Special Horror Issue

CHALLENGE 46

The Magazine of Science-Fiction Gaming

US $3.50
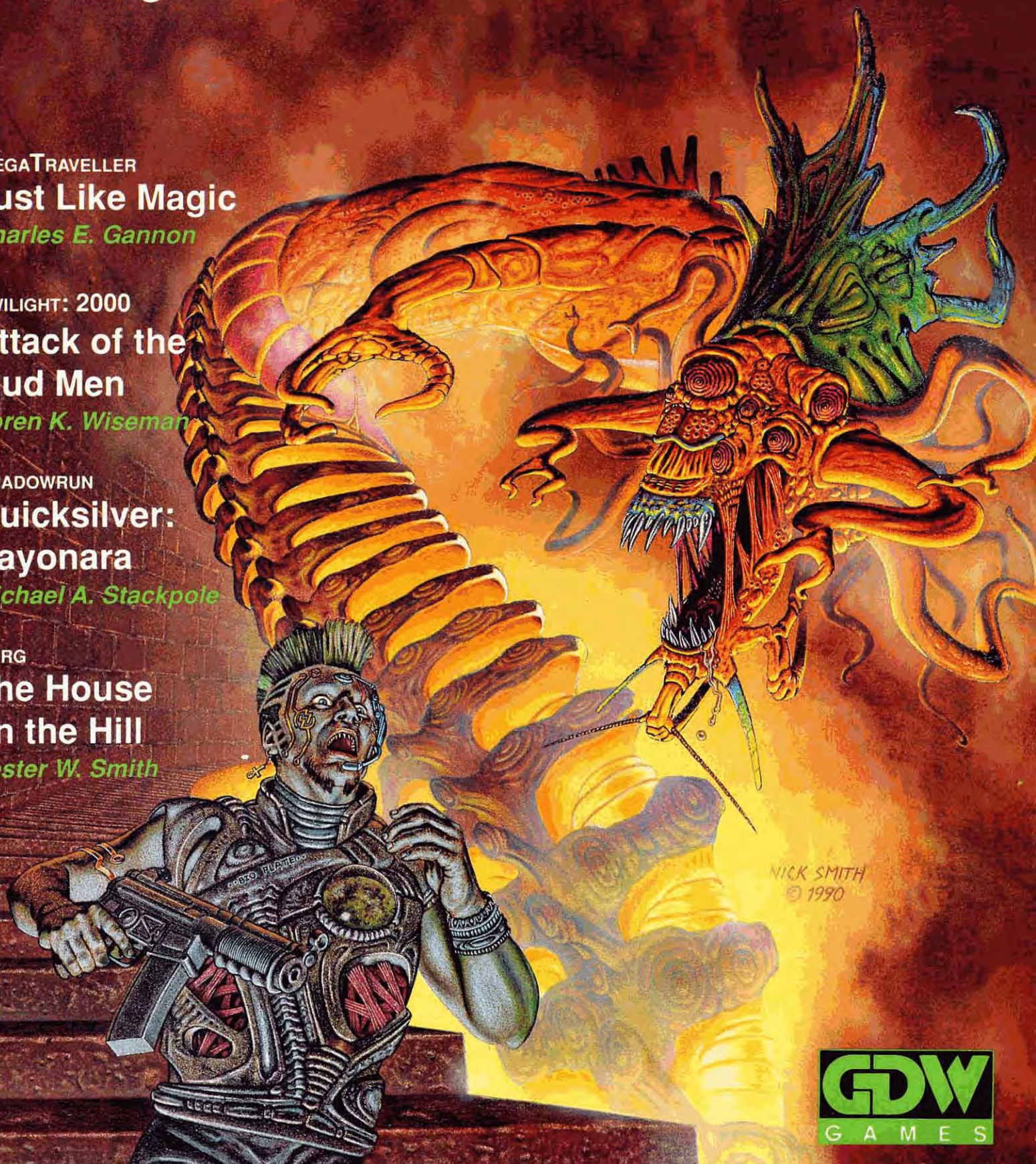
NICK SMITH
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GDW
GAMES

BUCK ROGERS

BOOKS

HAMMER OF MARS
The Martian Wars Trilogy — Book Two
M.S. Murdock

REBELLION 2456
The Martian Wars Trilogy — Book One
M.S. Murdock

ARMAGEDDON OFF VESTA
The Martian Wars Trilogy — Book Three
M.S. Murdock
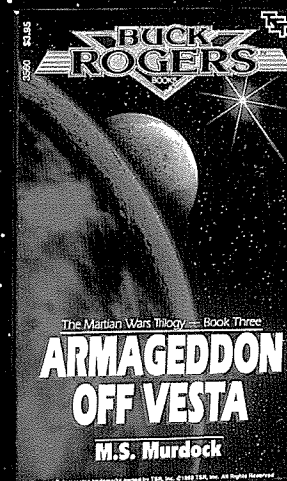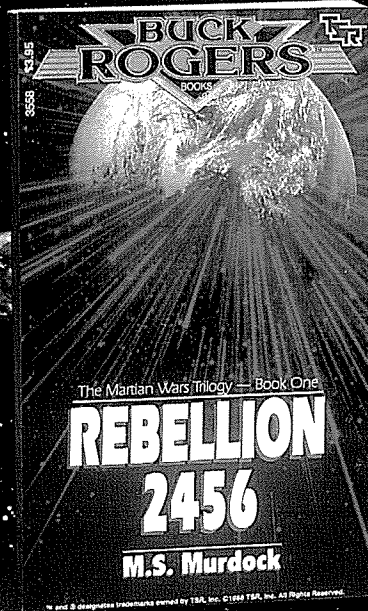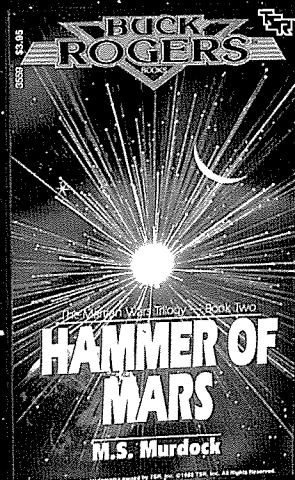
STEP INTO THE WORLD OF TOMORROW

In Book One of the Martian Wars Trilogy, **Rebellion 2456**, Buck Rogers joins NEO, a group of freedom fighters dedicated to ridding Earth of the controlling Martian megacorporation RAM. NEO's initial goal is to gain enough of a following to destroy RAM's Earth Space Station. The success or failure of that mission will determine the success of Earth's rebellion.

Available now at your local book or hobby shop.

In Book Two of the **Martian Wars** Trilogy, **Hammer of Mars**, Buck Rogers ignores threats from RAM and continues riding on the wave of NEO's recent victory. When Buck Rogers goes to Venus to strike an alliance, RAM makes good on its threats and sends its massive armada against a relatively defenseless Earth.

Hammer of Mars will be on sale at your local book or hobby store in September 1989.

Martian troops speed to Earth in unprecedented numbers, in Book Three of the **Martian Wars** Trilogy, **Armageddon Off Vesta**.
And the survival of the planet Earth depends on on Buck's negotiations with Venus . . . but even as Venus considers offering aid to Earth, Mercury is poised to attack Venus!
Relations among the inner planets have never been worse. And Buck Rogers has never faced a greater challenge!

Armageddon Off Vesta, the exciting conclusion in the **Martian Wars** Trilogy, will be available at your local book or hobby shop in November 1989.

TSR, Inc.

About the Cover

This issue's cover features artist Nick Smith, who wanted to write his own cover description:

Our fashion-conscious merc, Randy, is sporting the latest organically grown body armor* from the fine folks at Gigerwear Ltd.

BIO PLATE® comes in a variety of decorator colors—black, flat black, glossy black, blue black, dark black, light black, not-quite-so-dark black (medium black), black with black highlights and fuchsia. Surfaces include the popular textures Slime Coat™ and Liquid Fur™.

*Muscle tissue not included.

CHALLENGE
The Magazine of Science-Fiction Gaming

Twilight: 2000

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Loren K. Wiseman

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Charles E. Gannon

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Robert J. Cosgrave and Michael B. Cosgrave

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Richard S. McEnroe

Features

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Letters from our Readers

I hope this special horror issue of **Challenge** adds a few thrills and chills to your Halloween season.

Theme issues aren't new with **Challenge**—you might remember our equipment issue (40) from last year. But our way of looking at special issues has changed dramatically over the past year.

The first school of thought was that a special issue must arduously stick to the topic at hand. With that idea in mind, the equipment issue listed piece after piece (after piece, after piece) of equipment.

Our aim now is flexibility. We want a special issue to have an exciting governing theme, but with no limits imposed within that particular theme. For example, if we ever do another equipment issue, I'd like to see new pieces of equipment, plus adventures bringing the characters into contact with equipment they've never seen before, plus variant rules for creating new equipment or adapting old equipment to new uses, etc.

In order to achieve this flexibility, we first need a topic that is at once exciting, specific, and open to a wide variety of possibilities. I think horror as a theme achieves just that. We've covered a wide range of topics for a variety of systems, but the unifying theme pulls the whole piece into a nicely integrated whole.

Special themes planned for upcoming issues include:

● A locations issue (49), with a special At the Beach (swimsuit) supplement.
● And a solitaire issue (52).

I'd like to know what you think about our horror issue, as well as special issues in general. Fill out the feedback response sheet on page 96, or just drop us a line with your comments and ideas. Enjoy!

TWILIGHT

I think you are doing a great job. Since I subscribed to the magazine mainly for the **Twilight** articles, I was wondering if it was possible to have at least one **Twilight** article in each issue, with a new **Twilight** weapon in each issue as well. I was also wondering if you could have more *Battletech* articles.

Brent Williams
Northville, MI

COMPUTER GAME

I let my subscription run out, but I think I'll renew it since your magazine's on the right foot again. I was very impressed when I skimmed through issue 43. It seems very hard to get a group together and have a decent session of **MegaTraveller**. I don't have much time since I have two jobs. As a result, playing on computer would be great (I don't have to be the referee, which just gets me stressed out and depressed). I'm really anxious to get ahold of a copy of *The Zhodani Conspiracy* game for the Macintosh Plus.

Allen Hopkins
British Columbia, Canada

VIOLENCE OVERRATED

I discovered your magazine while traveling down under and thought I would drop you a line telling you what I thought of it.

