elf girl, dressed in ragged street leathers, with an elaborate makeup job streaked by tears. "I...I need some help. I don't know where to go."

"Through the door over there marked 'Ladies,'" Trog snickers. What a wit. Alisande gives him a look that could kill an unprotected human at 50 meters. Fortunately for Trog, he's too crude to notice.

"What's the matter?" Three Feathers turns on all his "noble brave" charm, radiating concern.

"My sister Meris. She's disappeared; I think they're holding her prisoner."

"Who's holding her?"

The Elf girl looks around us, suddenly afraid. "I can't talk here—they might be listening. Can we go someplace else?"

"Stop playing around, sweetears. What's the biz?" Trust Wolfboy to exhibit all the finer aspects of human nature.

"Please...I can pay you money; but you've got to help me find my sister. The DNX Corporation is hiding her somewhere, and I can't get in touch with her."

"Let's go someplace and talk this over," says Alisande. I thought a minute, then got up to follow. It's not often a fellow in my line of work gets the chance to rescue a damsel in distress....

The players are approached by Dairuna Cormac, a young Elf woman who is tearful and desperate: Her older sister, Meris, has disappeared. According to Dairuna, Meris worked for a large nanotechnology corp called DNX, which has facilities in Seattle. She was thinking about quitting DNX before she vanished, and Dairuna is afraid that her sister has been kidnapped and brainwashed by her employers to prevent her from defecting with some of their research secrets. If any mage or shaman character attempts to read Dairuna's thoughts by magic, she will resist, but her surface thoughts, at least, agree with her story: "I've got to get someone to help me get Meris away from DNX."

REFEREE

Dairuna is indeed trying to get her sister Meris away from DNX. The only problem is that Meris is quite happy as a researcher for DNX and has no desire to leave. Dairuna is planning to kidnap Meris and hand her over to Small Wonders A.G., a rival nanotech firm. She wants the players to do the dirty work of physically snatching Meris, then Dairuna and the Small Wonders security force will take Meris from the players, leaving them to deal with DNX and the law.

A LITTLE RESEARCH

If the characters investigate DNX, they may learn some interesting things. It is generally known that DNX is one of the corps on the cutting edge of nanotechnology—building microscopic machinery with a wide range of applications in medicine, microelectronics and chemicals. The company is owned by Doshinzu, a Japanese biomedical company, in partnership with a consortium of Texan petrobarons. Meris Cormac is listed as an employee of DNX, and the company will release the information that she is on temporary transfer to the company's research center in California. All communications with her must be through the DNX internal mail system. Any other direct inquiries about Meris will be answered with a chilly, "I'm sorry, that information is currently unavailable."

A check on Dairuna Cormac will confirm that she is who she says she is, but will turn up a few noteworthy facts: She has been jailed once in the CAS for credit fraud and has several times been arrested, but not convicted, in connection with thefts and assaults. Dairuna won't deny any of this, though she claims that the credit fraud charge was a frame-up by an unfriendly police chief in North Carolina. She admits that she likes to live on the edge, but don't all shadowrunners?

Meris' Apartment: Meris has an apartment near the DNX research center. Dairuna

has a key and can let the players in if they want to snoop around. It is small but well furnished; Meris is obviously doing quite well financially. There are some holos of her family, showing Meris and her sister. A very careful search will turn up a letter from Meris to Dairuna in the trash, saying that she cannot discuss her work and will not lend Dairuna any more money. Meris' clothes and personal computer are missing, the phone has been shut off, and her cat is gone.

DNX RESEARCH CENTER

The DNX research complex is located near the town of Downieville, California, in the northern Sierra Nevada mountains. The facility is in isolated mountain country and is surrounded by a large wooded area. The perimeter is patrolled by guards and is monitored by cameras along the fence. The fence itself is six meters high and is equipped with sensors to detect anyone cutting the wire. Infrared beams along the top of the fence will detect anyone climbing over. Simple Stealth will not be enough to sneak into the base; the players will need magical or cybernetic help. Within the boundary are several buildings—labs, administration, and housing.

Administration: This rather small building holds the business offices for the research center and the director's suite. Because all really sensitive data is in the base's computer system, the physical security on this building is rather light—thumbprint locks on the doors and sonic motion detectors inside. The director's terminal links directly to the CPU of the base computer but requires a retina print to use.

Security: This blockhouse-like structure holds the barracks for the base guard force, the control room for all security systems, a small arsenal, and the center's computer in a hardened subbasement. Retina prints are required to enter the building, and personnel must be visually identified via vidscreen before passing the inner armored doors. Because there is only one way in and out, the security force inside can be pinned down by a few adversaries with automatic weapons covering the door.

Residential Units: These are small bungalows scattered through a pleasant wooded area. The director's unit is the largest, while the others range down in size and comfort with the importance of the residents. The low-level staff share multi-occupant units. These houses have door locks using ordinary magnetic keys, but many residents leave their doors and windows open. Each home has a terminal linked to the base computer.

Staff Center: This large building holds the dining hall, gymnasium, laundry, a small commissary shop, and a bar. The building closes at midnight, except on special occa-



sions. The commissary and the bar have computer terminals linked into the accounting system.

Labs: The three lab buildings are the heart of the facility. They have retina-print locks to keep out intruders, and individual labs have thumbprint locks keyed to their users. Each laboratory has its own computer terminal. A few dedicated researchers can be found working at any hour of the night.

DECKING INTO THE SYSTEM

The base's computer system is large and powerful, and includes many security functions and routines. If none of the players is a competent decker, Dairuna will suggest hiring one.

The computer is linked into the California Free State net, but the countermeasures preventing illegal access from that direction are fairly strong. Access from the internal terminals is enormously easier. Several datastores or nodes shown on the diagram may be of interest to shadowrunners.

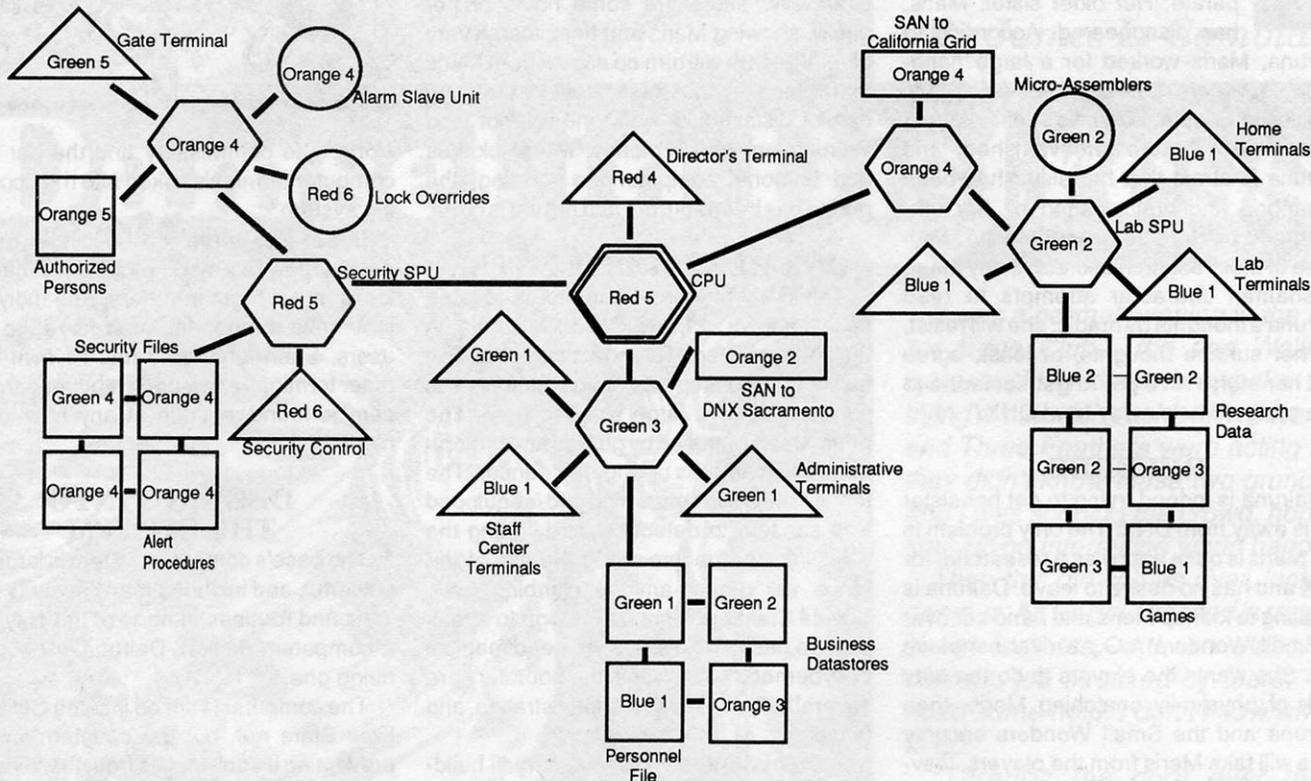
Personnel Files: The computer lists Meris Cormac as being resident in Housing Unit 26; she has level 9 clearance (this is very high). It also gives the names of all the researchers and staff at the center. There is nothing special listed about Meris.

Security Files: There are several security files of note. The Authorized Persons file lists everyone allowed into the complex; this includes the current staff and a number of high-level DNX executives. The Alert Procedures datastore describes how the guards are deployed in the event of a security breach. The Lock Override slave node can override the retina locks on all buildings and the main gate. The Alarm slave node can activate or shut down all the alarm systems.

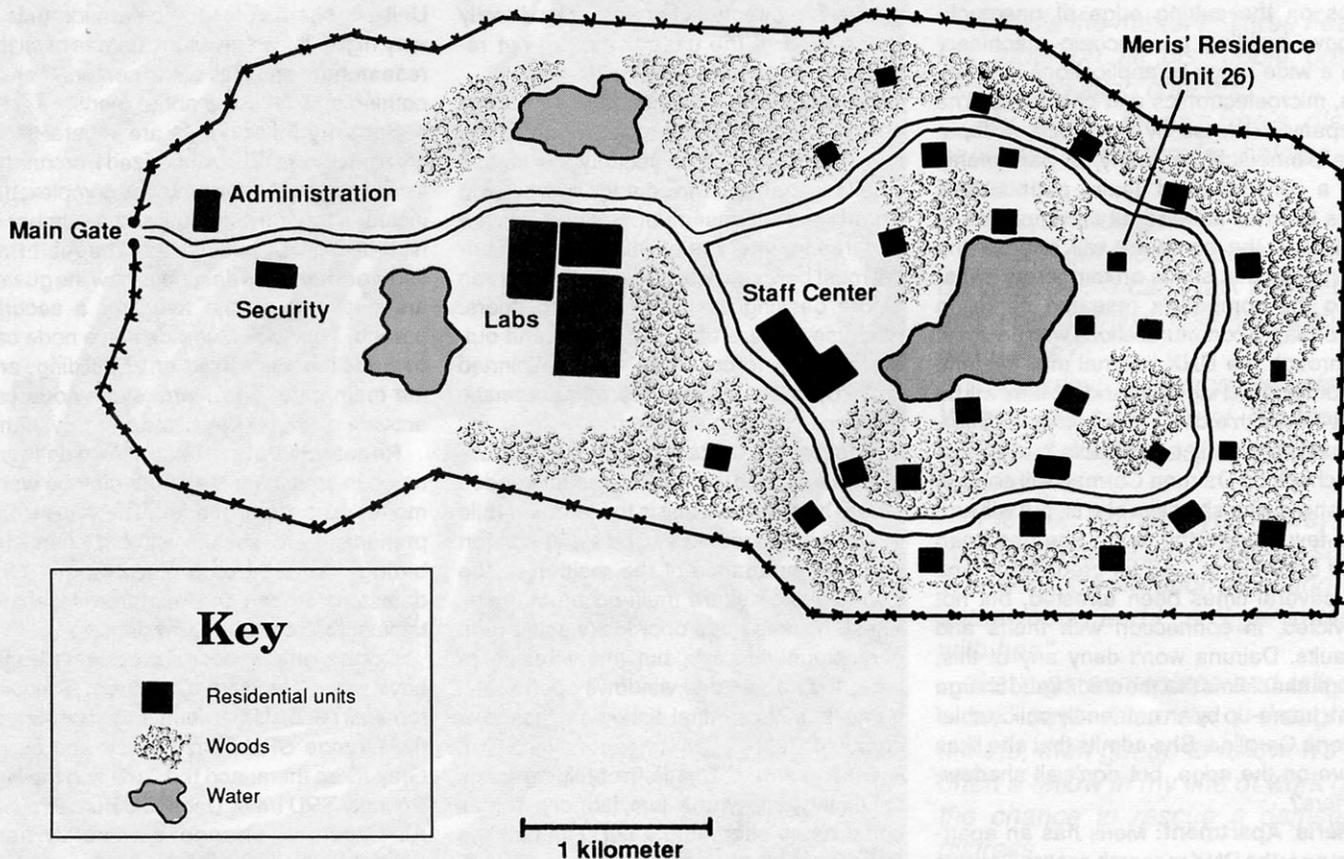
Research Data: These files won't help much in snatching Meris but may be worth money on the open market. They are incomprehensible to anyone without chemistry, biology and biotech knowledge. One datastore among the research data contains some really hot new games.

Countermeasures: The system's nodes have various kinds of IC on them. The California RTG SAN has White IC (Barrier); all the Orange SPUs have Trace and Dump Gray IC on them; and the CPU and the Red Security SPU have Trace and Burn Gray IC. All Green or Orange datastores have Scramble White IC on them, and all other

DNX Computer System



DNX Research Center



Orange or Green nodes have Trace and Dump Gray IC. If an external alert is triggered, the security system operator will come on; she is an Elven decker (as described in the Archetypes section of the *Shadowrun* basic rules), using a Fuchi-5 cyberdeck.

STRIKE

The characters should make whatever plans they feel are appropriate, and the referee can play the operation through, using the information given about the complex. Unless their espionage has been notably clumsy, the characters will have the advantage of surprise. If for some reason the plan fails (bad die rolls, etc.), Dairuna will call in her snatch team to finish the job, leaving the players to deal with DNX security and the local police.

Meris is in Housing Unit 26, but she will not act very happy to see her rescuers. She is unarmed, but will scream loudly for help and struggle as best she can.

Security Response: Eighteen security guards are at the base, working eight-hour shifts. Consequently, at any time, six guards will be on-duty, six off-duty, and six asleep. The on-duty guards are deployed as follows: two on the main gate, one in control in the security building, and three patrolling the perimeter. Once an alert is triggered, the six off-duty guards come into action: Two remain to guard security control while the rest go to the scene of the breach. The six sleeping guards will be available five minutes after the alert and can be deployed at the discretion of the control officer.

Security control will also alert the county sheriff's office and the California Free State Police. The sheriff's men can be on the scene in 15 minutes to a half hour, and then the state police can have a helicopter on-site in 30 minutes. In addition, the DNX regional headquarters is notified if any breach occurs. If the situation is serious, a helicopter full of DNX security troops will be sent from Sacramento.

Magical Defenses: The DNX center is rather weakly protected against magic. The one wage mage sorcerer in the security center will try to deal with magical attacks. He has the Fighter spell package. He also patrols the area astrally from time to time, and any astral scouts will encounter him on a roll of 1-2 on 1D6.