Basically, I think it's a great magazine. I buy it principally for the *Star Trek* articles, but I've been adapting a number of **2300 AD** adventures for use in my *Star Trek* campaign.

I realize that you have great difficulty making all of your readers happy, but please don't cut back your coverage of *Star Trek* and **2300 AD** (in particular, cyberpunk). I find that almost all of your adventures are useful enough to be converted to other systems and hence find the adventures far more valuable than the reference material.

The only thing that strikes me as completely worthless is the collection of **Twilight: 2000** scenarios. If I may challenge your editorial staff on a point, I do not believe that the genre of science fiction requires violence and chaos to be interesting; this is why I play *Star Trek*. The concepts that define the *Star Trek* universe (the two series, if not, to the same extent, the game) suggest that there is something better than all-out war. The conflicts that one deals with in a well designed *Star Trek* campaign are moral in nature, not physical.

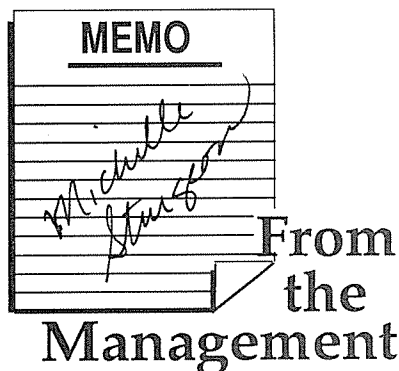Timothy B. Brown, in his editorial of **Challenge 41**, suggested that games without combat are uninteresting and that games have no peaceful applications. He uses this point to prove that science fiction gaming is dependent on violence. Might I suggest that most game designers haven't had the practice (one might say the creativity) to make noncombat interesting.

But such games can exist. Look at *Call of Cthulhu*; although destroying monsters is an important part of the game, research (gads!) is almost equally necessary and can be more fun. Further, *Cthulhu* amazes me because it cultivates an environment where combat is feared by the players.

I will not go so far as to say that roleplaying combat is not fun; I merely wish to suggest that other options exist—science fiction gaming need not involve chaos.

In light of this, I found the *Star Trek: The Next Generation* parody from **Challenge 42** to be almost offensive. Parts of it were really quite funny, but I think the article's premises about the new series are incorrectly founded. Its criticisms of the show are satirical, but also contradictory. For example, it claims that the new series is quite sexist. But then it goes on to say that men aren't "real men" because they avoid fights and bursts of anger. Now who is perpetuating stereotypes here?

Issue 43 was quite enjoyable. You seem interested in the effect of your cover art; I would like to suggest that your **Space: 1889** covers have a fascinating visual effect. Issue 43 is a good example—one's mind does flip-flops trying to reconcile the Victorian architecture with the science fiction motifs. Really striking.

The "Secret of the Ancients" article was nicely thought out and catered to a very real need. I have been in the position of having to think on my toes more than I cared for, but by adapting this article and keeping it for future use, I will get to avoid that feeling at least once. This is the type of article that I really appreciate—a fairly straight-forward adventure with few initial requirements that is easily adaptable to other systems. Congratulations to the author, Lester Smith. By the way, I really liked **Deathwatch Program** (also by Smith).

Also the "Stardate Chronology" in **Challenge 43** was greatly appreciated. I have been tearing my hair out trying to figure out how to reconcile the FASA timeline. This is a well researched article. Sadly, some of the material is already outdated (we know more about the *Enterprise C* from the episode "Yesterday's *Enterprise*"), but because it dares try to fit the original series' stardates into one consolidated timeline, it is worth occasional patching.

I'll sign off now, with the comment that most articles in 43 were useful and that because of the overall quality of your magazine, you've netted a new regular reader.

Brian Holmes
Ontario, Canada

Attack of the Mud Men

Loren K. Wiseman
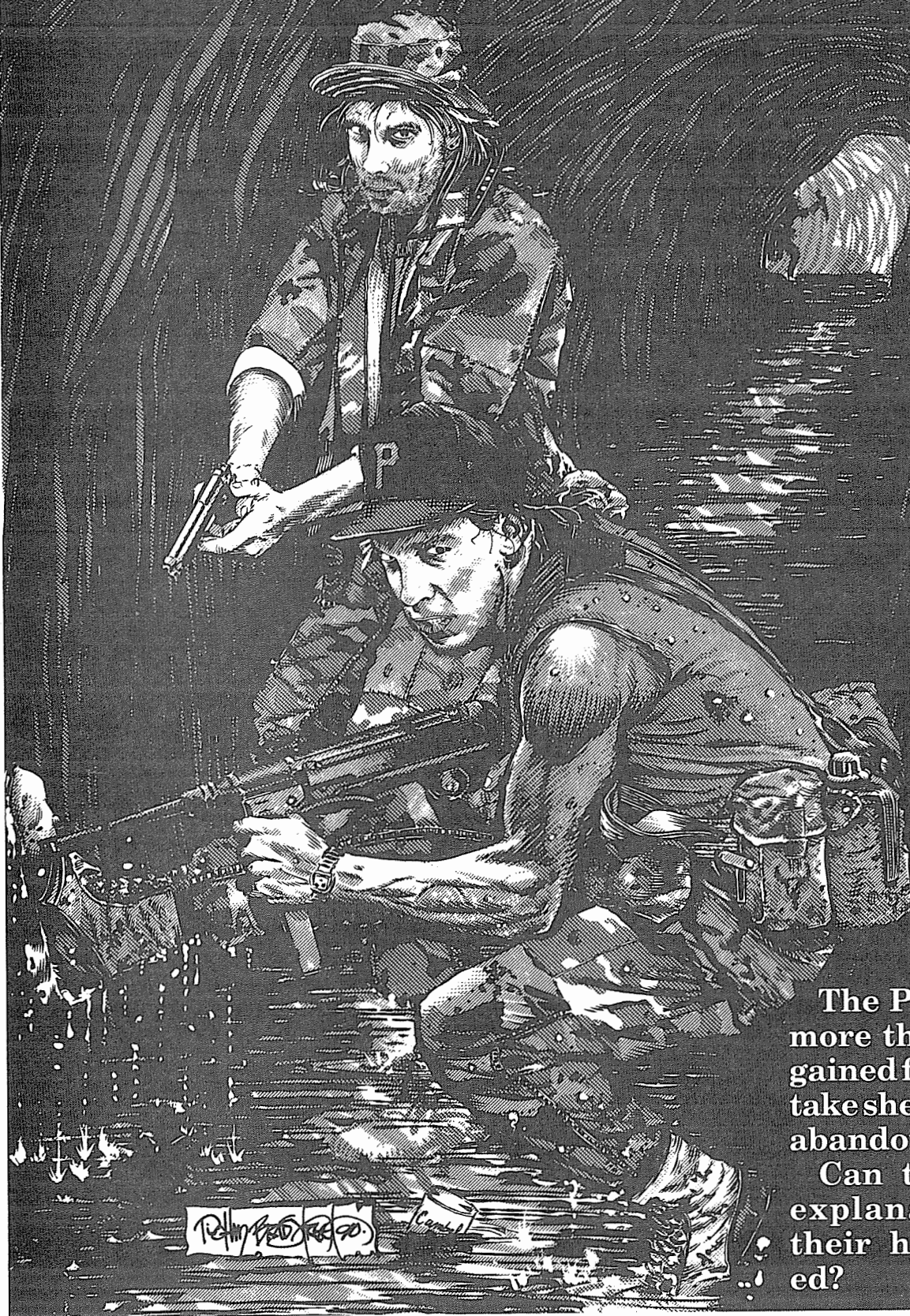
The PCs are in for more than they bargained for when they take shelter in an old, abandoned house. Can they find an explanation, or is their haven haunted?

I thought it was never going to stop raining—Anderson said we should lay to and start building an ark. It had finally let up, and the streams were starting to go down a bit, when we got to the city. We were all soaked to the skin.

I didn't see a sign, so I don't know which city it was. Not that I care much anymore. One abandoned mountain of rubble looks pretty much like all the others these days.

We spent a couple of hours scoping things out and looking for a dry place to sleep. It was that time of year when the clouds are constantly in the sky, and you never know when the rain'll start again. Like as not it'll be what my grandma used to call a "toad-drowner," one of those drenching down-pours that seem to explode from the sky.

The house was one of those old brownstone-like buildings that seem to be everywhere in the older residential sections of every city I ever went through—not much on any one floor, but they're several floors high. Me and Jersey drew the short straws, and we had to scope the place out to see if it was safe.

I did the upper floors. The walls and roof were in pretty good shape, and while the windows were mostly gone, the place still had shutters and doors. Ground floor was a mess, but the rest of the floors were dry.

Jersey checked out the basement. He said that it was full of mud and the only way into it was from inside the house. I wish that smog-brain had been paying attention—it would have saved us all some trouble.

Many people have become mentally unbalanced by the trauma of the war, and the few of them who survive have reverted to a primitive existence of foraging, scavenging, and theft. Primitives might be viewed only as a nuisance but can represent a real threat. This encounter is an expansion of a situation presented in the Twilight: 2000 second edition, and also covers how to administer underground/extensive interior adventure situations in subways, mines, caves, railway and highway tunnels, and the like.

APPROACH

The characters have taken up temporary shelter in an urban area infested by primitives (perhaps after encountering the primitives earlier in the day and frightening them off). After inspecting the building, they determine that it is safe enough to inhabit for a night or two, and they take a few precautions (post a couple of sentries, etc.). Unfortunately, the characters have overlooked the importance of a cistern in the basement—unbeknownst to them, it connects to an old storm drain catchment basin, which leads to a sewer and into a labyrinth of underground tunnels, subbasements, drains, and sewers.

MAP DESCRIPTION

The map shows a building being used by the characters as a temporary shelter.

The walls are in good shape. The windows are without glass, but those on the bottom floor are fitted with bars (this was obviously done before the war), and those on upper floors still have intact shutters (evidently added after the war, judging from their workmanship).

The building is old, with a wooden floor (partially collapsed in some places) and a basement. Transients have obviously passed through several times, and anything of value has long since been hauled away (the heavier plumbing fixtures will still be in place, but the water supply was cut off some time ago). The basement is filled with mud and debris, along with the usual collection of household junk. It has been flooded for days and has only recently drained, so everything is covered with a thick coating of mud, and pools of water are everywhere. If the characters wish to inspect the basement carefully, they should be allowed to do so, with the referee emphasizing the smelly, slimy, disgusting aspects of the site. Locating the cistern's manhole is a task, Average: Observation.