SNATCH

At a prearranged spot on the way back to Seattle, the party will be ambushed by a formidable group of street samurai and mercenaries. Dairuna will try to take out the most powerful player characters with spells. The referee should take advantage of the fact that Dairuna knows much about their strengths and weaknesses.

The snatch team will disable the party's

vehicles and escape aboard a Hughes Airstar helicopter piloted by an experienced Rigger; this can cause problems if DNX security or the California State Police are still after the party. The team should be slightly larger than the players' party, and consists of equal numbers of street samurai, mercenaries, and Ork mercenaries.

If for some reason the players had to divert from their planned getaway route, then the snatch team will hit them as they enter Seattle.

TRACING DAIRUNA

Dairuna doesn't leave much of a trail; she has moved without a forwarding address and canceled all her credit cards and ID. But the players do have her real name. Though she is building a new identity, she still has one of her old bank accounts in her real name. The last transaction was a deposit from a company called Small Wonders A.G., a cutting-edge nanotech research company.

DNX SECURITY

DNX is, of course, trying to trace the people who kidnapped one of their top researchers. Martin Javert, DNX's Troll head of security for the West Coast, will handle the investigation personally. If any of the players have fallen into DNX hands, they will be thoroughly interrogated with all the latest truth drugs. Otherwise, Javert will try to trace the players from whatever evidence they leave at the complex. It is simply amazing what a modern forensics lab can learn from a few strands of hair, a fuzzy video image, and credit records.

If the players decide to give up and let the Cormac sisters go, Javert will show up along with a nearly endless supply of company men and street samurai, demanding that the players return Meris. It will be very hard to convince them that the shadowrunners don't know where she is, and Javert will insist that they help him—or else. "Or else" can mean anything from handing the player characters over to the authorities to dumping their bullet-ridden bodies in the ocean.

But Javert's primary concern is recovering Meris, not wasting ammunition on street scum. If the players can help him, he will use them.

SMALL WONDERS

Small Wonders A.G. is a subsidiary of the European combine Strasser-Pharmadyne. Small Wonders does research and development on nanotechnology for medical applications. It has a small facility in Seattle. Naturally, nobody at the company has ever heard of Dairuna Cormac, and persistent inquiries will be dealt with firmly by company security guards.

Computer System: Small Wonders has a fairly powerful system with very good



security. All Red nodes are equipped with Blaster Gray IC except the CPU—which is armed with Killer Black IC! The Orange nodes are armed with Trace and Burn Gray IC, and the Green nodes have Access White IC. The computer contains no listings relevant to the operation except one. One datafile under miscellaneous procurements lists incidental expenses and includes recent expenditures authorized by Dairuna Cormac for security hardening of a safe house in the Barrrens. The address of the house is given.

Magical Searching: Small Wonders keeps a wage mage on retainer to prevent magical espionage. (Use the standard Archetype with the Fighter spell option.) But such espionage will be fruitless as Dairuna and Meris are not in the Small Wonders building. If the players can somehow get the local Small Wonders director alone and read his mind magically, he knows the location, but the director is a very well-guarded man.

SAFE HOUSE

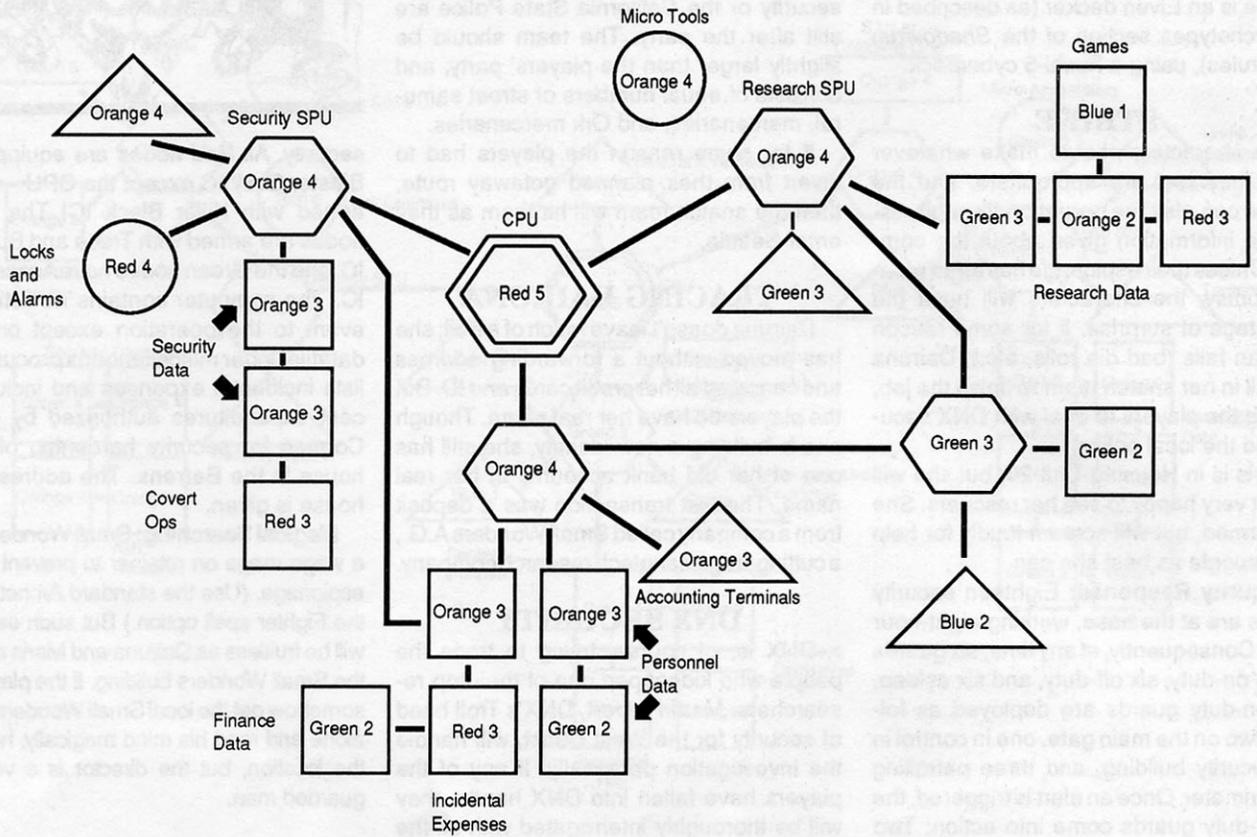
With or without the help of DNX, the players must get Meris out of Small Wonders' hands—the safe house will have to be assaulted. It is guarded by Dairuna and her snatch team. Any killed or disabled members of the team have been replaced by Gang Member archetypes. The players will probably want to hire some extra muscle for this job.

The building is an old warehouse, now fitted with retina-scan locks and bulletproof windows. A mobile medical module is inside, within which Meris is being interrogated by two medics (use the Street Doc NPC archetype) using truth drugs. Dairuna and her team are outside the module, living in sleeping bags on the floor and eating takeout pizza. At any time, one-third of the team members are asleep. One team member is always positioned on the roof with a radio link to the group inside.

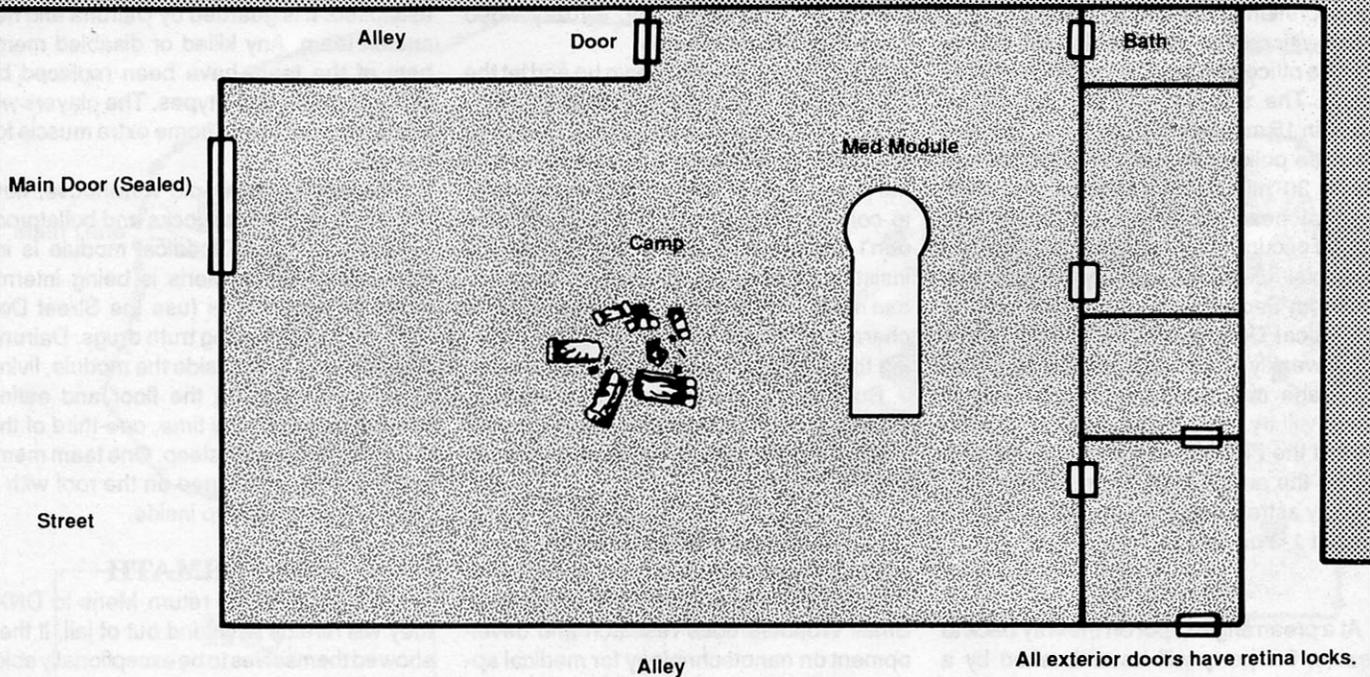
AFTERMATH

If the players can return Meris to DNX, they will remain alive and out of jail. If they showed themselves to be exceptionally able, DNX might hire them for some dirty work in the future—but don't count on it, chummers. Small Wonders will swiftly remove all evidence that can link the company to Dairuna Cormac. If she lives through the battle with the players, the company will send hitmen after her. A few weeks later, the shadow-

Small Wonders Computer System



Safe House



runners may hear that her body has been found in the bay. Small Wonders will remember the PCs, as well, and not fondly.

Since Dairuna will promise much but pay as little as possible, the shadowrunners will lose money on this caper. They can scavenge weapons and equipment from dead adversaries, and may be able to fence some of DNX or Small Wonders' data (the security departments won't like this at all). The PCs will probably get a lot of experience—including some wisdom about trusting people.

Adventures: If DNX and Small Wonders decide to wage all-out war, there might be good employment opportunities for shadowrunners. Dairuna might survive and seek revenge on the players. Meris might actually decide to leave DNX after all and would need some firepower to ensure the success of her career move. And it is possible that Dairuna was working for a third company interested in causing a war between DNX and Small Wonders.

DAIRUNA CORMAC

Dairuna is a tough Elven mage who long ago decided that nothing was as important as herself. Consequently, she is perfectly willing to sell her sister to Small Wonders and to double-cross the players. She is small and delicate-looking, and uses her appearance to seem harmless and pathetic.

Attributes:	Skills:
Body: 1	Bike (2-wheeler): 3
Quickness: 5	Etiquette (Street): 2
Strength: 1	Conjuring: 6
Charisma: 3	Sorcery: 6
Intelligence: 5	Stealth: 4
Willpower: 3	Pistols: 5
Essence: 6	Leadership: 1
Magic: 6	
Reaction: 5	

Spells:
Hellblast: 6
Sleep: 4

Gear:
Streetline Special pistol
Spell equipment

Notes:
Natural low-light eyes; mild allergy to iron.

MERIS CORMAC

Meris is a dedicated scientist, fascinated by the technologies of the very small. She is not accustomed to combat and violence. She feels that most Elves are foolishly antiscientific. Meris dislikes her sister for fairly obvious reasons.

Attributes:	Skills:
Body: 2	Computer: 3
Quickness: 4	Biotech: 4
Strength: 1	Etiquette (Corporate): 2
Charisma: 4	Build/Repair Biotech: 3
Intelligence: 6	Biology: 4
Willpower: 2	Physical Sciences: 6
Essence: 4	Spanish: 1
Reaction: 5	German: 2
	Japanese: 3
	Stealth: 3

Cyberware:
Datajack
100 Mp headware memory
Biotech shop
Pocket secretary

Notes:
Natural low-light eyes; mild allergy to iron.

MARTIN JAVERT

Martin is the head of DNX's proactive security division (West Coast); his job is to



prevent security breaches, and to recover stolen items and people. Javert is a Troll, but is unusually intelligent and disciplined. He exudes an air of quiet menace, which is infinitely more alarming than the usual Troll bluster. He is determined and ruthless, and never gives up. Because of his sunlight allergy, Javert works entirely at night and always wears mirrored sunglasses.

Attributes:	Skills:
Body: 5	Unarmed Combat: 3
Quickness: 5	Pistols: 6
Strength: 6	Stealth (Urban): 5
Charisma: 1	Computer: 3
Intelligence: 5	Interrogation (Verbal): 4
Willpower: 5	Etiquette (Corporate): 2
Essence: 6	Car: 1
Reaction: 5	Leadership: 2
	Electronics: 1
	City Speak: 1

Cyberware:
Datajack

Gear:
Ares Predator
Enfield AS7 shotgun

Notes:
Natural low-light eyes and dermal armor; has moderate allergy to sunlight. Martin Javert can get any equipment he needs with DNX money, and he is always accompanied by at least two company men. Ω

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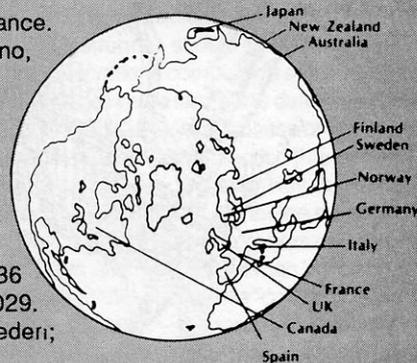
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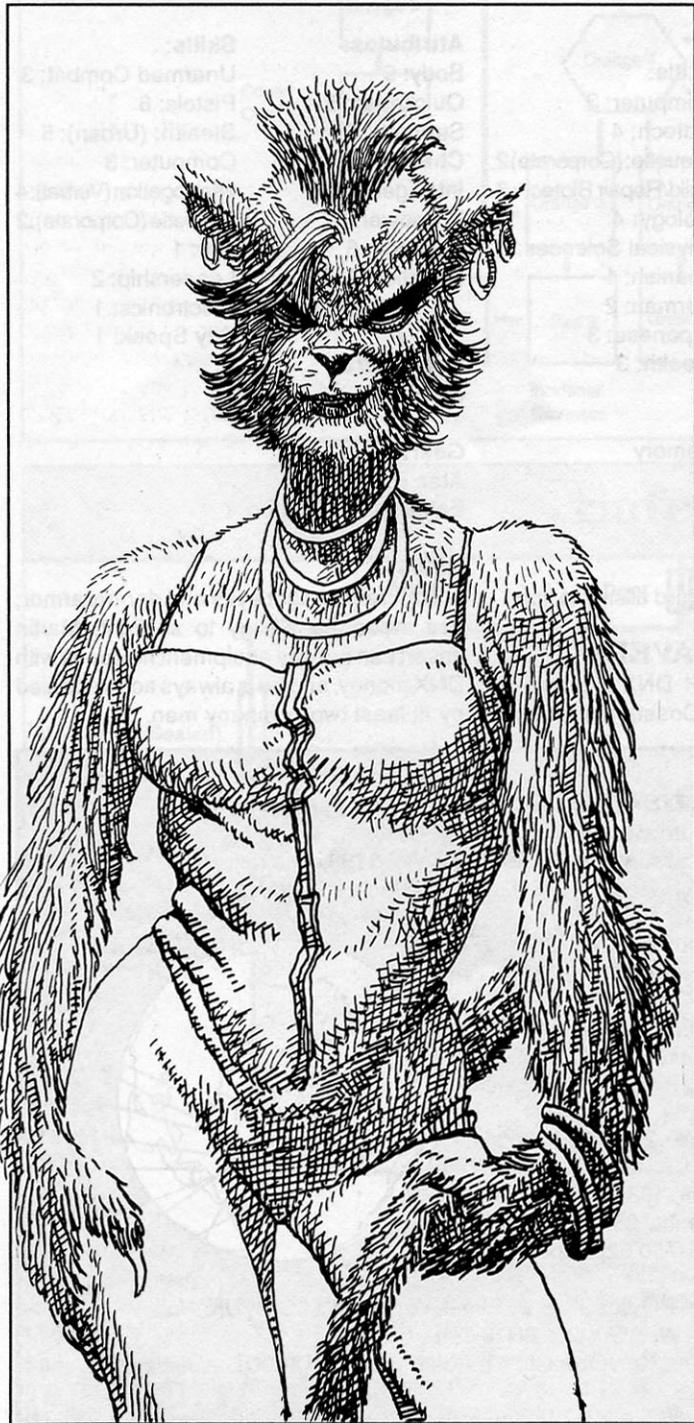
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Curiosity Killed the Cat

By Craig Sheeley

Exotic: Foreign; having the charm or fascination of the unfamiliar; strangely beautiful, enticing. Slang: A human biosculpted with nonhuman elements; fur, long ears, fangs, etc.



In the world of 2020, practically anything is available—for a price. Changes in personal appearance are no different. With sophisticated plastic surgery techniques, a person can have his appearance altered to nearly any specification. Want to be one of the “beautiful people”? No problem. Want to look like a famous vid star or a face from history? Easy. Want to be larger, smaller, the opposite gender? If you have the cash, you can get the bod to match. There’s the catch: None of these operations are cheap. Of course, with the proliferation of cosmetic surgery technology, prices fall. Once, a simple sculpt cost more than a worker could earn in a year. Now, a custom face-sculpt costs about three month’s income, for a good job.

As the status and cost of bodysculpting declined, new and more expensive styles developed. The exotic movement grew from this development, giving the wealthy something new on which to squander their money. (Don’t get a common bodysculpt, *dahling*; make yourself over as something inhuman!) For awhile, alien life form sculpts were popular, but exotic fashions eventually settled on humanoid animal types. The more animalistic, the better! A proper bodysculpt—with tail, facesculpt and natural fur—can run as much as 25,000 eb, far too much for anyone who has to work for a living. (Costs are listed on page 111 in the *Cyberpunk 2.0.2.0* rulebook.)

CAT-CALL

One evening, Chiyo calls a PC who is her old friend—she sounds panicked. “Please, you’ve got to help me! There’s someone at the door, and they’ve got me trapped!” There is a shuddering, splintering sound in the background. “I found a chip at the House; it was full of hot data. Joanne has it, in the Tiger’s Eye. They’ve come for me! Call the cops, quick! Before they get in....” She shrieks, and the line goes dead.

If Chiyo’s friend calls the police, he is informed that a mobile unit in the area has been dispatched. If Chiyo’s friend goes to her apartment, the police are already there—one of the neighbors alerted them. Chiyo lives in a once middle-class, but now decaying, apartment complex. Her door is ajar, its deadbolt lock knocked out of the jamb by brute force. Inside, a pair of city policemen are looking over the scene. One of them confronts the PCs at the door. “There’s a police investigation under way here. Go away.”

If Chiyo’s friend says he was called before Chiyo died or mentions his name, the senior officer will ask what Chiyo said to him (he knows about the last call she made, having gotten the records from the phone company). No matter what Chiyo’s friend tells the police, he is asked if he saw or heard anything that might help identify the killer. The phone call was voice only, so the adventurer couldn’t see anything. None of the other apartment dwellers saw anything, either, although they did hear the screams. Finally, the cop informs the PC that the city police department will do everything it can to bring the killer to justice.

Chiyo was a small woman of Oriental stock, transformed into an alluring combination of human and Siamese cat. Two stab wounds through her cat-eyes into her brain killed her, although she was tortured first: Someone flayed the tan-furred skin from parts of her body—someone quite professional. The police do not permit the adventurers to look around the apartment for additional clues (there aren’t any).

CATCHING THE SCENT

If Chiyo’s friend hasn’t already called in the other player characters for assistance, this is a good time for the referee to gently suggest doing so. This is more than one person can handle.

There are a few clues to go on: First, whoever broke into Chiyo’s apartment had immense strength at his disposal—it takes a lot to rip deadbolts out of a wall. Second, Chiyo was a contract employee of the Animal House. Third, her friend was told that she’d hidden some valuable information in “the Tiger’s Eye,” with someone called Joanne. As to the identity of the killer or Joanne, the nature of the information, or the location of the Tiger’s Eye, the PCs are completely in the dark.

They know about the Animal House, although it’s probable that none of them have ever been there. The House is a fairly new business, a franchise idea from Atlas Conglom of Midwestplex. During the 20th century, there were exclusive men’s clubs featuring

high-priced entertainment and attractive hostesses dressed in "animal" costumes. These enterprises declined in the century's last decades as wealthy pursuits turned elsewhere. In 2019, the first Animal House was opened in Midwestplex. It was scarcely more than a high-priced house of ill repute catering to the new taste for exotics. The concept was improved to encompass more expensive and diverse entertainments (dining, live entertainment, braiddancing, fitness and fashion) in addition to the basic amusements provided by the hosts and hostesses, and the first franchised Animal House was opened in Night City this year. It has proven to be quite a success, attracting not only exotics, but well-to-dos interested in exotics (or merely mingling with those wealthy enough to be exotic).

The hosts of the Animal House are the main attraction, indentured servants (in other words, corporate slaves, trapped by contract) with biosculpting ranging from the moderate to the excessive. They have only one job: to ensure that the patrons have a good time.

Adventurers working with the police (either Cops or those with police connections) can access city cop files, looking for any suspects known to have an MO of flaying tortures or eye-stabbing. The database yields four possibilities: boosterganger Yassa Chaltos, member of the Bloodcutters gang; Oscar "the Butcher" Meier, a low-life street samurai wanted for possible cyberpsychosis; Monkrum Xavier, an illegal ripperdoc; and Jorge Maganasa, a Yakuza enforcer.

Chaltos is usually located in the 29th Street Combat Zone with the rest of her gang. Meier has dropped out of sight completely. Locating Xavier means contacting him through intermediaries and setting up a meeting. Maganasa's known haunts include businesses in Night City's Little Asia district, particularly a restaurant called the Siamese Twins.

From this point, the adventurers may well attempt to find the four suspects with the flaying/eye-stab MO, or they may go to the Animal House to find the information Chiyo said she left there.

HITTING THE STREETS

To find the suspects, the adventurers will have to head out into Night City's seamier districts. Finding the 29th Street Combat Zone or the Siamese Twins is no problem; finding a fixer who can get messages to Xavier requires an Easy (difficulty 10) Streetwise roll. Meeting these persons is another thing altogether.

Chaltos: Chaltos is staying in one of the Bloodcutters' taken-over buildings along 29th Street. Venturing into the 29th Street Combat Zone is hazardous enough; the Bloodcutters rule the turf from 28th Street to 31st Street, bounded by Williams and Effinger. Anyone not from the neighborhood will be stopped within 10 minutes of entering the area and politely questioned as to their motives by 2-4 (1D3+1) gang members. ("Hey, city trash! Whatchoo doin' here? If you lookin' for trouble, you found it!") A successful Intimidate or Fast Talk/Persuade roll (difficulty +15) is required to convince the gang to let the adventurers talk to Yassa. Good, cool-headed "tough guy" roleplaying by the group's spokesperson adds +5 to the roll.

Yassa is reluctant to talk but is curious about what the party wants. If the adventurers tell her that they're looking for the person who killed Chiyo, she'll claim she did it. Anyone making an Easy Human Perception roll (difficulty +10) can tell she's lying. On the other hand, if the PCs question her carefully, cross-examination reveals that she has no idea of what the adventurers are talking about—a successful Interrogation roll +15 represents this.

If the PCs become abusive or threatening, or start a fight, they will be attacked by 2-12 Bloodcutters. The adventurers' party will have to fight its way out of the Zone, facing another 1-3 groups of 2-12 Bloodcutters per group in the process. If the party has fast transport, then only one group of Bloodcutters has to be fought past to escape.

Xavier: Xavier is harder to contact. After finding a fixer who can communicate with him (PC fixers have a Difficulty +20 to contact him with Streetdeal), the adventurers must pay 100 eb to have a meeting set up. Monkrum wants to meet at midnight under the 28th Street Underpass, a known Boostergang meeting place. There is no one waiting there when the adventurers arrive. Not even the regular gangs are in sight (a fact sure to unnerve street veterans). At five minutes past midnight, a single figure walks out of the darkness up

to the underpass. He's not Xavier; he introduces himself as Xavier's agent. He's a hideous parody of humanity, a cut-and-patch job of scars and grafts,



speaking in a mechanical voicebox monotone.

"What do you want with Doctor Xavier?"

When the adventurers tell him, he seems to be listening to something else for a moment before answering. On Xavier's behalf, he denies any connection with Chiyo or the Animal House. Unless the PCs have any other business to do with Xavier, he walks away. When he's about 20 meters distant, he explodes—BOOM.

The man is a zombie, a psycho run by Xavier from a distance. He's a walking bomb—if the adventurers attack him, or if Xavier thinks they're a threat to him (cops in the party might be considered such), he explodes the zombie in their midst, doing Fragmentation grenade damage.

Maganasa: Maganasa is easy to find. True to form, he's at his "base," the Siamese Twins restaurant. The city directory gives the PCs the directions but doesn't give warning of the crowded congestion that infests the streets of Little Asia. They might as well be in Singapore as in North America. No vehicles can be brought into the streets; even the AV-taxis let passengers off at second-story level.

When the adventurers walk into the Siamese Twins, they can't see Maganasa. The proprietor directs them into a back room, where Maganasa is watching the news on Network 54. He is cold and direct, quietly ordering them to state their business. He denies knowing Chiyo or anything about the matter, then orders them to leave unless they have some other business—something worth his time. The two Yakuza guards in the room and the one behind the party (he came in the front) point their submachineguns, emphasizing Maganasa's demand. If the PCs don't leave, and quietly, there's going to be an ugly fight.

Meier: Meier cannot be found.

THE ANIMAL HOUSE

The other leads are just red herrings, possibilities from the police files. The real action is at the Animal House.

If the adventurers want to go to the Animal House, they've got a bit of a problem getting in. Only people with memberships get in, and you can't get a membership without being recommended by another member. (And even then, a full-time membership costs 1000 eb per month.) Members can sponsor guests, though. To get in, the adventurers have to sneak in past the security (very difficult), find a member to sponsor them, or have a runner break in and create a sponsored reservation for them.

Finding a current member for sponsorship involves using a favor ("Powerful corporate exec owes you a favor"), finding a member who'll put in a good word (roleplay or difficulty +25 Streetdeal roll; +5 to the roll with a 500 eb "gratuity"), or hacking in.

Hacking In: Any competent netrunner should be able to make a reservation, since the House's reservations computer is small and lightly defended (by corporate standards). In game terms, the defenses consist of a password system, strength 4—if you have the password, it lets you through. You get three tries before it cuts your connection (hanging up on you). The password can be guessed with Wizard's Key or Raffles in standard Net "combat," making the difficulty +14 (10 for the system, 4 for the password). A runner without either of these programs can guess a password. The password program is a lively fox-woman with a bronze cyberleg, wearing a quite translucent "Southern Belle" costume. She flirts brazenly, asking for the runner's password—netnerds unused to seduction may flub the first try. After three unsuccessful tries, a large gorilla in a suit lumbers up and tosses the runner out the door.

If the runner is successful, there's no trouble making reservations.

Trying to access the actual House computer is another thing altogether. It's guarded by Strength 5 Data Walls, Watchdogs, and a very good (Interface 8) runner armed with Killer IV, Knockout,

YASSA CHALTOS

Int	6	Tech	4
Ref	7	Cool	8
Luck	5	Att	5
Emp	6/4	Bod	6
Ma	8		

Skills: Combat Sense 6, Handgun 5, SMG 4, Brawling 4, Melee 3

Hardware: Pain editor, cybereye with low-lite and IR, rippers, cybersnake in throat, Kevlar T-shirt, Sternmeyer Type 35 pistol, Uzi Miniauto 9.

BLOODCUTTERS GANG MEMBERS

Int	4	Cool	5
Ref	6	Body	7

Skills: Combat Sense 3, Handgun/SMG/Rifle 4, Brawling 2, Melee 1.

Weapons: Roll 1d6 for weapons: 1-2=Knife/sword/club, 3-4=9mm pistol, 5=Sternmeyer Stakeout 10 shotgun, 6=Ronin assault rifle.

Armor: Roll 1d6 for armor: 1-3=Kevlar T-shirt 4-5=Medium armor jacket 6=Heavy leather clothing. Roll 1d6 for cybernetics: 1=Boosted REF +1, 2=Cybereye with targeter and smartgun with WLNK, 3-4=Rippers, 5=Cyberarm with spike hand, 6=Dermal plating, grafted muscle (Body +2) and Bigknucks.

JORGE MAGANASA

Int	6	Tech	5
Ref	8/9	Cool	4
Luck	6	Att	6
Emp	8/5	Body	6
Ma	3		

Skills: Combat Sense 7, Handgun 6, Melee 4, Tae Kwon Do 6.

Hardware: Processor with WLNK, cybereye with target scope, IR, thermograph, cyberarm with pop-up 10mm smart pistol with AP ammo, Ripperhand and RealSkinn. Kevlar vest and tailored light armor jacket.

YAKUZA THUGS

Int	4	Cool	6
Ref	7	Body	6

Skills: Combat Sense 4, SMG 4, Melee 3, Tae Kwon Do 3.

Hardware: Cybereye with target scope. H&K MP-2013s, monoknives, medium armor jackets.

ANIMAL HOUSE SECURITY

Int	5	Cool	7
Ref	6	Body	9

Skills: Combat Sense 4, Awareness/Notice 4, Handgun 5, Aikido 3, Melee 4

Hardware: Processor with WLNK, Skinweave, 1 cyberlimb (at random). Silenced Sternmeyer Type 35 pistols, tasers. Some have melee weapons. Tailored light armor jackets at best for armor, plus Skinweave 12 SP.

OSCAR "THE BUTCHER" MEIER

Int	5	Cool	7
Ref	9/11	Body	14
Emp	1	Att	3
Ma	5		

Skills: Combat Sense 6, Awareness 2, Melee 6, Brawling 7.