Cistern: A cistern is a catch basin for rainwater, used in older buildings before city plumbing systems brought a reliable supply of water. In some places where the city water supply was hard, cisterns continued to be used as a source of soft water for laundry and other washing purposes. In any case, the cistern in this building has not been used in years, although the access manhole has remained in place. If the PCs move the manhole cover and shine a light into the cistern, they will find it full of water to within a foot or two of the basement floor. Only if the PCs remain watching several minutes will they see that the water level is gradually dropping.

It is best not to draw undue attention to the cistern, and no greater amount of descriptive detail should be lavished on it than on other aspects of the basement.

Underworld: The maps of the underground tunnels are presented in segments which the referee should photocopy and lay out as the characters move through them. When they enter one section, the area behind them (out of their range of vision) should be taken up. In this way, the PCs will never have a good idea exactly where they are. The referee may select underground sections at random or lay them out in advance. The referee should make a note whenever a map section indicates that the PCs have travelled up or down another level, and should keep track of how far beneath the surface the characters are (some map sections can only be used below a certain level). When the characters find themselves at level 0, they have successfully made it back to the street and have "won" the encounter

REFEREEING THE ATTACK

After nightfall, when most of the characters are asleep, the group of primitives will infiltrate the building through the cistern. The water level underground has been dropping for hours, and many of the underground tunnels in the neighborhood are now free of most water.

The primitives will be more interested in stealing things than in killing, and thus will not risk attacking the sentries except in self-defense. They will do their best to sneak from room to room, picking up food, weapons, loose clothing, and other items.

Upping the Ante: The intention is to give the players a good reason to have to venture into the mazes after the primitives when the primitives themselves or their handiwork is discovered. One possibility is for the primitives to steal some vital equipment or a package of medical supplies. Another alternative is to have the primitives kidnap a member of the group and haul him bodily into the tunnels (for a purpose best left to the imagination). This ploy is not well suited to all situations, however, especially if there is no convenient NPC to be the victim (PCs should not be used as kidnap victims as the player involved would have very little to do).

After Them!: When the PCs have followed the primitives into the underground, they should be led on a merry chase, then allowed to recover their property or their friend. The group, now in all likelihood hopelessly lost in the labyrinth of tunnels beneath the streets, can be led through a harrowing adventure finding their way back to the surface.

PRIMITIVES

The referee will need to play the part of the primitives during the jaunt through the underworld. Depending on how nasty the referee wants this scenario to be (it can provide comic relief or a frightening interlude), the nature of the primitives should vary from eccentric to deranged.

They should outnumber the party by one or two individuals, and consist of Novice or Experienced NPCs led by a single Veteran. All should be armed with melee weapons (clubs, knives, etc.) unless they have managed to steal more potent weapons from the PCs. They will be covered with mud and slime, and will present a wild, bestial appearance which should be emphasized by the referee to heighten the tension of the encounter.

INTO THE UNDERWORLD

The maps with this article show the cistern, its connection with the sewers, and a variety of map sections intended to be assembled according to the referee's decisions. All sections

Sewer/Tunnel Complex

Copy and assemble the sections of map to form a sewer/tunnel complex of the desired extent. *Referees are granted permission to photocopy this page for private use.*

The Down and Up markers are intended to be cut out and placed in any location desired.

The cistern access man-hole is indicated by a dark circle in the basement. Referees should cover up this notice before copying this page to avoid tipping off the players to its location.
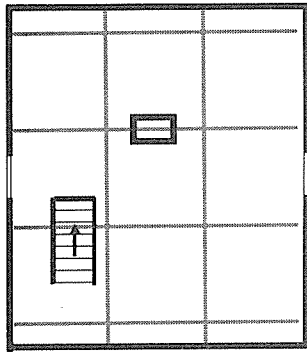
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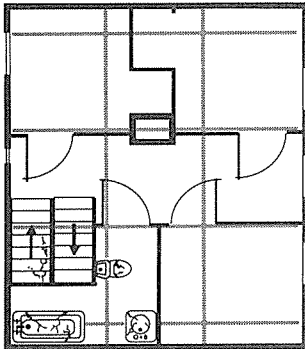
Second Floor
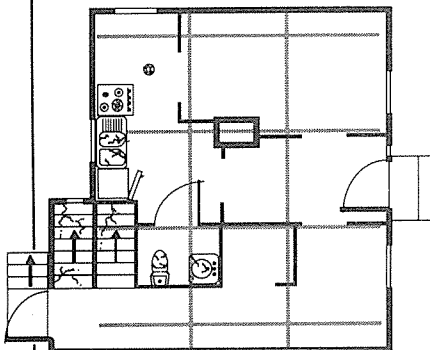
First Floor

Basement

● Down   ○ Up
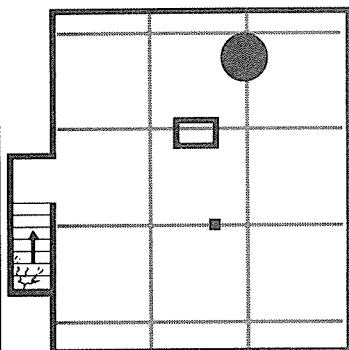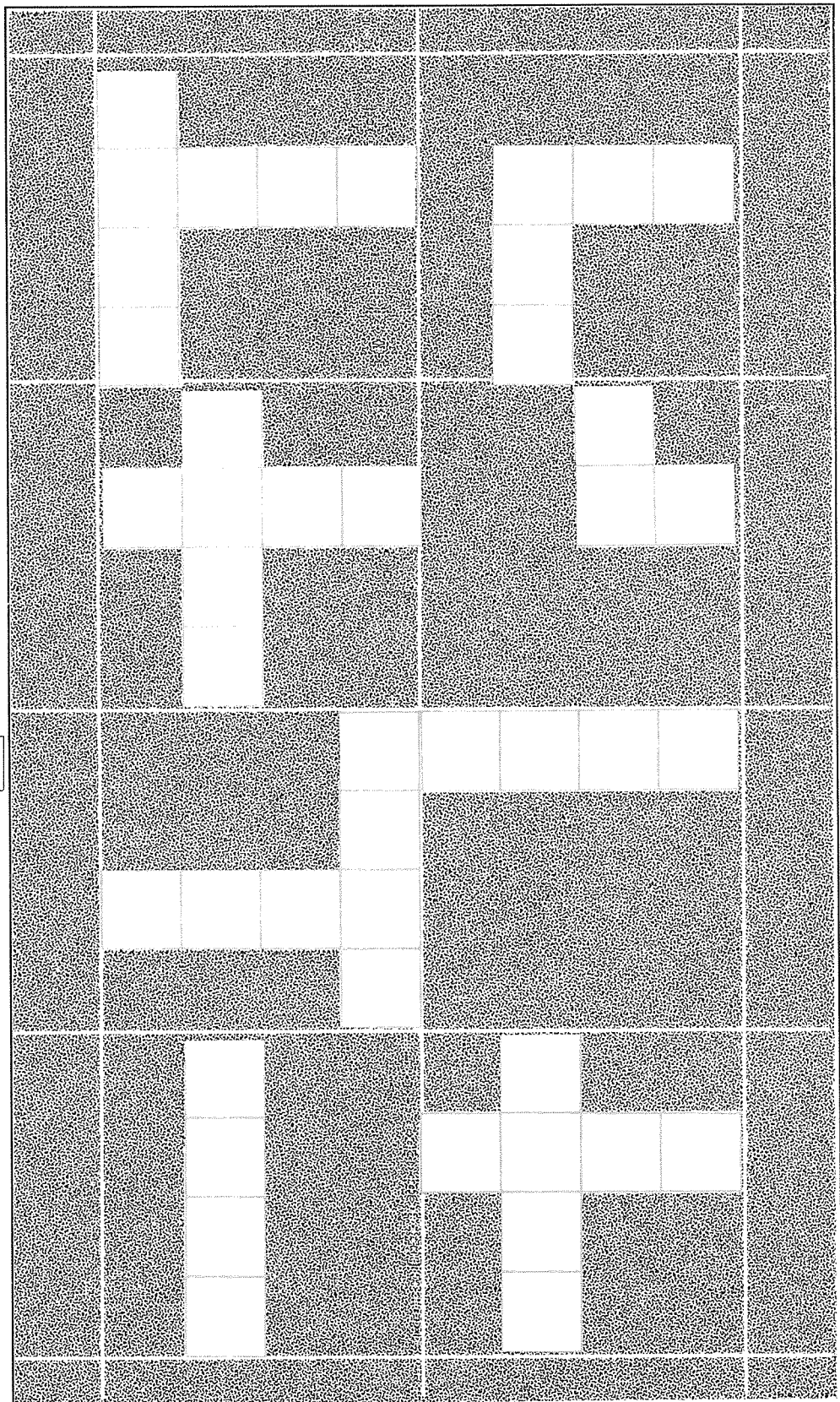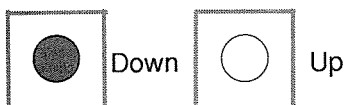
are at least two meters wide, and they will never be filled with water (although they should all have some water in them, the depth varying from a few inches to a meter or so). The referee may use encounters with bats, rats, bugs, or other animals to add to the atmosphere of imminent peril.

Surfaces inside the tunnels can be concrete, masonry, cast iron, or stone. Any or all of these can be covered with mud, water, slime (and other undesirable substances)— or be completely dry.

Illumination: It is pitch dark underground, except for the first few meters of tunnels leading to the outside (lit by sunlight unless the PCs enter—or exit—after sundown). Additional illumination may be provided by lamps, torches, candles, or flashlights. Characters without light cannot see and will have to feel their way along very slowly to avoid walking into walls or stumbling over slight irregularities in the floor. Flashlights provide good illumination for about 10 meters (beyond that it becomes almost impossible to distinguish details). Flashlights also throw very strong light along a narrow cone, but cast very poor light in other directions, illuminating an area five grid squares long and one wide. Torches and candles provide good illumination for a radius of four squares and two squares, respectively. Matches and cigarette lighters provide weak light for one square in each direction for only a short time (even lighters eventually become too hot to hold). There is a 50-50 chance that any given character has a cigarette lighter. Every player character can have a small supply of matches (each MRE contains a book of water-resistant ones).