Hardware: Subdermal armor, grafted muscle, muscle/bone lace, MS, two cyberarms, ripper hand, buzz hand, two cyberlegs with Spike heel feet. No guns or armor.

THE WEASEL

Int	10	Tech	9
Ref	5	Cool	6
Att	4	Body	4
Ma	7		

Skills: Streetdeal 2, Awareness 5, Dodge/Escape 4, Handgun 2, Pick Lock 5, Streetwise 6, Stealth 3

Hardware: Plugs, MLNK and VLNK. Militech Avenger pistol. Kevlar vest.

Force Shield, and Reflector programs.

At the Animal House: The PCs know they're going to a very high-priced place, with high-priced clientele. Obtrusive weapons and armor are not allowed—only tailored armor, Kevlar vests/T-shirts, and weapons that can be concealed are allowed. Dressing one's best is also a very good idea, as is carrying a lot of cash—if you're in the Animal House, you can afford to be there! The 150 eb door charge (per person) emphasizes this fact.

When they arrive, the adventurers are greeted by a breathtaking, white-furred rabbit-woman with golden hair. Clad in an appropriately tight and slinky dress, she smiles and speaks with a slight French accent.

"Welcome to the Animal House. I'm Bunny, your guide. What is your pleasure? Dining, dancing, entertainment? The Jungle is rocking with the Demented Arabs—Madman Hussain's vocals are really tight tonight—and the North Pole features the Meltdowns in half an hour. We also have complete physical recreations, with professional trainers to enhance your enjoyment. For the vicarious, we have the latest brandances." She winks a long-lashed eye. "We're here for *your* gratification."

Should the PCs ask for Joanne, Bunny will frown slightly. "Excuse me." Her eyes lose focus for a few seconds, then she speaks again.

"I'm sorry. Our files list no 'Joanne' either working here or in the House. But that might be her personal name. Is she a friend of yours?" She promises to speak to the other guides and see if Joanne is someone they know by name. "In the meantime, please enjoy some of the House's hospitality."

If asked about the Tiger's Eye, she says she knows nothing. She conducts them to a luxuriously appointed waiting room, pointing out the robotic autobar and information screens. The screens have jacks for plugging in. She then leaves the PCs alone, going to talk to her co-workers about Joanne.

If the PCs don't mention Joanne, Bunny politely presses them to choose their pleasure, conducting them to the waiting room if they have trouble making up their minds.

The information system is a very localized ROM system; it can't be altered or even entered by netranners. It provides a basic layout to the Animal House, states the cuisine specials of the day, lists all the entertainments available (but no prices—if you have to ask, you can't afford it) and provides pictures and simple profiles of the exotic men and women who work there. It directs anyone desiring further information on any of the activities or employees to ask their guide.

The employee file provides no clue as to Joanne's identity, covering some 200 people. The variety of exotics is astounding. Most are mammals—felines, canines, rodents, but no bovines or equines. There are a few nonanimals, including a couple of things that might have walked out of fantasy novels, and some reptilians. There are even several swimmers—otters, scaled fish-people, even fish-tailed mermaids. But none listed as Joanne. Should anyone be interested, there are three tiger-people in the file. One is male; the other two are female: Tigr and Rakshana.

PCs with good memories can memorize the House layout if they wish. Those with datalinks can upload the entire databank into processor memory. The adventurers can go snooping off without Bunny if they wish, or they may wait for her return. If the go off on their own, they soon find that the layout data is incomplete; there's a lot more to the House than is shown. A difficulty +17 roll is needed to avoid becoming lost in the side passages (+3 if using uploaded information). Lost PCs are found by security guards Rex and Grotzog. If the PCs don't lose their way, they can wander around the House looking and asking questions. Since the House is a moderate-sized high-rise (perhaps a dozen floors, each about 200 meters on a side), this can take a long time. The referee should have them encounter patrons, Animal House employees, and the occasional servo-robot as they prowl the hallways, stumbling into rooms featuring pleasures and entertainments ranging from the innocent to the scandalous. Eventually, Rex and Grotzog find them and politely detain them, explaining that their guide Bunny was anxious about what happened to them. Bunny appears soon after.

Should the party wait for Bunny, she will return after about 10 minutes with this news: "I spoke to Vix, and she told me that while she doesn't know

any Joanne, another group was asking for her. A pair of...unique gentlemen." She shrugs eloquently. "They then requested to visit Tigr."

If any PC mentions that Joanne was Chiyo's friend, Bunny brightens. "Perhaps Rakshana knows who she is. She was a friend of Chiyo's, too." She's interrupted by Rex and Grotzog, who come to talk to her.

TIGER TRAP

When Rex and Grotzog enter the scene, they speak to Bunny as soon as they see her. Rex is a full-blown lizard man, with scales, claws, fangs and tail. Grotzog is an orc: green-skinned, tusked, wide-mouthed and red-eyed, armed with a sword slung over his back. Their conversation is whispered—it seems that there has been trouble locating one of the hostesses, Tigr. She's not in the room where she is supposed to be. Internal monitors are having trouble; there's a particularly determined electronic intruder mucking about in the security computer. Has Bunny seen her?

Bunny turns to the PCs and apologizes for the delay, asking them to remain in the room while she "takes care of a slight problem." She leaves with the security pair, telling them that Tigr might be in her room, playing with her deck, if she's on break.

The personal levels of the House are not on the adventurers' map. They can follow the trio up, though, at a discreet distance. Rex, Bunny and Grotzog stop at a door in a dorm-like hallway lined with doors and look into one. What they see inside startles them: Rex hisses a report into a hand radio; Bunny looks ill; and Grotzog draws his sword.

Unless the PCs are very good at Stealth (+5 or better), Rex's superior vision spots them lurking in the near distance, and he demands to know what they're doing there—and what they know about the scene inside the room. It's a repeat of Chiyo's apartment, but this time the woman is Tigr, skin flayed in strips and eyes gouged.

If the PCs explain that they're still looking for Joanne, or seeking Chiyo's killer, Grotzog exclaims that Chiyo's other friend, Leona, might be in trouble too. He tries to contact her on the House intercom. When she doesn't answer, he finally says, "Joanne, pick up that line!" If asked, he explains that Joanne is her personal name.

Unable to contact her, Grotzog leads the way up to Joanne/Leona's room, sword drawn. Rex has his pistol jacked in and ready. Joanne/Leona lives on the next level up, and her door is closed and locked. Anyone wanting to listen at the door has to succeed at a hearing Awareness roll of difficulty +20 to make out anything from the sounds leaking through the door. Someone is whimpering, a high-pitched man's voice whines, "Come on, Oscar, hurry it up!" and another, much deeper voice growls, "Cryo, Weasel. There's more than one way to skin a cat."

Rex and Grotzog want to go straight in, knocking the door down while they have the element of surprise. Any PC with a +2 or better Reputation or Leadership skill can persuade them to try other tactics, if the adventurers have a different plan, as long as it involves rescuing the woman inside. If the PCs dither too long, a faint scream sounds through the door, and the two security guards go on in.

For the benefit of alternate plans, Joanne's room is a two-room suite of a small (three-meter by three-meter) living room and a slightly larger bedroom. There is one window in her living room, but it opens onto a drop straight down 10 stories of glass-sheathed high-rise.

Inside are Oscar and Weasel. Oscar has had an "exotic" bodysculpt that gives him the looks of a troll—an ugly one. Weasel looks like a weasel, complete with black button nose and shifty eyes. Anyone wanting to surprise them must roll a better Stealth roll than Weasel's Awareness roll. Oscar is too busy with his "fun" to notice anything. He's in the bedroom, slowly flaying Joanne while Weasel stands nervous guard in the living room. The PCs have to go through Weasel to get to Oscar, and Weasel must be knocked out or killed quietly and immediately or he squeaks a warning to the mad cyborg.

Weasel's strategy is to hide behind a chair and shoot at the closest threat. Oscar doesn't have much strategy, preferring to wade into his opponents and rip them to shreds.

When (or if) Oscar and Weasel are defeated, Joanne can be rescued. She's a tall, statuesque lioness with a black mane, and is quite grateful to be rescued from the Butcher.

TIGER'S EYE

Joanne knows what Chiyo meant by the "Tiger's Eye." It's a game file in her computer—Joanne net-runs as a hobby. She doesn't know what the file contains, but is willing to give it to her rescuers.

Examination of the data reveals some privileged financial information about the local Merrill, Asukaga & Finch operation, indicating that some of its investment strategies have been compromised. The PCs can make contact—but this will put several ugly killers on their tails! Or they can contact the local MA&F district manager, who will pay 5000 eb for the information (she'll go up to 7500 eb if necessary).

If Weasel was taken alive, he'll break under the interrogation and tell the PCs everything he knows.

No matter what, the PCs have a friend at the Animal House (Joanne/Leona). If they managed to subdue or kill Oscar and Weasel quietly and discretely, the Animal House management may contact them with an offer to become part of the House's security staff, if they need jobs. Of course, not all the details of working for the Animal House are included in the offer.

WORKING FOR THE ANIMAL HOUSE

PCs desiring exotic biosculpting soon discover that the costs are enormous and dictate lengthy hospital stays—Joanne's transformation cost over 30,000 eb, including the vat-grown digitigrade legs and the tailored "ripper" claws. She spent at least two months in the hospital and another month in physical therapy, getting used to her new form. And exotic surgery is strictly elective, not covered by any health insurance program. Anyone wanting to go exotic either has to come up with the money on his own or find a sponsor.

The Animal House is always looking for more hosts and is willing to pay for suitable exotic conversion. The minimum requirements are an adjusted EMP of 6—that's after all HL costs are factored in—and a willingness to sign the host contract. Following that, the Animal House will provide the character's exotic conversion, an ATT of 10, a sexual implant (the "Mr. Studd, Midnight Lady" implant, pages 66 and 74) and training in Social and Seduction skills (+2 in each). If, following the installation of the sexual implant, the character's EMP drops below 5, something cybernetic will be removed (the referee's choice) and the character given therapy (pages 64 and 65) to reduce HC until his EMP reaches at least 5. Characters with "ugly" exotic conversions such as reptilians and nonhumans (Rex and Grotzog) are reduced to ATT 3-5.

In return, the new exotic character has to work at the Animal House for six hours each day, six days a week. This work may be the character's speciality (solos and cops for security, rockers for entertainment, fixers for concierges) or may just be to keep the customers happy. The work does include "intimate physical activity." To ensure a lack of absenteeism, it is rumored that the management has the ability to remote-control extremely unpleasant feedback through the implant.

Pay at the Animal House depends on the character's skill at pleasing the customers. Monthly pay is 400 eb, plus 100 eb per level of skill in Seduction, Social, Perform, Play Instrument, plus 50 eb per level of skill in Wardrobe & Style and Personal Grooming, plus regular pay as per Special Ability level for solos and cops (security) and fixers (concierges).

Of course, half this pay goes to paying off the exotic surgery! Total up the costs for the surgery and add 40% (for hospitalization, therapy and interest). Minimum components of exotic sculpt are a heavy bodysculpt (5000 eb), a facial sculpt (5000 eb), the implant (500 eb—a high-quality implant) and skin alteration (10,000 eb). Most sculpt add tails and sometimes paws, as well as ATT increases. The character has to pay off this total to be released from the contract. Of course, this will take the average host (earning roughly 1000 eb per month) over three years to pay it off—unless the character can find some other money. Ω



GENERAL ORDER I

When contacting a planet making normal progress toward a technological civilization, an officer of Star Fleet shall make no identification of self or mission; no interference with social development of said planet; no references to space, to other worlds or more advanced civilizations.

GENERAL ORDER II

Under no circumstances, not even to save his own life or the lives of his crew, shall an officer of Star Fleet willfully inflict harm or injury on a being known to be intelligent, unless such action is warranted by General Order I.

*By Charles G.
Weekes*



Gaming with the Prime Directive

A starship is one of the most powerful weapons platforms available to the United Federation of Planets—a Constitution-class starship can eradicate the surface of most worlds in a matter of hours. In peacetime, starships rarely operate in squadrons—they are under the control of a captain, isolated by distance from immediate Star Fleet overview. What then is to prevent a captain from meddling in a civilization with the gentle diplomacy exhibited between Spain and the Aztecs? Enter the Prime Directive.

Throughout the *Star Trek* series, the Prime Directive might require a ship captain to destroy his ship and crew, permit limited interference, or enact General Order 24, all at the whim of a script writer. With so much variation, how can referees reasonably handle Prime Directive violations with some semblance of consistency?

Use the first two general orders as a guide. In the classic *Star Trek* television series, exceptions to the general orders could be applied to a local situation, subject to Star Fleet review at a later period (we may assume Kirk was never seriously reprimanded on any of his decisions on the first five-year mission). Of course, there is no requirement that your players cannot interpret the Prime Directive to the letter, without exception (as demonstrated in the first two seasons of *Star Trek: The Next Generation*). Very few people ever get in trouble going by the book. Then again, this might not be as much fun in a campaign. With the Prime Directive as a framework, add these suggestions for the RPG:

- Create a contact mission leader or officer in charge of the away team (if playing in the *Next Generation* time period). This individual is a senior officer, usually the executive or 2nd officer of a ship, who is trained in the fine points of contact with other cultures. *This is not a job for the captain*, whose task is to command the ship, not become bogged down in the early stages of negotiations.

A contact mission leader should use every method at his disposal to avoid violent confrontations with a native population. If necessary, the team should be considered expendable, but this does not imply that the landing party is expected to meekly walk to its death. Although there is no restriction on using the weapons available to defend oneself, reason should be used. Consider as an example Captain Pike dealing with the Kalars of Rigel 12. While his people were equipped with laser pistols, he relied on Kalar weaponry to free his landing party from an ambush.

• At the discretion of the commanding officer or the senior officer appointed by the commanding officer, modern weaponry can be utilized (subject to later Star Fleet review) if the operation of said weapons would not cause cultural disruption through revelation of advanced technology. As an example, consider Scott's demonstration in "Bread and Circuses."

• In all cases of first contact, every effort will be made up to and including the sacrifice of the landing party to avoid killing the native population. If a native death, attributable directly to Federation personnel, does occur, the incident will be brought before a review board for determination of negligence, if any, and punishment required.

GAMING SITUATION

Now for a practical application of the Prime Directive to a game situation.

Admiral John S. Mendez, commanding officer of Starbase 20, has been forced into a duty he does not enjoy: deciding whether a fellow starship captain should be sent to court-martial for violation of the Prime Directive. He sits down and reviews the log:

Excerpted from contact team leader's log, USS Alliance NCC-1721, Stardate 2/8106.4; Commander L'Iarn reporting.

"...The commodore and I were standing in a glade near the native's gas works. I was discussing the rather good probability that the Romulans had not come to Ariel III as conquerors, but as teachers, when the Arielan walked out from a maintenance tunnel carrying tools and a boxlike device.

"He spoke to us in his native tongue; the commodore replied in Romulan. The Arielan raised the box to his mouth. Without hesitation, Commodore O'Neill drew a slug thrower, fired, and missed. I state for the record that prior to our arrival, slug throwers were unknown on Ariel. The natives had not developed gunpowder, and the Romulans had not disturbed this trend. Commodore O'Neill was made aware of this prior to transporting down, but he disregarded my advice on the grounds that a gun was more effective in dealing with natives than a phaser. His violation of general orders resulted in severe injuries to himself and the death of our chief sociologist, Lieutenant Commander Darlene Kyoto, and prevented the Federation from establishing friendly relations with Ariel at any time in the foreseeable future..."

Mendez considered the data. After a review of the Arielan contact, he determined:

1. O'Neill had pulled rank and superseded the authority and expertise of Contact Team Leader Commander L'Iarn.

2. The commodore had brought an advanced (and illegal) weapon to Ariel that would induce severe trauma, if not death, in most humanoid life forms.

3. His actions directly caused the death of a crewmember.

After the Prime Directive violation has occurred, make it known that the players' ship is to report to the nearest starbase ASAP. Keep notes from various characters—for instance, did others object to the violation? Was unusual behavior noted before, during, or after the incident in question? Was it logged with the referee? If not, give each character a die roll based on Intelligence. If the player comes within 20 points below his Intelligence, he has logged his suspicions with the proper people.

Mendez finds that Alliance's surgeon noticed increased depression and frustration on O'Neill's checkups prior to arrival at Ariel. Dr. Kelso's recommendations for rest leave were ignored, and the ship's surgeon did not press the matter, though it was within his authority. Mendez orders a formal court of inquiry into the incident of stardate 9706.4. If guilty, O'Neill faces a minimum of reduction in rank, loss of seniority, and removal from the Galaxy Exploration Command. A maximum penalty of dishonorable discharge and sentence to Elba II for rehabilitation could apply.

Requirements for a board are no less than three officers of command rank for captains and below, and three officers of flag rank for commodore and above. It is recommended that an NPC run by the referee be the president of the board, with the other PCs filling in as required.

An important person in such a proceeding would be a lawyer. As we have seen

STAR TREK®

from the series, there is a legal branch similar to the judge advocate general's office in today's military. The lawyer could be an NPC or could be played by someone who loves to orate (Daniel Websters and Sam Cogleys should apply).

The stats for a Star Fleet lawyer are listed in the sidebar below. JAGs are *not* line officers. They are eligible for department head training, but they would never go to command school and would never be in a position to command a starship or base.

With the board assembled, next comes establishing guilt or innocence. Referees have numerous options: Was computer evidence tampered with? How can suspicions be verified? Was the accused reacting to exterior motivation, such as drugs, mind control, blackmail—cosmic rays from space? Is it a Caine Mutiny situation? The possibilities are endless.

Remember that my Prime Directive rules are broad to permit characters freedom of choice. Such liberty may encourage cerebral solutions rather than brute force. Remember, the mission is to go boldly where no one has gone before, not to pillage the village. Ω

CONTACT TEAM PERSONNEL

In addition to the normal generated skills, an individual trained for and assigned to a contact team would possess the following:

Negotiation and Diplomacy	35
Social Sciences	2 at 20, 1 additional at 10
First Aid	20
Unit Security Procedures	20
Shuttle Craft Pilot	15
Physical Sciences	Add 10 to one
Personal Combat Armed	35
(archaic, various disciplines)	
Personal Combat Unarmed	30
Planetary Survival	Choose two climate types at 20 each
Bonus points of 1D10+2 each (round up to a minimum of 1 point) are added to Strength, Endurance, Intelligence and Dexterity.	

STAR FLEET JUDGE ADVOCATE GENERAL OFFICER

Intelligence bonus	+5, all cultures
Charisma bonus	+5, all cultures except Tellerites
Luck bonus	+10, all cultures except Vulcans, who only get a +5

For skills, in addition to regular Academy skills:

Federation Law	35
Federation History	25
Star Fleet Regulations	40
Administration	10
Computer Operation	30
Language	35 (divided among any three)
Any two cultures' laws	20 each
Any two cultures' history	15 each

Taming the Terrible Trivia

Most referees have limited time available to prepare for a gaming session due to jobs, studies, or families. Players and referees alike have limited time during a gaming session. By taming the trivia that often eats up much of a gaming session, you can have more fun in that limited time.

The first step in taming the trivia is to identify it. In my experience, the main trivia are (in no particular order):

- PC equipment lists.
- PC expenses and upkeep.
- Ammunition expenditure.
- Detailed combat results in mass combat.
- Unexpected (unprepared) NPC encounters.

EQUIPMENT LISTS

How many gaming sessions have you been to where the whole evening was spent selecting equipment for an expedition, buying it, writing out a list, deciding who would carry what? Too many, I'd guess. How many adventure movies or novels devote chapters to this kind of thing? None that I recall. Don't waste time on equipment lists; the only time it is worth looking at equipping the PCs in detail is when they are trying to acquire something so rare or so illegal that you can make the quest for it a short scenario in its own right.

I minimize the time spent on equipment by assuming that any PC has enough sense to take with him reasonable essentials like clothing, camping gear, etc. Usually at least one PC in a group has enough survival skill to advise the party what to take (assume he has done so). If your group doesn't have a PC like that, assign it an NPC to act as guide. If you want your PCs

to wander, lost and dying of thirst in the wilderness, don't make them list all their stuff and announce partway through the adventure, "You've run out of water, what now?" Be direct about it—have their vehicle destroyed and their supplies with it.

Likewise, assume PCs' vehicles have minimal tools, first aid kits, enough fuel, etc. In short, unless one of the key plot elements for your adventure is a shortage of something, assume they've got it.

This approach is especially helpful for the new player, who won't know what he needs as he doesn't know what the equipment does, but naturally doesn't want to forget anything vital.

Of course, occasionally there will be a disagreement; usually when you think it's unreasonable for a PC to have something with him, and he thinks it's perfectly reasonable. There's an easy way out: Have him roll an Intelligence task (the difficulty depending on how outlandish his desire is). If he succeeds, he thought of packing the relevant widget "just in case." If he fails, he forgot, or didn't think of it, or it fell off the hovercraft on the way because he didn't tie it on properly.

If a player is determined to take something unusual along with him, have him note it on his character sheet. I had one player whose characters took a spool of fishing line everywhere, whatever the scenario (after he'd been doing this for a year consistently, we just agreed that any of his characters would always have it available, and we both stopped writing it down).

Another step I take to minimize equipment hassles is to divide players' starting money by an appropriate amount—like 10 (less cash to buy gear means

less gear to keep track of, right?). Impoverished PCs are easier for the referee to keep under control, too.

EXPENSES AND UPKEEP

You don't really want to keep track of every last hotel receipt and drink tab the PCs have to pay. There's enough of that in real life. Take a tip from classic **Traveller**: Decide on a range of standards of living, each with a monthly cost, ask your PCs how well they want to live, and charge them the appropriate amount. Assume that this cost covers food, lodging, practice ammunition, and anything else you can't be bothered keeping track of.

If you want an even simpler technique, just assume that half (or all) of anything a PC gains on an adventure he will squander on food, drink and entertainment before the next scenario rolls around. This is how TSR's *Star Frontiers* game handles it.

An extension of this is to eliminate money altogether by making the PCs serving members of some military or paramilitary force, like *Star Fleet* in the *Star Trek* RPG. You assume that their salary exactly pays for their upkeep, so you can stop worrying about both. This is good for controlling equipment too; whatever the PCs need to do the job, *Star Fleet* will provide it, then repossess it at the end of the scenario.

Eliminating treasure and the search for it focuses the group's attention elsewhere, on roleplaying or character improvement—that can be an advantage or a disadvantage, depending on your players.

AMMUNITION EXPENDITURE

Do you keep track of every round fired by everyone? Why not say that running out of am-

munition is a mishap? Assume PCs and NPCs will reload when they get the chance. If someone rolls a 1 while shooting, roll a mishap in whatever manner is appropriate to the game system being used. A serious mishap indicates that the player needs to reload. Most battles your players are in won't last long enough for them to exhaust their basic loads of ammunition, so don't bother with how many magazines they have in their pockets; PCs have a thing about running out of ammunition and will have huge amounts about their persons. It may be worth keeping track of grenades and missiles because the PCs usually won't have many, but rifle bullets are not worth the effort. This is doubly true of NPCs who will usually be incapacitated before they need to change magazines.

Don't make the PCs buy ammunition, either. Include it in their living expenses, and make those high enough to reflect anything weird.

COMBAT RESULTS

2300 AD combat slows down drastically when there are more than a handful of characters on either side, or when people start flinging explosives around with gay abandon. Minimize this by not rolling for anything you don't have to roll for. For example, if PCs in inertial armor are attacked by grenades, there is no way the fragments can hurt them, so it's pointless rolling to see if they are hit by fragments, let alone where they are hit. Just worry them by saying after the fight that they notice a few shards of shrapnel that very nearly came through.

Several other ways to speed up **2300 AD** combat follow:

First, don't roll against the DPV of weapons fired by PCs to see if the wounds "convert" to

**Time-saving tips for referees
of 2300 AD, Star Trek, Mega Traveller and other systems**

the more serious type; assume that if an NPC gets hit in location 1 or 2 by something with enough poke to get through his armor, he's either dead or has developed a sudden lack of interest in the fight and is lying doggo. This will speed play by requiring only two die rolls per attack on an NPC (whether you hit and where) rather than three.

Second, be aware of the average results for things and use them wherever possible. For example, the PCs throw an EP: 2 grenade into a group of 10 Kafers. Assume the Kafers are all within a five-meter radius. Under normal circumstances, you're looking at 20 die rolls to hit (10 blast and 10 frag); four of the concussion rolls will result in hits, each needing a hit location roll (the blast has a high enough DPV to penetrate any Kafer armor, so there's no point rolling for damage); and six of the fragmentation rolls will hit, each requiring 1D6 hit location and damage rolls. This adds up to 42 dice rolls for one grenade! (And if your PCs fight Kafers the way

mine do, there will be more grenades queued up behind that one.)

Roughly speaking, one Kafer will die and one will be seriously wounded by the blast, and fragmentation will account for another half dozen or so killed or seriously wounded. Why not just roll 1D10 for how many Kafers the PCs' grenade takes out? After all, as referee, you have plenty more Kafers where these came from. One die roll instead of 40-odd is less likely to send your players to sleep.

UNEXPECTED ENCOUNTERS

If the players decide to talk to someone you didn't expect them to take an interest in and the encounter escalates into bribery or violence, it can disrupt the flow of the game drastically to stop and generate the NPC on the spot.

Instead, note down a few NPCs in advance to be used whenever the players do something like this. You need a name, some motivations, and an iden-

tifying tag (e.g., badly scarred, stutters, etc.—something to make the NPC stand out). You can then add the NPC's career or other details as necessary for the role he is to play, when you know what it is. I keep these NPCs on 3x5-inch cards in a box and draw one whenever the PCs talk to someone unexpected. As I keep all NPCs in the same box, the players are never sure which NPCs are part of the scenario and which ones are just accidental encounters. Whichever they are, when the PCs try to bribe, threaten or persuade the NPC, I can describe him and his reactions without breaking the flow of the game.

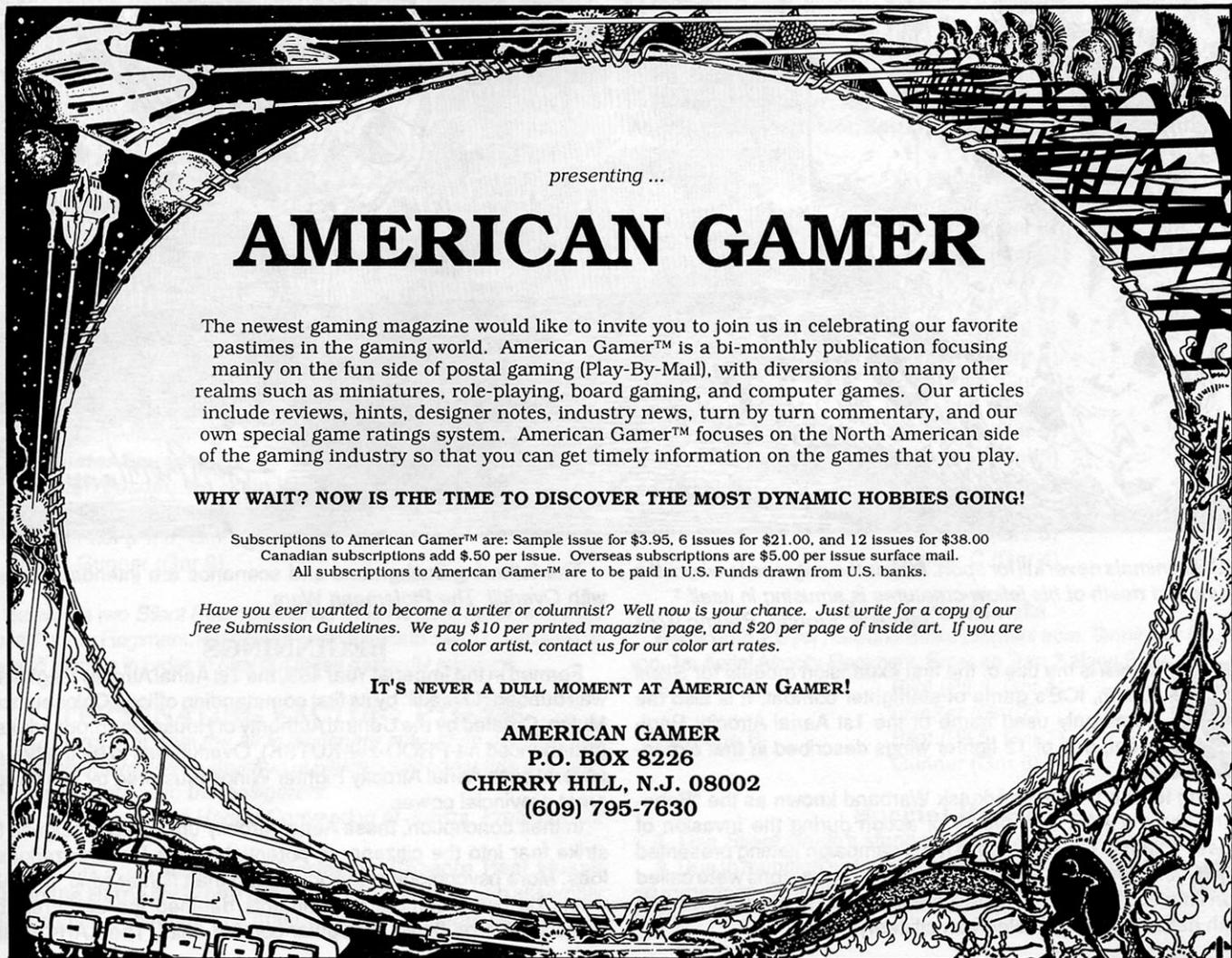
Remember too that in **2300 AD** the average PC is in his mid-30s or 40s by the time he enters the game and should already know some NPCs. I assume that each PC knows one major NPC for each turning point in his career, which I create and describe to the player. These may be allies, rivals, enemies, relatives, colleagues, or former lovers, depending on their motivations and

careers. These NPCs save you time because the PCs will tend to go to known friends for help and blame known enemies for misfortunes, so you have fewer detailed NPCs to create. As these NPCs are used again and again, they quickly develop detailed personalities and start giving you inspirations for scenarios.

If you have a lot of players, you can assume that they all know certain NPCs. This can also be used to explain why the PCs work together—they all work for NPC X, or perhaps they are all bent on destroying NPC Y (and vice versa, one assumes).