If the players do not have flashlights or some other light source, they can make torches from readily available materials before going into the catacombs. A torch will burn for about 30 minutes, and takes about five minutes to make.

Referees should exploit the effects of poor or flickering light—in such light, it is easy to imagine things. People may think immobile objects are moving, or may see things that are not there (a bundle of rags can look like a dog ready to leap, and a shadow or pile of rocks can look like a crouching man).

Sounds: The referee should also take advantage of the auditory aspects of being underground. Is that scrabbling sound the characters hear a rat running away, or some unspeakable horror sneaking up on them? Noises made by rats, dripping water, or echoes of the PCs' own voices can be exploited to add to the rising crescendo of panic. Remember that noises propagated through a maze of tunnels can seem to come from all directions, and auditory hallucinations are as possible as visual ones. For instance, if a person is listening intently and expects to hear footsteps, he may interpret a faint sound (such as distant dripping water) as footsteps.

Time and Movement: When underground, the referee should use the five-second combat phase as the basis of time. Players may move at any speed they are capable of but run the risk of not being able to see. A character running in total darkness could slam into a wall or trip over something (imagine closing your eyes and sprinting through an unknown building). A player character can feel his way cautiously along in total darkness at the rate of about one to two meters per phase. With a torch, match, lighter, or candle, a character cannot go too fast for fear of extinguishing it, and should not move faster than three to five meters per phase. With a flashlight, a slightly faster speed could be maintained. Speed should be halved on wet surfaces, quartered on muddy or slimy ones.

Navigation: The PCs will probably want an accurate map of the labyrinthian tunnels as they explore them. Unless they are willing to carefully measure every step and record it, they should not be given one. Part of the tense atmosphere of this scenario is derived from the PCs not knowing exactly where they are, and this should be reinforced by the referee.

COMBAT

Armed and unarmed attacks are conducted according to the standard rules. Fire combat requires one or two special considerations.

Underground Fire Combat: The referee should limit the players to small arms and hand grenades underground. Any firearms used underground have a chance of hitting something by ricochet (except shotguns—the pellets do bounce, but lose power so swiftly that they are unlikely to do damage). Certain hand grenades used underground may cause a cave-in. Also, gunfire or explosions in an enclosed area can be painfully loud (this last effect may be implemented by the referee if desired, perhaps causing stun damage without the prior necessity of a head wound).

Ricochet: If the PCs fire their weapons in the underground catacombs, the bullets will ricochet. For every shot from any firearm (other than a shotgun) that does not hit its target, roll 1D10. On a roll of 1, the shot hits another target (chosen at random among the people in the area).

Explosions: Any explosion in the catacombs can cause a tunnel collapse. Basically, any explosion more powerful than small arms fire (including grenades—except for nonexplosive types such as chemical or smoke) set off in the tunnels may cause a cave-in (roll a 1 on a D10). A cave-in covers an area for three meters on either side of the explosion with rubble. It may totally block the tunnel (1D10 for 3 or less); otherwise, the tunnel is only partially blocked (i.e. characters may crawl through). Escaping a cave-in is a task—Average: Agility. Failure means the character takes 6D6 damage points to a random hit location (reroll on a result of "head"). The referee may wish to assign the hit location based on a character's position and location when the cave-in occurs. Catastrophic failure means the character is killed (or is critically wounded, if the referee is feeling merciful). If a character is killed in a cave-in, his equipment is considered crushed beyond use.

Other: Other facets of underground combat may come up (the spread of gas from a grenade, for example) that are too complex for consideration here. Such things must be adjudicated by the referee as circumstances dictate. Ω

TWILIGHT: 2000

STEVE JACKSON GAMES' new releases include *GURPS Fantasy Folk, GURPS Fantasy Bestiary, Autoduel Quarterly, Roleplayer 20, Aeroduel, Roleplayer 21, GURPS Horror second edition, Autoduel Quarterly* and *GURPS Martial Arts.*

CYBERPUNK 2020 is now available from R. Talsorian Games. This second edition of the hit roleplaying game of the dark future features faster, simpler combat systems and new weapons, enhanced character creation and background, and new cyberware (including bioware and nanotech, new cyberweapons and enhancements). Plus Netrunnnning 2020 (new programs, abilities and cutting-edge technology in an exciting new Net, and Welcome to Night City (a complete guide to the mean streets of 2020). Compatible with all *Cyberpunk* materials. No. CP 3002. $25.

MERC: 2000, a December GDW release, presents a more conventional environment for **Twilight** adventures. The world never went over the brink of thermonuclear war in 1995, but the small border wars and petty conflicts continue. Terrorism, revolutions and small "brushfire" wars present a ripe climate for soldier-of-fortune adventures. **Merc: 2000** uses the basic **Twilight** character generation, task resolution, and combat rules, but provides a new environment—a more "civilized" world, but not a less dangerous one. Scenarios include mercenary missions/campaigns, industrial espionage, drug cartel raids, hostage rescues, intelligence gathering, and more. Detailed coverage of antiterrorist and special forces throughout the world, including (but not limited to) the Delta Force, Special Forces, SEALs, SAS, SBS, and GSG9. **Merc: 2000** opens new vistas of adventure for dedicated **Twilight** players and continues to build on the best combat roleplaying system in the world. GDW: 2005. $16.

WEST END'S releases include *The Secret Society Wars Adventure* (for *Paranoia*), *Iris Coordinates* (*Star Wars* adventure), *The Dark Realm* (a novel for *Torg*), *Imperial Troopers* (miniatures set for *Star Wars*), *The R&D Catalog* (for *Paranoia*), *The Nile Empire Sourcebook* (for *Torg*), *The Possibility Chalice* and *The Forever City* (installments in the *Relics of Power* trilogy), *Jedi's Honor* (a standalone product), and *Vulture Warriors of Dimension X* (*Paranoia* campaign pack).

GUNSLINGER, the game of modern jet combat 1950-1975, will be available from GDW in November. American jets have met and fought the Soviets in two places in the skies of the world—Korea and Vietnam. **Gunslinger** (which is based on the award-winning **Air Superiority** game system) provides dozens of scenarios pitting American planes against the Soviets in an easy-to-play air combat game. Boxed. GDW: 0442. $30.

AMERICAN COMBAT VEHICLE HANDBOOK from GDW supplements and extends the basic vehicle listing provided with the 2nd edition **Twilight: 2000** rules. More than 60 vehicles are represented (only 11 repeated from the basic game), ranging from the latest variations on the M1 Abrams to the M42 Duster 40mm self-propelled antiaircraft vehicle. Vehicles include four versions of the Bradley IFV, the M151 Jeep, M42 Duster, M551 Sheridan, M728 CEV, M48A3, M88 ARV, M109, M110, and many other vehicles in current or recent service with the U.S. Army, as well as three prototype combat hovercraft and two experimental laser air defense self-propelled artillery vehicles. Plus eight pages of color plates. No **Twilight** aficionado or modern vehicle fan will want to miss it. GDW: 2003. $12.

THE WRESTLING theater of the absurd is now a tongue-in-cheek card game. *Wrasslin'* is a quick-playing strategy card game from The Avalon Hill Game Company that simulates the rough and tumble world of professional wrestling. Wrestlers of varying size, skill and disposition wreak havoc upon one another by playing various hold cards to batter their opponents senseless en route to a quick fall or submission. For ages 10 and up. $15.

FROM ICE for October are *Demons Rule* (*Hero* product), *Bladestorm* (*Cyberspace* support), *Organized Crime* (family boardgame), *Space Master Companion I* (sourcebook), *Adventurers Club No. 17*, and *IQ Issue No. 10*. Other new products include *Champions in 3D, Death Game 2090, Overkill: The Ptolemean Wars*, and *A. McBride's Characters of ME*. ICE is celebrating the tenth year since its incorporation. For a complete listing of products available this summer, write to ICE, PO Box 1605, Charlottesville, VA 22902.

AT YOUR DOOR, a campaign of madness and terror in the days to come, is now available from Chaosium Inc. *At Your Door* is a new set of modern-day adventures for the *Call of Cthulhu* roleplaying game. It contains six linked *Cthulhu* adventures forming a campaign set in the 1990s. This is an excellent book for players new to the *Call of Cthulhu* roleplaying system—the effects of the Mythos are generally subtle, and confrontations with nigh-invincible powers are few. 130 pages. No. 2326. $17.95.

BARD GAMES, in association with Jovialis, announces the *Cyclopedia Talislanta* Volume VI, *The Desert Kingdoms*. This book pierces the veil of secrecy around the Holy Nation of Rajamistan, revealing the societies of the five Rujan Death-tribes: the Rajanin, Shadinn, Aramuts, Virds, and Zagir. To subscribe to Bard Games' free Talislanta newsletter, or if you have any questions or comments, contact Black Savant, c/o Bard Games, PO Box 7729, Greenwich, CT 06836.

KILL TED! is a new card game from Blue Panther Enterprises. The object is to kill Ted. The first person to accumulate 300 points in the process also wins the game. It's violent! It's exciting! It's quick! It's violent! It's easy to play! It's pointless! It's violent! It's new! It's a card game for three or more players! It's violent! It's on sale! It's very satisfying! But most of all, it's violent! Write to Blue Panther Enterprises, Box 080003, Staten Island, NY 10308-0009. $10.

SOVIET COMBAT VEHICLE HANDBOOK, an October release from GDW, supplements and extends the basic vehicle listing provided with the 2nd edition **Twilight: 2000** rules. More than 60 vehicles are represented, ranging from the T-80 and T-90 MBTs to the T-34 of WWI and post-WWII vintage. Vehicles covered include T-55, T-62, BA—64 Armored car, multiple variants of BMDs, BMPs, BTRs and BRDMs, as well as several experimental vehicles, including combat hovercraft, an electromagnetic rail-gun testbed, a binary-propellent tank gun, and other high-tech weapon systems. Plus eight pages of color plates. **Soviet Combat Vehicle Handbook** presents an opportunity no **Twilight** aficionado or modern vehicle fan can afford to pass up. GDW: 2004. $12.

INTRIGUE is a play-by-mail game of interstellar political conflict. Special game

features include political attacks, maintenance costs, free battle reports, free bi-monthly newsletter, secret racial sheets, computer moderation, fast turn-around time, and three different space movement technologies. Write to White Lion Enterprises, PO Box 188, Wood-Ridge, NJ 07075. $10 for startup package, $2 for rulebook only.

THE SOUTH ATLANTIC WAR, GDW's new **Harpoon** supplement, covers the Falklands conflict in detail. A chronology of the war is presented, along with both British and Argentine orders of battle and chains of command. Scenarios include "Stalking the Belgrano," "Lombardo's Fork," and "Airstrike, Port Stanley." Historically correct ship forms for the ships and aircraft in the Falklands/Malvinas conflict are provided. Plus rules for the land campaign in the Falklands utilizing **Command Decision**. GDW: 0718. $10.

FLEETS OF BRUTERRA is now available for playtesting. A PBM game of force-building, perpetual combat, logistics, bounty hunting, technological innovation, and catastrophic bomb attacks, *Fleets of Bruterra* was designed to be easy to learn, skill-oriented, highly interactive, fun, and intense from the first turn. Contact Anthrobotic Software Group, 1210 Auburn Way North, Suite B128, Auburn, WA, 98002. $3.50 for rules manual.

GAMES MASTER INTERNATIONAL, Britain's new fantasy roleplaying magazine, is now on sale in the UK. From the people who brought you *Crash, Zzap, The Games Machine,* and *Fear.* Write to *Games Master International,* Case Mill, Temeside, Ludlow, Shropshire, SY8 1JW, UNITED KINGDOM. 84 pages. Cover price £1.75.

MIRTH OF YORE, a cartoons of fantasy collection compiled by James B. King, ships in October. This collection of reprints and never-before-published works contains 90 high-quality—and funny—illustrative cartoons, including such artists as Jerry Fuchs, Joseph Pillsbury, and Richard Tomasic. Write to StarLance Publications, 50 Basin Drive, Mesa, WA 99343. 96 pages. $7.95.

GAMES WORKSHOP'S new releases include *Genestealer,* the long-awaited expansion to *Space Hulk.* Contains 15 new miniatures, more floorplans, and psychic combat rules. *Ork Battle Wagon* is a plastic kit for *Warhammer 40,000,* the ultimate dream car for every warboss. And *Doomstones III* is the third volume in the Flame Publications role-

playing modules. Other items released recently include *Elder Aspect Warriors, Middle-Earth Heros & Villains, Terminator Patches,* and *40K Softback.*

INFANTRY WEAPONS OF THE WORLD is a GDW's **Twilight: 2000** sourcebook of over 250 pistols, submachineguns, light and heavy machineguns, grenade launchers, mortars, and man-portable rocket and missile launchers. These represent weapons in active service or under development, or archaic weapons likely to be encountered in service throughout the world in 1990-2000. Small arms range from the primitive .69 caliber smoothbore musket and .50 buffalo rifle through breechloaders, lever-action magazine rifles, cap-and-ball and cartridge revolvers, bolt-action rifles, semiautomatic rifles and pistols, assault rifles, battle rifles, civilian and combat shotguns, and advanced caseless weapons. All major infantry support weapons are described, as well as man-portable antitank rockets and missiles, man-portable air defense missiles, grenade launchers, and light and heavy machineguns. Invaluable to the **Twilight** fan and firearms enthusiast or military historian. GDW: 2002. $12.

THE BROKEN COVENANT OF CALEBAIS, 2nd edition, an adventure supplement for *Ars Magica,* is now available from Lion Rampant. Fifty years ago, the covenant of Calebais was destroyed, and in the intervening years, no one has ever discovered how or why. Now the broken covenant will finally be explored, and the truth of how such a powerful and well defended covenant could possibly fall will be unveiled. Contact Lion Rampant, 3264 Nature's Walk, Suwanee, GA 30174.

STONE MOUNTAIN Miniatures has announced that it is now the exclusive North American agent for Adler Miniatures,

an English figure line which specializes in 6mm figures. For more information, write to Stone Mountain Miniatures, Inc., Box 594, Broomfield, CO 80020.

CADILLACS AND DINOSAURS, the RPG, is coming from GDW in November. Since 1986, Mark Schultz has been writing and drawing *Xenozoic Tales,* one of the most interesting and vividly conceived comic books on the market. It is currently published by Kitchen Sink Comix, but Marvel will begin publishing colorized versions of the original black and white books under the title *Cadillacs and Dinosaurs* in September. The story is set 500 years in the future, after a series of geological and ecological catastrophes. The scattered survivors of humanity fight a hostile environment with their brains and a few artifacts of 20th-century technology. It's a marvelous environment for roleplaying adventure, and GDW is thrilled to have the game rights. GDW: 3000. $18.

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*Briefs describes gaming news and releases from a variety of publishers. Announcements should be sent in at least four months before a product is released, if possible. Write to **Challenge** Briefs, PO Box 1646, Bloomington, IL 61702-1646 USA.*
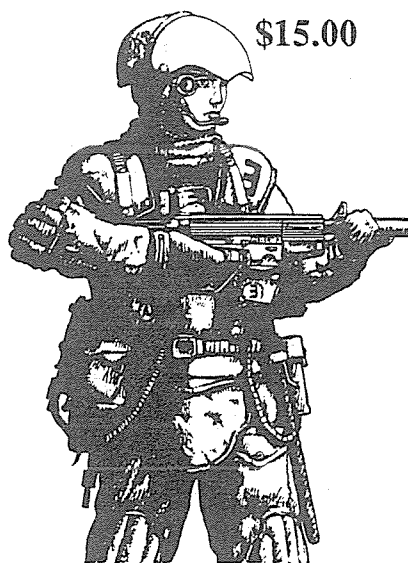
MegaTraveller players are accustomed to operating in a universe where there is a logical explanation for everything, and where the principles underlying that explanation are usually not too hard to figure out.

But now, referees can take players for a trip to worlds where the answers might not be so quick in coming, and the characters might begin to wonder if science is the only explanation.

Just Like
Magic

Witches and Wizards in MegaTraveller

I didn't like the weapons restrictions, but what the heck. This was going to be an easy job—a tech level 1 backwater, a careless navigator who let herself get kidnapped, and an abduction-minded old coot who claims he's Mephistopheles, Merlin, and Moriarity all rolled into one—and who better than us to get her back and teach grampa a lesson in manners.

Of course, we couldn't take along any of the fancy gadgets or guns we're used to using, since the planet had contact restrictions: sensitive young culture and all that. So in we go with swords and crossbows, done up in leather like Macbeth's henchmen. Shellene turned her nose up at the primitive precautions, insisting that these barbaric accoutrements were beneath her dignity. Ossian and the other ex-military folks had a good laugh at that. I just smiled; I had managed to sneak a body pistol past customs.

So off we go to get the fair damsel back from the mad magician. Piece of cake, right?

The old boy's "house" was a castle that made Dunsinane look positively cheery. Making our approach under the cover of night didn't make it seem any less sinister, either. Anshugaar started cracking jokes about looking for the three weird sisters (the kid's a Shakespeare buff), but his voice was a little higher than usual and his speech a little faster. A couple of people laughed—but it was a thin, worried sound.

Inside wasn't any better. The place was crawling with weird critters—most from other planets in the subsector. Locals, having never seen any of them before, would certainly have taken them for monsters. As it was, the creep show menagerie, a chaotic collection of incongruous life forms, was still unsettling—bioluminescent arthropods, small gliding carnivores that nipped at the backs of our hands, and one huge, shaggy monstrosity that had no head. I heard Ossian mumble "No head. Must echolocate. Yup, echolocation. That must be it," as he finished the thing off with a backhanded sweep of his sword. I also heard Anshugaar's teeth chattering.

That damn castle seemed to stretch on forever—one dank, cobwebbed corridor after another. Took me awhile to realize that we had walked into a maze without realizing it. I held up my hand in the all stop gesture.

Suddenly, from the rear of our group, I heard the tinkle of fine crystal shattering. A green-yellow vapor boiled up around Anshugaar and one of the ex-marines, and they fell back against the clammy walls. Even in the dim light, I could see their pupils contract violently, telescoping down into little black pinholes.

Even as Anshugaar began screaming something about headless monsters eating him alive—and the ex-marine bolted off with a lunatic howl—I heard a click and a WHOOSH. I turned back around in time to see Shellene drop out of sight as the floor under her swung away. She shrieked and plummeted into the blackness—gone.

I was just starting to admit to myself that this was all getting a little weird, when the wall next to me opened up. Moving through the hole were gaunt, half-naked figures. Their eyes were either painted black or they were gone, because there was no reflection from their sockets. They came forward with scabby hands extended, and I smelled dead flesh. Very old, dead flesh. Next to me, Ossian muttered, "Holy Hell." Appropriate sentiment, I thought, as the hair on the nape of my neck stood up and I took an involuntary step backward. I had never been attacked by dead people before.

Looking back on it, I could have wondered if that sickly-sweet carrion smell was emanating from rotting steaks hidden in their pockets. But instead, I was yanking out the body pistol—and hoping against hope that there was some silver in the bullets' alloy."

Referees are encouraged to read on, but players may spoil their fun if they continue.

F or those fearing (or hoping) this article introduces genuine magic to the world of **MegaTraveller**,

MEGATRAVELLER™

that is not the case. Rather, it offers a look at those primitive subcultures which work to create a belief in magic and represent themselves as witches and wizards. The terms *witch* and *wizard* are used interchangeably in this article. While they do denote gender, the reader is reminded that any reference to one or the other refers to *both* sexes; the scientifically based con artistry that underlies notions of magic is available to both genders.

The main purpose of this article is to give referees a way to jolt their players out of the mindset of scientific certainty that is the foundation of **MegaTraveller**. With a carefully designed combination of seemingly unexplained phenomena, eerie settings, and suspense, veteran players might find themselves wondering if everything in the **MegaTraveller** universe *can* be neatly explained by science. Of course, it can—but an occasional challenge to a scientific world view not only allows players to discover its logic anew, but gives them the chance to experience the momentary chill that accompanies a split second of doubt.

THE SCIENCE OF MAGIC

One of the fundamental assumptions of the **MegaTraveller** universe is that there is no such thing as magic. Unusual and advanced phenomena, yes. Psionic powers, yes. But in keeping with the tradition of hard science fiction, all occurrences must be explicable within the realm of natural science—and so they are.

However, the nonexistence of magic does not dictate, or even imply, that no one *believes* in magic. In our own seemingly mundane world, one need not look further than the local bookstore to find tomes on magic, or past the pages of a newspaper to find a section dedicated to foretelling future events via astrography (horoscopes).