CONCLUSION

The above are specific tips for specific problems, but there is a general rule to apply to other cases. Both players and referee are trying to be storytellers; a good storyteller doesn't put anything into a story unless it develops one of the characters or moves the plot along. Don't you do it either! ☺



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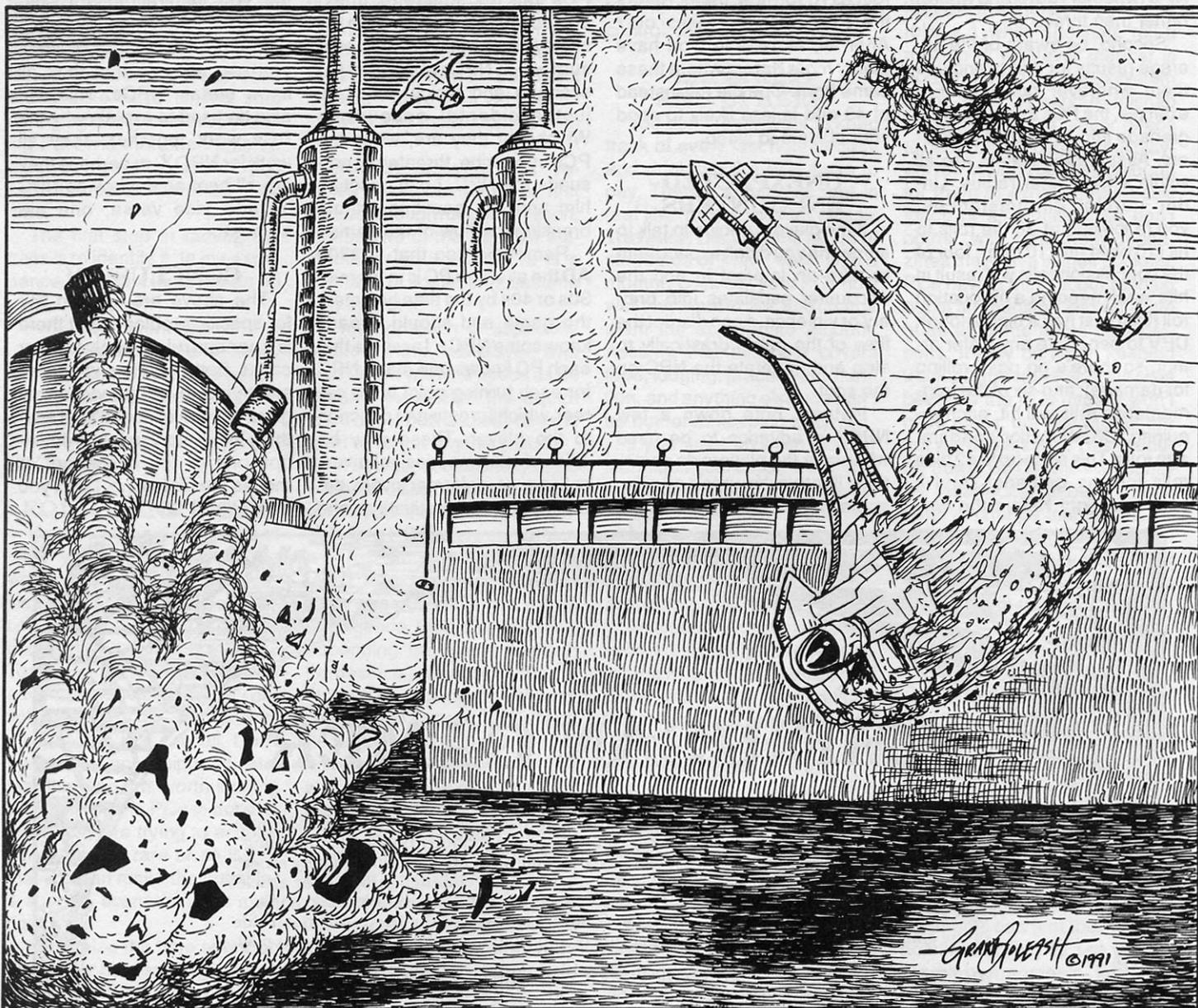
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A Time For Overkill

By Kevin Barrett



"Wild animals never kill for sport. Man is the only one to whom the torture and death of his fellow-creatures is amusing in itself."

James A. Froude, *PreImp* 9751

Overkill is the title of the first expansion module for *Silent Death*, ICE's game of starfighter combat. It is also the commonly used name of the 1st Aerial Atrocity Regiment, one of 12 fighter wings described in that expansion.

Flying for the Dneprodzerkutzk Warband known as the "Behemoth," the 1st AAR saw plenty of action during the invasion of House Ptolemus (*Silent Death's* main campaign setting presented in the *Overkill* module). Its three operational squadrons were called upon time and again to subdue bypassed points of resistance and crush defiant knots of Ptolemean citizenry.

The following background and scenarios are intended for use with *Overkill: The Ptolemean Wars*.

BEGINNINGS

Formed in the Imperial Year 459, the 1st Aerial Atrocity Regiment was dubbed "Overkill" by its first commanding officer, Colonel Aztar Mulgo. Created by the Central Authority of House Dneprodzerkutzk (pronounced ne-PROD-zer-KUTSK), Overkill was to be the first of several such Aerial Atrocity Fighter Wings mustered by this belligerent provincial power.

In their conception, these Aerial Atrocity units were designed to strike fear into the citizenry of potential House Dneprodzerkutzk foes. More psychological terror weapon than fighter wing, an AAR would be given combat assignments deemed too abhorrent or detestable to be flown by regular combat units. The AARs would

undertake such tasks as massed civilian bombardments, brutal anti-insurgency operations, genocidal missions, and attacks aimed at political figures intended to destabilize the command structure of opposing forces.

Overkill, like other AARs, was an all-volunteer force. The pilots, gunners and technicians of the regiment were fully aware of the operations they would be undertaking if sent to war. As bloodthirsty Dneprodzerkutzk warriors, they obviously reveled in the prospect of unleashing their weaponry for such treacherous means and dour ends.

INVASION OF HOUSE PTOLEMUS

Near the end of Imperial Year 474, two allied Warbands from House Dneprodzerkutzk, "Behemoth" and "Black Plague," invaded neighboring House Ptolemus. Their goal was to acquire a number of new, habitable worlds and therefore expand the influence of the Dneprodzerkutzk people.

Fully aware of the two warbands' invasion plan, the Dneprodzerkutzk Central Authority—overseer of all warband activities—granted them a number of combat formations. Among the numerous capital ships, transports, and supply vessels given by the DCA to Behemoth and Black Plague, the 1st AAR was also released for active duty.

Overkill was granted to the Behemoth Warband, which placed it in reserve, ready to be called upon when any "special" mission needed to be flown. The fighters and gunboats of Overkill saw action shortly after Behemoth's initial invasion of the Ptolemean White Star system.

OVERKILL OPERATIONS AT FAR STATION

In keeping with its intended purpose, Overkill was first used against civilian factory workers on the planet Far Station. The workers were actually producing and repairing military hardware for the star system's defenders while the battles for the planet raged overhead. Bombing factory complexes and the workers' domiciles, Overkill repeatedly proved its worth as an effective instrument of terror.

Following is a listing of the 1st AAR's assets with which it began the Ptolemean campaign:

OVERKILL SQUADRON SUMMARY (AS OF IMP 474:351)

Dominator Squadron

Squadron Leader: Urgi Asami (Plt 10, Gnr 3)
Assets: 4xSpirit Rider, 4xThunder Bird, 4xRevenge
Typical Pilot (Plt 6, Gnr 6)
Typical Gunner (Gnr 5)

Beast Master Squadron

Squadron Leader: Hama Vladomov (Plt 9, Gnr 9)
Assets: 8xPharsii II, 4xRevenge
Typical Pilot (Plt 5, Gnr 6)
Typical Gunner (Gnr 4)

Terminator Squadron

Squadron Leader: Yin Khun Wu (Plt 8, Gnr 7)
Assets: 8xEpping, 4xRevenge
Typical Pilot (Plt 5, Gnr 5)
Typical Gunner (Gnr 6)

Below are two *Silent Death* scenarios which feature Behemoth's 1st Aerial Atrocity Regiment. Players will need access to *Silent Death* and the *Overkill* module in order to play out these dastardly missions.

TERMINATING FACTORY PTO-236

"Bombardment from the air is legitimate only when directed at a military objective, the destruction of which could constitute a distinct military advantage to the belligerent."

The Hague Convention of Jurists, Prelmp 9722

Dispatch from Behemoth Warleader Chzecto Haal Mukak during the Battle for White Star: Far Station factory and assembly yards continue to repair and manufacture Ptolemean machines of

war. This must stop if we are to crush the White Star defenders and move on to our next objective.

I am authorizing the release of several fresh units from our reserve pool for immediate combat duty. Of these, I am assigning the task of civil Ptolemean worker suppression to the 1st Aerial Atrocity Regiment.

I am confident that our Dneprodzerkutzk Central Authority will approve. Victory is at hand.

SILENT DEATH

Behemoth vs. Ptolemus

Date: Imp 474:359

Location: Low orbit over Far Station Factory PTO-236.

Situation: With the battle for White Star reaching its climax, Ptolemean factory workers on the planet Far Station continue to churn out war materiel for the system's beleaguered defenders. In response, the Behemoth invaders call their Aerial Atrocity Regiment out of reserve and unleash its squadrons to destroy the Ptolemean starfighter factories and shipyards. This scenario depicts one such action by the 1st AAR's Terminator squadron against the defenders of factory PTO-236.

Forces

Ptolemean Player: Mixed units from the Far Station Civilian Defense Force: Set up first in Areas E and/or F.

Death Wind A Pilot (Plt 5, Gnr 5)

Gunner (Gnr 7)

Blizzard A Pilot (Plt 6, Gnr 5)

Blizzard B Pilot (Plt 5, Gnr 2)

Blizzard C Pilot (Plt 4, Gnr 3)

Pit Viper A Pilot (Plt 6, Gnr 7)

Pit Viper B Pilot (Plt 2, Gnr 2)

Behemoth Player: Alpha Flight from *Terminator* Squadron, 1st Aerial Atrocity Regiment: Set up second anywhere within two hexes of the map edge.

Epping A Yin Khun Wu (Plt 8, Gnr 7)

Gunner A (Gnr 9)

Gunner B (Gnr 8)

Gunner C (Gnr 8)

Epping B Pilot (Plt 7, Gnr 2)

Gunner A (Gnr 7)

Gunner B (Gnr 6)

Gunner C (Gnr 5)

Epping C Pilot (Plt 5, Gnr 5)

Gunner A (Gnr 6)

Gunner B (Gnr 5)

Gunner C (Gnr 5)

Epping D Pilot (Plt 5, Gnr 3)

Gunner A (Gnr 5)

Gunner B (Gnr 5)

Gunner C (Gnr 4)

Reinforcements

Behemoth Player: Ground Strike Element from *Terminator* Squadron, 1st Aerial Atrocity Regiment: Enter on Turn 2 along Edge 1.

Revenge A Pilot (Plt 8, Gnr 1)

Gunner (Gnr 7)

Revenge B Pilot (Plt 5, Gnr 1)

Gunner (Gnr 6)

Special Rules

1. Use *Silent Death*'s standard game map configuration.
2. Due to munition shortages, the Ptolemean Death Wind carries no torpedoes. The Blizzards are loaded with four standard Mk10s each.

3. The Behemoth player's Revenge fighters have had their Mk50 torp loads replaced with ground attack munitions (they are on their way to strike Factory PTO-236). Therefore, eliminate all torps from the Revenge displays.

4. The Behemoth player is allowed to exit his Revenge fighters from Edge 3—from there they will be moving on to attack Factory PTO-236. No other vessels are allowed to exit the playing surface.

Victory Conditions

At the end of Game Turn 6, the scenario is over, and the Behemoth player tallies up victory points according to the following schedule:

- +20 points for each Revenge exited.
- +5 points if the Death Wind is destroyed.
- +1 point for each Blizzard or Pit Viper destroyed.
- -1 point for each "t" hit taken on a Revenge Damage Track (Score -10 for each Revenge destroyed).
- -5 points for each Epping destroyed.

Compare the victory point total to the following outcomes:

- 40+ points: Decisive Behemoth victory
- 35-39 points: Marginal Behemoth victory
- 30-34 points: Draw
- 20-29 points: Marginal Ptolemean victory
- -(19) points: Decisive Ptolemean victory

Battlefield Report

Factory PTO-236 was one of many to be flattened by the Behemoth's 1st Aerial Atrocity Regiment during the battles over Far Station.

During this campaign, the 1st AAR members acquired their infamous reputation as cold-hearted killers since they often dropped heavy munitions on civilian worker dorms, as well as the production and assembly complexes their victims worked in.

TREACHERY OVER FAR STATION

"A people who are bombed today as they were bombed yesterday, and who know that they will be bombed again tomorrow and see no end of their martyrdom, are bound to call for peace at length."

Giulio Douhet, Prelmp 9724

Dispatch from Behemoth Warleader Chzecto Haal Mukak at the end of the Battle for White Star: The defenders of Far Station have been bombarded into submission and now, finally, wish to discuss the terms of their surrender. I am quite surprised. I thought they would hold out to the last.

Regardless, we cannot allow these few, who held out against our assault for a full month, to survive as prisoners.

What an example they would be to their fellow Ptolemean patriots.

To make an example of them, I will have their peace delegation destroyed.

Behemoth vs. Ptolemus

Date: Imp 475:030

Location: High orbit over Far Station, White Star system.

Situation: Beaten and cut off from other Ptolemean forces, the defenders of the White Star system sue for peace. As their escorted peace delegates approach the Behemoth flag cruiser, the Ptolemians are jumped by members of the 1st Aerial Atrocity Regiment.

Forces

Ptolemean Player: White Star peace delegation with escorts: Set up first in Area E facing direction 6.

Shryak Shuttle A	Pilot (Plt 3, Gnr 7) Gunner (Gnr 10)
Death Wind A	Pilot (Plt 10, Gnr 8) Gunner (Gnr 7)
Glaive A	Pilot (Plt 5, Gnr 7) Gunner (Gnr 6)

Blizzard A	Pilot (Plt 5, Gnr 5)
Blizzard B	Pilot (Plt 4, Gnr 5)

Behemoth Player: Strike elements from Beast Master Squadron, 1st Aerial Atrocity Regiment: Set up second anywhere within two hexes of the map edge.

Pharsii II A	Pilot (Plt 8, Gnr 6) Gunner A (Gnr 7) Gunner B (Gnr 6)
Pharsii II B	Pilot (Plt 7, Gnr 5) Gunner A (Gnr 7) Gunner B (Gnr 6)
Pharsii II C	Pilot (Plt 5, Gnr 2) Gunner A (Gnr 5) Gunner B (Gnr 3)
Revenge A	Pilot (Plt 5, Gnr 1) Gunner (Gnr 7)
Revenge B	Pilot (Plt 4, Gnr 1) Gunner (Gnr 7)

Special Rules

1. Use *Silent Death's* standard game map configuration.
2. All fighters are armed with standard torps.
3. The Ptolemean player is allowed to exit his fighters from any map edge hex bordering Area J. Behemoth vessels are not allowed to exit the playing surface, and Ptolemean vessels may not exit from any other area.
4. It is recommended that rule 10.7, Torpedo Defensive Systems, be used during this scenario.

Victory Conditions

At the end of Game Turn 6, the scenario is over, and the Behemoth player tallies up victory points according to the following schedule:

- +20 points for each Ptolemean vessel destroyed.
- +5 points for each Ptolemean vessel left on the map with a Drive value ≤6.
- -8 points for each Ptolemean vessel which has exited the map.
- -10 points for each Behemoth vessel destroyed.