In **MegaTraveller**, the concepts underlying the scientific method become more deeply seated in a culture's psychology as it progresses. And as its technological tools for investigation become more refined, the wishful belief in magic dwindles, finally becoming the province of reactionary antiscience subcultures.

However, in addition to early indigenous mythologies, a belief in magic may also be engendered by an encounter with an advanced civilization or technology. To crudely paraphrase Clarke's now famous axiom, the technology of any sufficiently advanced civilization will appear as magic to any sufficiently primitive civilization. A case in point from 20th-century Terra: During World War II, various isolated Micronesian natives firmly believed that the American supply planes—and their pilots—were magical entities. This belief persisted for a number of years and was labeled *cargo-cultism*, due to the fact that the natives always anticipated marvelous wonders and gifts being unloaded from the bellies of these great silver-winged gods.

Prior to a general social knowledge (and acceptance) of the scientific method, the capacity for belief in magic in a culture is quite large. And on worlds where a small minority discover and control natural phenomenon that seem inexplicable to the rest, the concept of magic is often used to explain the phenomena. It is on just such worlds that witches and wizards dwell in the **MegaTraveller** universe.

WHERE SHALL WE THREE MEET AGAIN?

Witches and wizards are most likely to be found on TL0 and TL1 worlds that have been fully interdicted (Red Zone) or have significant trade and contact restrictions in place. In both cases, it is

extremely likely that the populace is not acquainted with the principles of the scientific method or empirical experimentation. If they were, they would almost certainly have used the technological fruits of this knowledge to upgrade their civilization and make life safer and easier. (*Note:* Some technophobic enclaves exist that espouse a pretechnological, pastoral civilization, and are therefore exceptions to the prior rule of thumb.)

UNNATURAL SELECTION: EVOLUTION OF WITCHCRAFT

In these prescientific civilizations, the possession and use of psionic skills will almost certainly be seen as proof of supernatural powers. Since the discovery of psionics is usually a chance occurrence at first, this means individuals who possess them are likely to share the belief that these abilities are indicative of an energy and a reality that exists beyond the boundaries of the mundane universe. Any legends that a human culture retains regarding its "miraculous" arrival on a world (the work of the Ancients) and the amazing powers of their (technological) forbears serve to reinforce this conclusion by providing a mythic framework for it to fit into.

And so witches and wizards come into being. Before long, these unusually gifted psionics come to realize that there is a predictability to psionic powers. As they begin to search for apprentices, and as eager parents try to press young aspirants into their employ, the psionics develop the ability to discern the degree of psionic power inherent in humans. At first, they detect only the stronger levels of innate psionic strength. Eventually, though, they discover that everyone has some measure of psionic ability.

From that moment, these witches and wizards have a choice to make. They may choose to reveal that their special power is neither mystical nor divine, but a human attribute that varies among individuals as does size, intelligence, speed. Or, they may conceal that knowledge in order to retain their privileged—and powerful—place in society. Usually, they choose the latter path.

By the time a civilization has evolved to a stage that includes cities, commerce, and nation-states, witchcraft (also known as wizardry) has become an institution itself. The great practitioners of the magical arts are likely to hold considerable personal and immense political power. Most important, they are the sole possessors of many generations of secret knowledge—knowledge which is actually technological in nature.

ARS MAGICA

The magical arts of witches and wizards vary from world to world. Some civilizations focus on psionics to the exclusion of the other arts; others de-emphasize psionics. However, for reasons included in the explanations that follow, the normal observed pattern is for the various magical arts listed below to develop in tandem.

Playing Those Mind Games

Psionics is the root of all magic as described above. A quick perusal of the "Psionics" chapter in the **Players' Manual** should provide a ready understanding of why primitive cultures would make the assumption that these powers are, in fact, supernatural. Witches use these disciplines and powers not only to achieve their indicated results, but to reinforce the awe and mystery that surrounds the user of the magic. For instance:

Telepaths: Telepaths may discern all types of proprietary information about individuals and their intentions. This allows them to have an almost prescient ability to predict a scanned individual's actions and plans. Since this may be done when the telepath and subject are even miles apart, the telepath may inculcate a general belief that he can be in all places at all times. The psychological power is beyond practical assessment. Add the power of telempathy, which allows the telepath to shape the responses and attitudes of the subject—used over time and with subtlety, this combination of powers can mold the behaviors, preferences, and allegiances of individuals—particularly those with weaker intellects. Telempathy also affords witches an invaluable aid in training otherwise inapproachable and dangerous animals—which make for useful and intimidating pets that acquire reputations as monsters. The use—and terror potential—connected with telepathic assault hardly needs to be detailed here.

Clairvoyants: Clairvoyance allows wizards to actually see and hear what is going on in a remote location. When combined with the above telepathic skills, it becomes possible for wizards to (for example) spy on secret negotiations and then, via telempathy, manipulate the reactions of the negotiators. More obvious uses of clairvoyant skills allow wizards to conduct thorough advance reconnaissance of virtually any locale, thereby nullifying a defender's surprise ambush plans, and/or discovering the exact location of even the most cleverly hidden objects.

Telekinetics: Telekinetics obviously possess the potential not only to undo locks and whisk away certain objects, but they may be quite lethal as well. Nearly any object has the potential of becoming a projectile. Necklaces become garottes. Knives may jump out of scabbards and into their owner's back. In combination with clairvoyant-telepaths (whom the Zhodani commandoes call *directors*), telekinetics can conduct assassinations and even thefts from considerable ranges.

Awareness: Awareness psionic abilities, particularly enhanced strength, convey obvious and highly visible benefits to a witch in a tight spot. But in actuality, the more subtle skills of suspended animation, enhanced endurance, and (particularly) regeneration do far more to increase the witch's aura of mystery and inhuman vitality. These three skills allow the witch to apparently defy the most basic human needs and vulnerabilities: An injured witch appears unharmed two days later. An entombed wizard emerges from his imprisonment after several weeks, appearing healthy and rested. The apparently casual use of such powers is likely to make primitive witnesses believe that the wizard in fact *cannot* be human, since he clearly does not share humanity's frailties. As a result, rumors may fly that such persons are half (or wholly) inhuman—with a predictable mix of awe, fear, and fascination.

Teleportation: Teleportation is probably the most disconcerting of all the talents. The visceral impact of watching another human vanish before your eyes—or out of your very grasp—is singularly powerful. Most of this power derives from the fact that there is no room for skepticism. Other phenomenon can be dismissed as strange coincidence, luck, or as stemming from extraordinary skill in logical deduction, psychology, etc. But teleportation defies all of the evidentiary and logical laws of time and space.

To even the most informed primitive mind, Occam's razor suggests that if a person simply vanishes from sight, the only rational explanation is that something beyond the bounds of rationality has occurred. Extraordinary (and culturally precocious) intellects such as Archimedes, Da Vinci, and Galileo *might* see teleportation as indicating a new domain of science which is invisible to their current levels of investigation, but the average genius of a primitive civilization would tend to wager that teleportation is proof positive of the existence of magic.

In addition to the familiar Zhodani commando tactics of direct insertion to a target zone, more subtle uses of this ability are possible, including carrying out the ultimate in "closed room" thefts and murders.

Precognitives: Of the many special talents, the rarest (and most disturbing) is precognition. It should be noted that such individuals are rarely well adjusted. Many are plagued by madness, often manifesting itself as paranoid schizophrenia. In general, the more constant and clear the precognitive experience, the greater the tendency toward insanity, since the human mind is not accustomed

to existing in multiple space/time continuums simultaneously (which is what a precognitive individual is doing). The more sane precognitives tend to have intermittent visions, usually in their sleep or after they fall into a trance state—thereby being consciously distanced from the normal time/space continuum. Such precognitions are never very precise, and are usually generalized symbolic representations open to a multitude of possible interpretations. The precognitions of the "mad seers" are often more precise, but one can never be sure how accurate (or complete) such afflicted individuals are in reporting what they see. Even in societies which have attained a great understanding of the various psionic talents, precognition is seen as more of a curse than a benefit.

Skill Distribution: Successful witches usually possess two or more psionic skills, most often at levels of 9 or greater. Promising apprentices are located at an early age and are usually fully immersed in their magical studies by the time they reach adolescence. In this way, they acquire the highest possible psionic strength rating, since the initial rating tends to drop if psionic studies are pursued after age 18. In societies where magic orders spring up, it is not uncommon for selective breeding to be encouraged (or even enforced) in order to enhance innate power levels or to promote the emergence of special (nonstandard) psionic talents such as pyrokinesis (fire starting), cryokinesis (freezing), and others.

Double, Double, Toil and Trouble

Psionics are only the foundation of the witch's power. The almost inevitable search for ways to enhance available psionic strength often results in the discovery of the various psi-drugs. Even if useful results are not realized, a spin-off technology from this research is a greatly enhanced knowledge of pharmacology—often called *alchemy* by witches. In fact, primitive witches often possess pharmaceutical knowledge comparable to that possessed by early interstellar civilizations.

The main areas—and advantages—of this pharmacological knowledge include:

Psi-Drugs: Psi-drugs are the key to increasing an individual's psi-strength rating to extraordinary levels, often in excess of 15. These drugs, although manufactured using primitive techniques, are often of unprecedented refinement and strength due to the extreme care and time devoted to their creation. With such drugs, a single multitalented psionic can perform a sequence of astounding feats in rapid succession, making such a person seem nearly invincible. These drugs—in addition to their psionic users—are often the real reason behind the Imperial interdiction of various primitive worlds. They are also the reason behind the smuggling and black marketeering problems that are endemic to such planets.

Fast Drugs: Fast drug equivalents are quite common, although they are most frequently used in nonmedical applications. Fast drug analogs are often used in conjunction with a nonlethal immobilizing neurotoxin. This combination of slowed metabolism and loss of voluntary motor functions produces the equivalent of living death in the subject. Frequently, such subjects are then buried alive and are convinced that they have become zombies (some experts contend that this was the phenomenon at the heart of the 20th-century Terran voodoo). Witches strengthen the impact of the death experience by telempathic reinforcement and supplementary drugs which render the subject emotionally malleable.

Slow Drugs: These can be used to enhance the reflexes of not only the witch, but any of her servitors—many of whom already have considerable combat prowess.

Combat Drugs: These allow a further enhancement of a wizard's servitors.