Take the victory point total and compare it to the following outcomes:

- 90+ points: Decisive Behemoth victory
- 40-89 points: Marginal Behemoth victory
- 30-39 points: Draw
- 20-29 points: Marginal Ptolemean victory
- -(19) points: Decisive Ptolemean victory

Battlefield Report

In a blatantly treacherous act, the Ptolemean delegate ship (the Shryak Shuttle in this scenario) was destroyed by fighters of the 1st Aerial Atrocity Regiment.

This overt act of barbarism was condemned by most members of the Imperial Senate, but seeing as the Dneprodzerkutzk-Ptolemean dispute was being treated as a localized House-to-House war, little more than an official rebuke was brought against the Dneprodzerkutzk leadership.

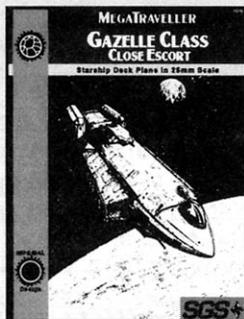
The event did, however, galvanize Ptolemean resistance in other besieged star systems.

The 1st AAR went on from White Star to do battle at Dios Provanis, Aneb-Het and Lebanstar. But as casualties among Overkill's crewmembers and craft mounted, and the entire Behemoth offensive began to falter, the Dneprodzerkutzk Central Authority recalled its Aerial Atrocity Regiment for a refit. Actually, this was just an excuse for the DCA to remove the 1st AAR from front-line duty.

Having been released from Behemoth control, Overkill was free to return to House Dneprodzerkutzk space and avoid complete annihilation.

The 1st Aerial Atrocity Regiment was never returned to the Behemoth Warband's control. Ω

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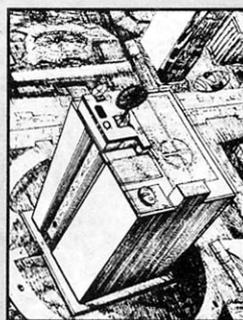


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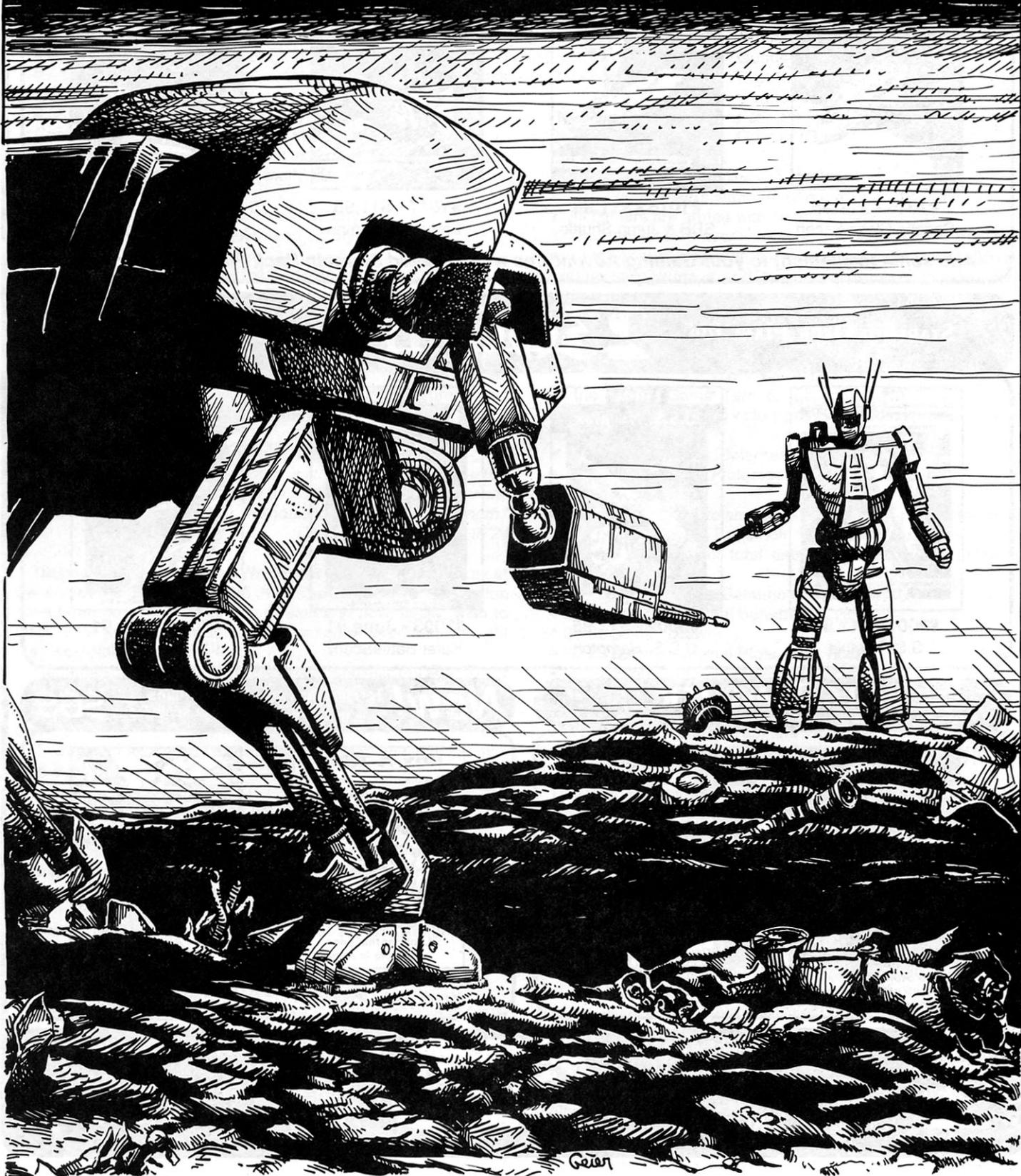


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The Warriors' End

A 'MechWarrior Roleplaying Table

By James Beane



H

ave you ever wanted to add a little spice to your *BattleTech* games? Or wanted to have your players start out on leave, but didn't know where to start them from? Well, here is your answer.

Gard is a small, neutral planet (really more of an asteroid) ideally located in the Inner Sphere, giving access to all the Houses. No 'Mechs or military vehicles other than those belonging to the Gard government are allowed there.

Gard has many shops that sell used 'Mechs and other equipment, as well as employers looking to hire characters for various missions.

The biggest attraction on Gard is The Warriors' End, a very large bar. Well known throughout the Sphere, it is frequented by warriors from all parts of known space—whether mercenary or House troops, they all come here to find fun and excitement.

The Warriors' End occupies nearly four acres of land. Characters may rent or buy a vehicle from the starport, or take a cab to the bar (the latter may be preferable as the parking facilities are nearly always packed).

A dedication plaque at the bar's entrance reads: "To all the gallant 'Mech Warriors, Scouts, and Troopers who lose their lives every day and show up here at The Warriors' End."

Inside, visitors' senses are assaulted by an abundance of sights and images. The air is filled with a heavy blanket of smoke and a unique odor of something known only as the "Pit." A band plays loudly somewhere, while waiters and waitresses push their way through the crowd carrying trays of food and drinks. Game rooms are filled with holo-games, a casino is off to the left side, and tables fill the center of the room. To the right is a long bar, stretching for nearly 1000 feet. Patrons are all dressed in combat dress, and all have sidearms.

When your characters enter the bar, roll on the Encounter Table every 30 minutes (roll once for each group if the players decide to split up).

ENCOUNTERS

01-05: Waitress Slaps Character: Waitress slaps male character for becoming fresh (whether he is guilty or innocent). She screams loudly, turning all attention in the bar toward him. She then proceeds to pour his drink, or any on her tray, on his head, then storms away. The entire bar erupts in laughter and returns to its business.

06-20: Employment Offer: A finely dressed man offers the characters an employment opportunity. (This is where the referee can introduce his adventure.)

21-30: Gamble: The players are approached by an NPC who asks if they would like to play poker, blackjack, or one of many

other gambling games going on at the bar. Use the Gambling skill described below.

31-50: Pit: The players are challenged to go a few rounds against an opposing Warrior from another unit or House over the Pit. The Pit is a nauseating, 50-foot-deep, garbage-filled hole in the center of the bar. The loser is the first one knocked off the three-foot-wide footbridge and into the pit. Combat is with six-foot-long wooden staves. For any blow resulting in a hit, the fighters must make a Dexterity saving throw in order to stay on the bridge. The first one that does not make the roll falls into the pit. If both fighters fail the roll, both are thrown off balance and sent hurtling into the pit. The winner is then the one who has the highest Dex out of the two who fell in (he is able to hang on for a few seconds longer). The prize for the winner is 2000 C-Bills and a dozen free drinks.

51-60: Brawl: A brawl occurs between two rival groups, soon throwing the entire bar into a knock-down-drag-out fight.

On a roll of 01-30, the characters are arrested by the local police and must post a 40 C-Bill bail plus 100 C-Bills to cover damage. If they refuse to pay, they will be left in jail for two weeks or until the fines are paid.

On a roll of 31-70, the characters receive injuries in the fight and need 30 C-Bills worth of medical attention.

On a roll of 71-00, the fight erupts into a firefight, and the characters either get out of the bar or duck into a corner.

61-75: Ghost Encounter: An overly talkative 'Mech Warrior, Scout, Pilot, or Trooper (wearing battle dress, outdated combat clothes or clothes that have numerous tears), asks the PCs to buy him a drink. When the character goes to the bar to order, the bartender jokingly remarks on how well the character talks to himself. If the player orders "a drink for me and my new friend," the bartender will ask, "What new friend?" When the player turns to look, the person he was talking to is gone.

The bartender will explain that this bar is often the site of ghost sightings—that is the reason for the plaque outside. The players will rarely get useful information from the ghosts that show up at the bar—most of the ghosts will describe the last battle they were in, up to the point where they were killed, then will disappear. The ghosts simply want someone to talk to, unless a ghost was killed by one of the players—then he may try to get him in trouble.

76-84: Arm Wrestling: A warrior from another House or unit challenges one of the players to an arm-wrestling match. On a roll of 01-50, it will be for sport; on a roll of 51-00, it will be for 10 C-Bills. To resolve arm wrestling, average Body and Dex for each contestant. The character with the highest average wins the challenge. If the player

BATTLETECH

wins, on a roll of 01-80, the loser walks away without saying a word, paying the winner if it was for C-Bills. On a roll of 81-00, the NPC becomes angry, saying that the player cheated. This could come down to a rematch or to an all-out fight.

85-90: Holo-Game: A warrior from another unit or House challenges the character to a holo-game. If the player is a 'Mech Warrior it will be a holo-game of one-on-one 'Mech combat. If the player is a pilot, it will be a holo-game of a one-on-one dogfight. A total of 20 players may be accommodated in one game for an all-out battle of different forces. The players are allowed to type in the names of their 'Mechs, current condition, etc. for an exact duplicate of their 'Mech on the holo-screen. Simulations are available for 'Mechs, aerospace fighters, infantry (all three types), armor, aircraft and waterborne vessels. On a roll of 01-60, it is a challenge for 30 C-Bills. On a roll of 61-00, it is a challenge for 50 C-Bills.

91-00: Fight: Warriors from an opposing House or unit try to start a fight with the players, either by hitting them or insulting them. On a roll of 01-80, the fight is a melee, unless the characters escalate to weapons. On a roll of 81-00, the fight starts out as a melee, with the opposing group drawing weapons before the players can. Run it using normal melee and ranged combat rules.

GAMBLING SKILL

Gambling: LRN Based, Skill Level 0 is automatic.

All characters know something about gambling in some form or another. Cost is the same as for other skills. This allows the players to roll against their characters' Base Skill. Roll Target as found in *'Mech Warrior Roleplaying Game*, page 10.

For example: 'Mech Warrior Andrews has Gambling 0 and a LRN of 8. He would need to roll an 8 or better on 2D6 to win at a single hand of poker. If he rolls below 8, he loses that hand and whatever C-Bills he bet. Then a new round starts.

Each player makes a Gambling skill roll twice—those making both win the hand. If two players should tie with both rolls, the hand is a draw, and the pot (bets) remains on the table. A new hand begins, and new bets are placed into the pot. The winner of this hand claims the pot unless another tie results between the two players. ♠

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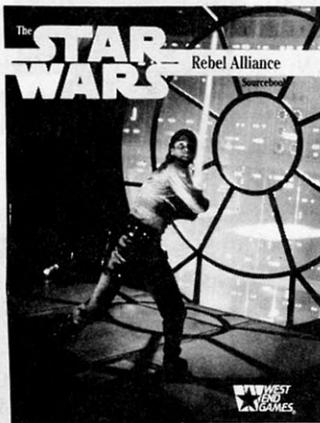
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Rebel Alliance Sourcebook review by Craig Sheeley.

Empires for Rent review by Eric W. Hadcock.



Star Wars Rebel Alliance Sourcebook

West End Games.

\$20.00.

Designer: Paul Murphy.

144-page hardbound sourcebook.

When the *Imperial Sourcebook* came out, everyone knew it was only a matter of time until the companion piece for the Rebellion hit the stands. Almost a year later, it finally appears for the edification of *Star Wars* players and referees alike.

Like the *Imperial Sourcebook*, the *Rebel Alliance Sourcebook* outlines the purpose, history and organization of the subject matter in great detail. Also included are chapters on the tactics and units used by the Alliance. The book starts, appropriately enough, at the beginning, illuminating the origins and controversies of the birth of the Alliance. There is even a formal declaration of Rebellion included for those who like to add a little color to their dry background histories. An overview of the current Alliance "government-in-exile" finishes the history section.

Further chapters feature arms of the Alliance, such as the Alliance Intelligence network, complete with basic primer on espionage activities. (For those who read of the triad espionage cell structure in Robert A. Heinlein's *The Moon is a Harsh Mistress* but didn't quite comprehend it, a slightly improved model of that structure is diagrammed here.) The Alliance military is examined, with the bulk of the chapter dedicated to

details of upper-echelon administration, chains of command and the like. Throughout the chapters, a sample sector command of the Alliance, the Atrivis Sector, serves as a specific example of the general organizations presented in each chapter. Because of the NPC profiles for the sector, it seems to have been the author's design to give referees an Alliance setup for campaign play.

The second half of the book is used for describing the combat environments Alliance forces fight in. One chapter discusses capital ship and fleet combats (with a deck-plan map of the blockade runner, the ship Princess Leia was using at the beginning of *Star Wars*). Another chapter covers starfighters and their battles, while a third details simple ground combat tactics and typical ground equipment. The closing chapters discuss the Alliance's use of 'droids, Alliance bases, and Alliance support and training.

Like other *Star Wars* products released by West End Games, this sourcebook is a stunning example of good physical quality. Internal illustrator Allen Nunis does a masterful job of supplying good illustrations that are nearly comic-industry standard—I wonder what he could do with color? The cover is a brilliant photo from *The Empire Strikes Back*, with Luke "at bat" against Darth Vader's telekinetic pitching. The interior diagrams are lavish and easy to follow, even through some of the tricky maneuver diagrams for starfighter tactics. The real armed forces should be so lucky as to have this quality. As for the game material, Rebel players will be happy to see the selection of new ground vehicles—at last, something with which to fight those darn AT-STs!—and variably priced and powered blaster weapons, ranging from 3D+1 pistols to 5D+2 rifles and a large selection of grenades.

As usual, the grenades are hideously overpriced, as per the original designers' fear of the game becoming a grenade-fest. Even a section on Rebel artillery and sensors helps beleaguered player characters, if they can get their hands on some of the hardware.

FLAWS

Alas, that covers everything good about the sourcebook. On the whole, it is a dull treatise on administration and organization, largely bereft of the gaming material usually considered necessary for a game supplement.

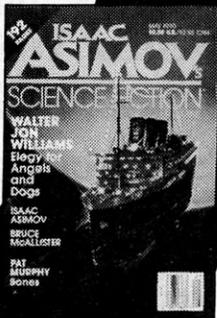
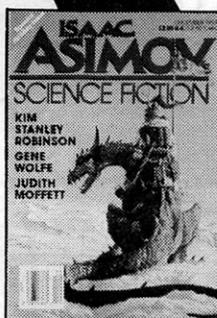
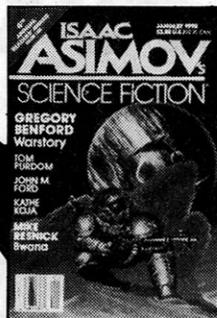
As I read it, I found three principal flaws.

Not Enough Gaming Material: Perhaps a dozen pages of actual gaming statistics

could be pieced together from the bulk of the book. Instead of approaching the sourcebook from the view of players and referees, the author wrote it as a pocket outline of the Alliance, the sort of thing that might be found in an intelligence file. The data on the various administrative bodies and chains of command is well thought out. But it is fairly useless to the average referee and is just the sort of thing the average character despises—most citizens would just as soon not know about the bureaucracy that orders them about. As a scholarly tract, or from an Imperial officer's point of view, the book would be interesting—as interesting as the *Imperial Sourcebook* would be in the hands of a Rebel general. At least the author didn't fall prey to the excessive fascination with tables of organization and equipment and myriad military arms that seized the author of the *Imperial Sourcebook*. Perhaps the lack of fixed organization within the Alliance prevented this.

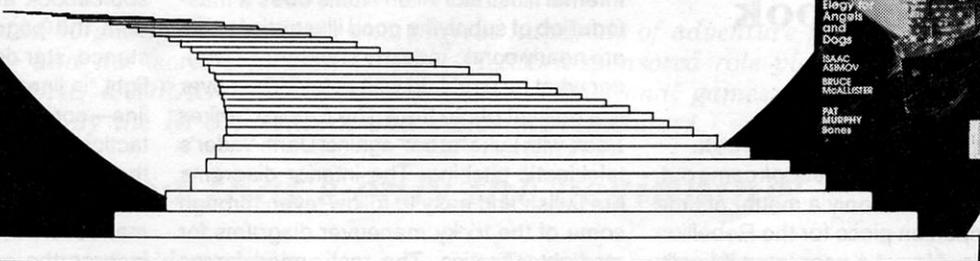
History Repeats Itself: The situations, strategies and tactics discussed in this sourcebook are all archaic, taken straight from the pages of history books. For instance, star destroyers and Rebel cruisers fight "in line," like old wooden ships-of-the-line—complete with ancient and suicidal tactics like the "line-breaker," here called the Ackbar Slash. The author has these half-mile ships pinned to two-dimensional maneuvers in close order. He conveniently ignores the common sense of the space environment that was so surprising in the *Star Wars Sourcebook*. He even ignores the information on capital ship combat presented in the *Star Wars Rules Companion*. Starfighters use common prop-fighter tactics, old since WWII. Considering the close-maneuver combat of the movies, with common electronic warfare barring use of homing missiles, this is acceptable. The ground tactics suggested remind me of the lectures given to the British Home Guard, preparing for the never-realized German invasion in 1940: Try anything—it might work. The Battle of Tiems, illustrated as an Alliance victory, reminds me of battles of the Napoleonic era, complete with lack of battlefield intelligence, aerial assistance, artillery support or flank-ing maneuvers.

Original and Published Source Material Ignored: The author seemed to have certain set ideas about capital ship combat and was not deterred by evidence or rules to the contrary. As I noted earlier, the author borrowed his capital ship tactics from history, contradicting the rules in the *Star Wars Rules Companion*. In the capital ship com-



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bat section, a diagram illustrates the star destroyer as having no weapons that can fire under the massive battleship. This must have been a shock to Princess Leia's retainers during the first five minutes of *Star Wars*, as clearly half the fire directed at the blockade runner came from the belly of the star destroyer pursuing them. And fleet dispositions in *Return of the Jedi* don't support the two-dimensional "fleet line astern" idea described in the book. The *Star Wars* series may not have the bulk of source material available to the *Star Trek* or *Dr. Who* universes, but there is source material to be used in books concerning it.

EVALUATION

The *Rebel Alliance Sourcebook* is a high-quality essay on the Alliance, its goals and its organization. If dry background material is what you want, this is it. If you want game material and adventure assistance, save your money and buy a couple of *Star Wars* adventures.

Empires For Rent

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P.O. Box 080003

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In this play-by-mail game, each player attempts to gain control of a certain part of the galaxy called the Zeta Cluster. This is done by essentially three methods: taking over sectors in space with your ships, destroying other players' ships in combat and allocating your investment points wisely.

The game map contains 225 sectors arranged in a 15x15 grid that represent the playing area in the galaxy. You start with a few sectors, and by investing in them, you produce more ships that can occupy more sectors of space. As a sector is taken over, its production value is added to your overall production value; the player with the highest production value and the greatest number of sectors under his control wins the game.

STRATEGY

This game is fairly straightforward. Most of the strategy involved concerns the position of the sectors you control compared to where everyone else is. Early in the game, it's easy to take over the sectors that surround your initial starting territory as there's no one to oppose you. But, as everyone else expands, you quickly find yourself having to consider competing with someone over the same sector.

This leads to combat between ships. The only strategy in combat is making sure you

have more ships going into the contested sector than your opponent. Combat is essentially a war of attrition—the more ships, the better. Each sector has a defense value of its own, which represents natives fighting for their homes, but this can't be counted on to win battles. It's up to you to win the fights.

There's no control of individual ships other than assigning which sector they go to. No ship has a name or identity; they are all just numbers in a sector box. Each sector produces a certain amount of ships, and that number can be increased by investing in that sector.

A map is provided each turn which shows how many sectors you own and how they are positioned in the 15x15 grid of the 255 sectors. You also have the opportunity to spy on a few sectors—this is the only way to determine what's there short of blindly moving an expeditionary fleet into it, and blind moving (once the game has been under way for a few turns) to send a small unsuspecting fleet of yours into an enemy armada.

It's extremely important to know the rules and have a strategy as early as possible in the game. Eleven other people are competing for a limited number of sectors, so you've got to move quickly!

ALLIANCES

Players can ally with each other to the degree that they become teams in the game. You can trade Investment Points with others, and your ships won't attack an ally's ships. The number of people allowed on a team is limited to three, but the number of times you can switch alliances is unlimited. There are three levels of alliance, which represent the degree to which your races are cooperating with each other. If mutual alliance levels are high enough, you and your allies are considered to be a team in the game.

INVESTMENT

This is the key to the game, as it's essential to keep your production high. As you send more and more ships into combat and fewer return, it's necessary to replace them as soon as possible. The more you invest in a particular sector, the more ships it will produce.

Each sector also produces a certain number of Investment Points (which can be considered money). You can spend them to increase the ship production of a certain sector, increase the native defenses of a sector or invest in a sector's own industrial facilities so it produces more investment points.

Or, to prevent other players from investing effectively, you can attempt to sabotage a certain sector to bring its production value down.

After spending all these Investment Points, it's easy to wish you had more. You can borrow up to a certain amount of IPs from GOLF (Galactic Organized Liberation Front), a shady NPC organization that makes loans at substantial rates of interest.

STORY

There's really nothing to the background of this game—the introduction of the setting is only a paragraph long. Those who play are looking to send ships into combat and kick other people out of sectors, not relish a rich story or the intricate, changing plot of a roleplaying PBM.

In fact, the only thing which saves this story from complete dryness is the fact that you can be any one of seven different galactic races. Each race has its own set of attributes which are relevant to the game. Each of the races is given a rather detailed explanation and history, but none of the characteristics described necessarily apply since each race is played as the person running it sees fit.

OTHER PLAYERS

Dealings with other players are anonymous. No one knows the name, nor is there a public handle, for the other people in the game. Everyone is just known as a number from 1-12.

Alliances can be either public or private. Each player has the opportunity to make public messages each turn, which are printed on each turn form for all to read.

ACCOUNTING

Much of this game boils down to accounting. You keep track of numbers, and that's about it.

Each sector has eight numbers assigned to it: its number on the map, how many ships it produces to the owner, industrial rating (a number from 1-3 which represents how much of a return you'll get if you invest IPs into it), the number of the player who owns it, how many IPs it produces, its native defense rating, native population (for how many IPs you must invest to keep the sector alive and going), and how many ships—both yours and other players'—are in the sector.

GAME TURN

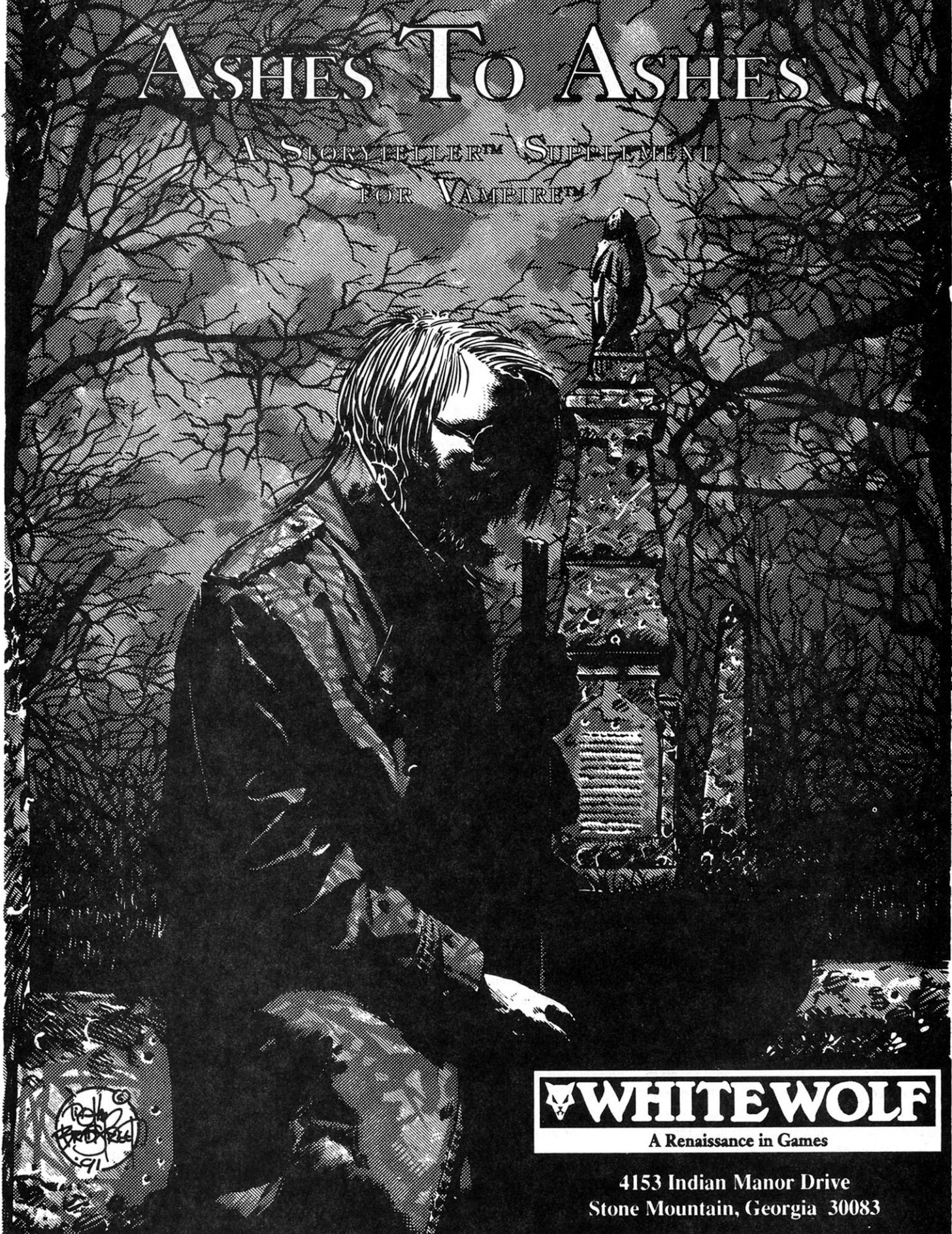
Turns are seven main phases, each with a number of subphases. The turns are logical in structure and very easy to understand.

Filling out the turn sheets is a quick and simple process, and the mechanics of this game are very straightforward.

I spent by far more time deciding what to do than I did looking up rules or trying to figure out how the game worked. The challenge comes from dealing with other players, not the game itself.

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GAME MASTERS

The GMs of this game were extremely cooperative when I thought there was a mistake in the game. It turned out that I was at fault, but I'd like to emphasize that BPE was very gracious in resolving the problem.

If you forget to mail in your turn sheet in time, you can call BPE before the deadline and phone your turn in.

Although this isn't considered a standard method of handing in your turn, it can be used in emergencies.

There were some rules changes during the game, but they weren't anything drastic that undid my whole strategy. There were also a couple of delays of a few days while the turn sheet was redesigned and produced by a laser printer, but this was only a minor inconvenience.

EVALUATION

I would recommend this game for its strongest attribute: extreme ease of play. I looked forward to each turn sheet to find out what battles were successful and to see how many—if any—sectors I had taken over or lost.

It's a game that's on the strategic scale, so there's some dryness as far as lack of individuality and story background is concerned. It's not an RPG, either, so don't expect a fabulous fairy land in which you pilot a ship in a space opera. But I found the game to be, on the whole, enjoyable.

Even though there are a lot of numbers to keep track of, they are very well organized both on the turn sheet and on the map you get with every turn. You know exactly where you stand at all times in the game, yet there's suspense in not knowing exactly what the other players are up to.

And since you can only spy on a few sectors, you can't know what's just a few sectors away.

There's also enough diversity in the game to maintain interest. How you spend your IPs can be more important than where you put your ships. You need to spend money on maintaining your sectors as well as building more ships, and you can spend money on a variety of economic strategies.

Empires For Rent is billed as a "grand strategic space game," and I would recommend it as it has a good, easy blend of battleship strategy and economic planning. Ω

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Feedback Results for Challenge 49

Pennsylvania Crude (Twilight)	3.9
Maps (Twilight)	4.0
Julian Protectorate (MegaTraveller)	4.1
The Dam (MegaTraveller)	3.2
Lances, Not Lasers (MegaTraveller)	3.4
Thymiamata: 1889 (Space: 1889)	3.4
Operation Back Door (2300 AD)	3.8
Wrecking Zone (Cyberpunk)	3.6
Inferno (GURPS)	2.4
Abaddon (Star Trek)	3.0
F.I.L.T.H. (Paranoia)	3.5
Dandrian's Ring (Star Wars)	3.3
Wuj (Renegade Legion)	3.2
World Generation (Morpheus)	2.6
Cowabunga! It's the Beach	4.2
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This issue's cover art	4.1
This issue's interior art	3.9
This issue as a whole	4.1

We look forward to hearing your feedback on this issue.

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