Psychotropic Drugs: Psychotropic drugs are compounds which affect the cognitive mind or psyche of the subject and are often combined with combat drugs. The most common of these

supplements is the equivalent of a berserker drug which creates a fearless frenzy in the subject. Such individuals are likely to seem possessed, often performing apparently impossible feats and enduring mortal wounds for extended periods of time. Individuals on this type of psychotropic/combat drug "trip" cannot be reasoned with and are generally fixated on destroying everything around them, starting with unfamiliar sophonts.

Another oft-used variety of psychotropic drug includes those which increase a subject's susceptibility to suggestion. This may produce a heightened tendency to visualize things that are not present, exaggerate prominent features of objects which are present, or simply hallucinate. Such drugs are used by wizards, along with telepathic manipulation, to create illusionary realities in the mind of the subject. The subject then later recalls these illusions as having been real. In this manner, individuals may be convinced that they have seen displays of incomprehensible power, been threatened by fantastic monsters, etc.—all of which are evidently at the beck and call of the wizard. The psychological impact of this is literally immeasurable insofar as the affected individual is concerned, and such uses of psychotropic drugs help to bolster the awe and mystery that surround the users of magic.

Mood-Altering Drugs: These drugs are related to psychotropics, but instead of affecting cognition and perception, they alter emotional states. Most frequently, they are used to cause a subject to have a negative or positive mental state for a limited amount of time. The strongest versions of this family of drug can cause the subject to have a permanent association between the emotional state created and a prominent person or object encountered while under the effect of the drug. This type of mood-altering drug is the much-mystified love (or hate) potion of legend. In addition to having any number of "domestic" uses, such compounds can have profound impacts on negotiations, meetings between heads of state, etc.

Poisons and Injurious Neurotoxins: These types of pharmaceuticals are well known compounds long before psi-drugs are even discovered by a culture. However, generations of experimentation generally produce an unusually extensive pharmacopoeia of lethal substances, offering wide variation in time of effect, method of administration, detectability, size of dosage, etc. Multipart poisons are particularly favored by the most unscrupulous wizards as subtle (and often undetectable) methods of assassination. Toxins with long onset periods and rare antidotes are used by such evil sorcerers as a means of ensuring the loyalty of (or compelling obedience from) unwilling subjects.

Anagathics: These are not a typical member of the wizard's pharmacopoeia. Most worlds do not evolve a natural source of the key ingredients, and synthesizing them is all but impossible even at the higher tech levels of Imperial civilization. But on those worlds which *do* have a natural source of anagathics, the probability of witches and wizards occurring as a social phenomenon is greatly increased. They are the ones who are likely to discover such a source of anagathics first, and they are equally likely to reserve it for their exclusive use. This allows them to accrue increased power—both psionic and political.

A Fondness for Pets

Another area in which wizards achieve considerable competence is animal training and selective breeding. Their focus is generally on guard/hunting beasts, but other animals may be utilized, if they have characteristics desirable to the wizard.

As previously stated, witches use telempathy—along with standard reinforcement/punishment conditioning—to train animals to become efficient and unswervingly loyal servants. If a witch develops a particular rapport with a given creature, a very special bond may arise between the two. The witch eventually may learn to communicate rudimentary unspoken commands telepathically. This is very difficult and requires a deep understanding of the target creature's mind, since animal psychology and cognition are radically different from that of humans. However, despite the long effort involved in this process of mental acculturation, such creatures— often known as familiars—are invaluable to a witch, particularly as scouts or thieves.

Witches prefer to train young animals, since they are the easiest to condition and since they often transfer parental attachment to their trainer (if separated from their parents). Therefore, since most creatures have comparatively short life spans, witches will tend to keep at least a small breeding community.
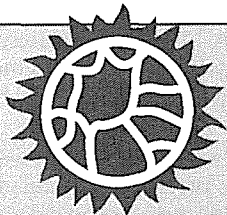
MAGOCRACIES, SMUGGLING, AND THE IMPERIUM

In extreme cases, a strange form of technocracy—calling itself a magocracy—may develop on worlds with natural anagathics and a "magical" power base. Such magocracies may prove to be difficult to handle, even for the Imperium. The concentration of enhanced psionic power makes contact undesirable and conquest extremely difficult. Even quarantines may be difficult to enforce at close interplanetary ranges, depending upon the range and talents of the wizardly psionics.

In the same way that a magocracy uses anagathics as a reward/punishment device for controlling its own populace, it may also be able to use these drugs to influence its fate in the interstellar community. The extraordinary economic attractiveness of anagathics draws smugglers and black marketeers like flies to honey. Although many are caught, some usually manage to get through. And once they are planetside, it is unclear who will have the upper hand—the locals or the visitors. If the high-tech visitors are not careful, they may find themselves controlled like puppets on a string. Of course, the navy would try to intercept any smuggler's ship upon departure, but if several powerful telepaths were aboard, the outcome of such an encounter is far from inevitable (to quote a relevant line from *Star Wars*: "These aren't the droids you're looking for.").

The Scout Service rumor mill has more than a few stories circulating regarding primitive planets that purposefully concealed a major psionic subculture after being contacted by the Imperium. These planets sought—and were granted— membership in the Imperium, only to have their secret uncovered decades later. This is proof that some of the wiser wizardly worlds realize their only hope for survival in an Imperium-dominated, high-tech universe is to go underground and lobby for continued trade and education restrictions on their homeworld. Meanwhile, the off-world mercantile factors that depend upon the good health of the magical subculture support these isolationist objectives and, in return, receive exclusive rights to any black market anagathics and psi-drugs the locals permit to be exported.

Witches prefer unusual creatures, and often raise a particular breed simply because it has unusual/alien looks or behavior patterns. Often, however, witches keep a number of large predators—usually of the carnivore/killer variety—as their personal guards. In addition, witches are likely to keep one or more breeds of pack animals—usually hunters or scavengers—and let them wander about the grounds as a roving patrol.

Witches also depend upon various animals for any number of key ingredients for their alchemical concoctions. Therefore, rather than constantly combing the wilderness for necessary species, witches tend to raise their own livestock. It is not uncommon for certain venomous creatures to fill dual roles as both guard creature and alchemical ingredient. Consequently, a wizardly environment is likely to resemble a cross between a menagerie and kennel— with a few surprises thrown in just for the unsettlement of unwanted visitors.

Most Deadly Animal

In addition to their dependence upon various creatures, wizards and witches also recruit humans into their service. Ethical witches hire retainers much as any other powerful individual might, except they tend to maintain a greater distance between themselves and their employees—lest the retainers learn that there's nothing magical about magic.

Unscrupulous witches wish to control all their retainers fully and directly. Common methods of acquiring this control involve telempathic conditioning (although this is only reliable on fairly weak minds), rescuing and offering sanctuary to otherwise condemned individuals, and engendering chemical addictions. Such witches are usually generous masters, but they demand absolute obedience and loyalty. The price of anything less is death.

Witches—unscrupulous or not—tend not to have highly intelligent individuals as their direct servitors; such persons are difficult to control, unpredictable, and more likely to see through the carefully woven web of illusion surrounding the witch. Witches tend to accumulate large, skilled, but not very bright, men-at-arms as close retainers. If a witch needs the aid of a person of intelligence and learning, she will tend to strike a deal with the individual and then keep him at arm's length. However, some witches do without human servitors because they find even the most gullible persons too unpredictable and hard to control.

The only exceptions to the frequent use of the dull-witted as servants/retainers are the witch's apprentices, who are selected with the utmost care and caution, since it is to these young minds that the secrets of witchcraft will be revealed—the most sacred of which is the fact that magic per se is a sham. Apprentices or witches that violate the code of silence surrounding this secret are in effect committing suicide, since most magical subcultures make their members promise to eliminate any traitors as quickly and flamboyantly as possible.

With a Wave of My Magic Wand

The last element in the wizard's bag of tricks is advanced technology—of any type. It is important to note that wizards are not technophobic. Quite the contrary; they know full well that all their powers are in keeping with the laws of science. So wizards are actually quite aggressive in pursuing new technical knowledge and acquiring advanced devices. They are equally concerned with making sure the operation of such devices is seen as magic, not natural phenomenon.

Wizards are therefore likely to be the first persons in a primitive culture to discover such things as gunpowder, anesthetics, electricity, magnifying lenses, magnetism, metal refinement (making steel, for instance), surgical procedures, and more. However, they tend to keep public displays of such powers to a bare minimum, in order to reduce the chances that an observer will notice something that

reveals the technological nature of the phenomenon.

Not surprisingly, wizards are avid collectors of off-world technologies (and creatures) that are useful both as tools and as props that enhance their magical reputations. One of the obvious favorites is the laser pistol, which, when concealed in a large-sleeved robe, becomes the legendary wand of death. Wizards also favor things as simple as flashlights, calculators, self-contained breathing apparatuses, and—of course—reference texts of all types. More expensive—but much more impressive—are items such as grav belts, vision-enhancing goggles, gauss weaponry, holographic projectors, and even robots.

Of course, since worlds primitive enough to support a belief in wizards are protected by stiff trade and contact restrictions (if not outright Interdiction), such high-tech trade is usually conducted through the rather tight bottleneck of blockade-running smugglers. But since the stakes are high (wizards tend to pay *very* well), there is generally no shortage of desperate or unethical merchants willing to attempt such a run.

PERSONAL ATTRIBUTES

Although they may attempt to represent themselves to credulous native populations as supernatural beings, so-called witches and wizards are ordinary mortals just like everyone else. But it takes a special combination of talents and aptitudes to be truly successful at this unusual career. Those who are less than successful usually wind up with an early retirement to an unmarked grave.

Obviously, a successful wizard needs to have a great deal of psionic strength and will usually possess two or more disciplines. High intelligence is a necessity, and a high degree of dexterity is a major asset. Once inducted into the secret society of wizards and witches, a good education is sure to follow.

But beyond all this, a successful witch must be an excellent manipulator of people. After all, the existence of magic is nothing more than a multigenerational confidence racket on a monumental scale. Whether the wizard believes this is for the good of his society or not is immaterial. By definition, he has to be an accomplished con artist. Consequently, most wizards possess skills such as Liaison, Streetwise, Interrogation, Interview, Psychology, and especially, Persuasion.

Since the sham of magic is not restricted to a single individual for a short period of time, but is maintained as a cultural belief over many generations, witches need a great deal of political acumen and foresight. They tend to be adept observers of history and shrewd tacticians (most have at least one level in Tactics).

Common wisdom among witches is "the less you're seen, the more you're believed." Left with only a few sketchy reports and a great number of unknowns, people will invent stories which portray a level of power much greater than that actually possessed by the witch. Consequently, witches defer direct political control or power, preferring to pull strings from behind a throne. They use influence, counsel, and implied threat to attain their objectives—force is the last recourse. If an adversary is deemed to be implacable (or worse yet, a skeptic), then a witch will strike as hard, effectively, and finally as she can. However, she is likely to only wound more malleable and/or credulous foes—and leave them alive to function as her pawns, haunted and daunted by memories of her power.

In most regards, wizards are rather apolitical. They are not tremendously interested in notions of nationalism, religion, or any of the other beliefs that humanity has proven to be willing to wage war over. However, one political interest and affiliation is shared by all wizards: They are antipluralistic. They fear any social movement that suggests that each individual has equal rights and that one of those rights is to share in determining the fate of his society. Close on the heels of this first glimmer of emancipation, such people will also begin to demand knowledge and education. This—not technology per se—is what threatens a wizard's place in society. When all humans begin to demand education, they also begin to demand the truth, and begin to demand that mysteries be explored and secrets be shared. The end result is that magic will become demystified, and the wizard's various supernatural powers will come to be recognized as natural phenomena.

Consequently, wizards are motivated to support hierarchical societies which insist on believing in fundamental differences between classes of people. For wizards, it is essential that the common people believe that the privileged upper classes (to which the wizards belong) hold their station due to some innate superiority over the lower classes.

Contact with the Imperium is therefore discouraged for two reasons. In addition to introducing the concept of the scientific method, the mere presence of obviously mortal men from the stars proves that great achievements and access to great power are not innate, hereditary attributes; they are within the grasp of each and every human. And in this revolutionary concept, wizards rightly foresee the beginning of their end.

SOMETHING WICKED THIS WAY COMES

Now that the reality behind witches and wizards has been revealed—as well as the methods they use to fabricate their miracles—referees can easily develop any number of **MegaTraveller** adventure ideas involving these psionicists/scientists/con artists.

It is important to remember, however, that the player characters should never have even *heard* of witches or wizards, outside of folk tales and fantasy literature. The Imperium does not want to have to answer any embarrassing questions regarding the fact that some of its younger member-systems have just recently overcome (?) a long tradition of active psionics and an absolute belief in magic. Therefore, the Imperium goes to considerable lengths to stifle any such information and to maintain interdictions until such time as the culture is thought to be thoroughly purged of these two embarrassing traits.

However, the Rebellion has thrown many of these orderly, long-term plans into turmoil. A great number of interdictions have been relaxed due to the drain on combat-ready ships imposed by maintaining an adequate patrol. In some cases, interdiction enforcement has been abandoned altogether. The various conflicts raging between the different factions have caused some powers to occupy any garden world available in order to secure necessary resources and/or deny them to the enemy.

Set against the backdrop of the disintegration of the Imperium and its contact restrictions, adventures involving witches and wizards can range from Gothic-style chillers to tongue-in-cheek spoofs of the horror genre. A sample of suitable adventure ideas might include:

Trick or Treat: The player characters are a merchant crew that has landed on a TL1 world still rumored to harbor some witches and wizards. Although this subculture has just about faded away, one old wizard has dreams of rekindling the days of magic. So he kidnaps an NPC crewmember and demands that the local government pay a steep ransom for the individual's safe return.

Unfortunately, the local government has no intention of encouraging the rebirth of wizardry by coughing up a hefty ransom. The characters can't turn to the Imperium since this is taking place in a subsector where no one faction is firmly in control—and all the factions are too busy worrying about military matters, anyway. So it's up to the players to get the NPC back themselves.

Of course, the old wizard lives in a house (or castle) in a remote location. And of course, the house/castle is said to be haunted. And since the structure sits smack dab in the middle of a large expanse of flat land, the PCs are best advised to approach under the cover of night. The referee might want to throw in a full moon (or two) for classic effect.

This scenario can be played for fun and laughs, or can be deadly serious. The fun and laughs version would reveal that the deadly, ancient wizard is actually a pretty decent sort who's a tad senile and very lonely—and has now grown quite fond of chatting with the NPC crewmember and doesn't want to give him up. The haunted house should provide the usual run-ins with snakes (nonvenomous, or they spit a vile-smelling spray), a pesky familiar (sure, make it a black cat), a couple of ingenious traps, and even a zombie-like servitor or two, who turn out to be pretty much normal folks who just work for the wizard. Their state of general stupefaction is due to their persistent insomnia—a direct result of the old boy's insistence on playing a wheezy, old organ (imported from off-world) at all sorts of indecent hours. Of course, the characters themselves may hear a few broken chords of Bach's *Toccata and Fugue* as they go prowling around in search of their lost companion.

The serious version of the adventure gives the referee a fine opportunity to pull out all the stops and use the full range of powers enumerated in the preceding article. The referee is recommended not to call the antagonist a wizard, or use words like *magic* or *haunted* in describing him or his castle. Rather, the locals should simply be portrayed as being extremely uncomfortable talking about the mysterious old fellow, glancing about nervously when they do. At most, they'll mumble something about, "He's odd—different." If the player characters decide to undertake the rescue themselves, the locals will try to dissuade them. Failing that, they will begin to avoid the characters.

The search of the castle should really test the players' nerve and

ability to retain a cool, detached rationalism in the face of apparent magic. Zombies, familiars, horrible guard monsters, traps, psychotropic gas bombs, venomous serpents, and a bewildering array of psionic powers should leave the more impressionable PCs wondering if maybe, just maybe, magic is for real on this one planet. And referees should remember that the wizard is a master of illusion and psychology; he'll never show his hand if he can help it. He knows the best way to defeat the characters is with their own fears, not a direct use of his powers. He will attempt to time his countermeasures in a way most likely to unnerve the players. He wants them to spend time wandering through his strange menagerie, running into his hideous pets, getting split up into smaller groups by traps that seal corridors, rotate walls, or drop people down to a lower floor. Remember, suspense and terror are heightened by careful timing and the ability to isolate individuals within an unknown and threatening environment.

Insider Trading: The group is working for one of two factions competing for the tattered local remnants of the Imperium. The adversarial faction is fearful that your side's economic superiority will defeat them in the long run. Therefore, according to your information, they have sent a group of agents into your territory in order to sneak onto a poorly patrolled interdicted world known to have a tradition of witchcraft. Their objective: to trade technology for telepaths. This would help the enemy faction out-maneuver the PCs' faction when it comes to trading and diplomacy. In order to counter this move, the player characters must go to the interdicted planet (with official permission) and stop the enemy agents. How they do this is up to them, but overt, violent means are likely to backfire, sending the locals into the arms of the other side. Options include outbidding the enemy and thereby getting the witches to agree *not* to send any of their telepaths off-world, searching for and capturing the enemy agents, or stirring up a local "free men and free thought" movement that would force the witches to keep their resources at home in order to fight for their cultural survival. One way or the other, some (or all) of the wizards will not like the PCs' actions and will make a few troublesome plans of their own. But the purpose of this scenario is to resolve the matter quickly; this is not intended as a campaign.

Field Research: Schunamann and Sons, AG, the megacorporation otherwise known as SuSAG, hires the player character group to recover a confidential research packet that was lost on a primitive but unrestricted world. Once there and on the trail of the packet, the player characters will bump into agents of a rival megacorporation (Naasirka would be a good selection) who are also trying to get their hands on the research.

Meanwhile, IRIS or IISS security agents are shadowing both groups. The reason: The research packet is actually a sample of a locally produced psi-booster drug which SuSAG purchased from the local secret guild of witches and wizards. However, immediately after the trade with SuSAG, the wizards learned that Imperial agents were on the case, and would be sure to apprehend the SuSAG personnel and follow their trail back to the wizards. So the wizards eliminated SuSAG's agents and retrieved the package, only to find that part of the sample had been removed and secreted somewhere else. For all the involved parties, the hunt is on.

The PCs may decide to abandon SuSAG's employ, but if they do, the Imperial agents will ask (and, if necessary, compel) the characters to continue in their role as SuSAG freelancers. That way, SuSAG won't know to replace them with a new recovery team. This multisided skullduggery allows for all sorts of alliances, doublecrosses, and detective work as the PCs must eventually try to find the sample and turn it over to someone else before one of the rival groups manages to kill them. Referees should note that this is a large-scale adventure. And remember, the PCs will not be up against a single witch or wizard, but a large and powerful secret enclave. Ω
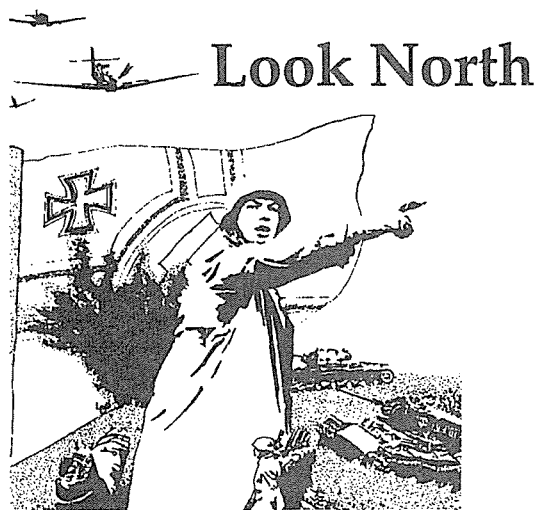
TRAVELLER News Service

Terra/Solomani Rim/Sol (1827A867A69-F)   Date: 159-1120

¶An archaeologist helping with the restoration of the Cheops Historical Site has found the oldest Terran writing known.

¶Dr. Daniel d'Aidre announced today that cave paintings found in the excavation date back 23,000 years. No translation has yet been made, but the marks and designs clearly point to their being writing, probably for use in a religious ceremony.

¶The Cheops Historical Site, under the care of the Terran Historical Administration, was flooded in 1106 when terrorists destroyed a dike holding back the waters of the Mediterranean Sea.

Knabbib/Core (2115A331758-F)   Date: 212-1120

¶Julian Trane, distinguished professor of interstellar history, has committed suicide in prison, according to police.

¶Guards delivering lunch found Trane hanging from a hand computer strap in his cell.

¶Trane was arrested almost two months ago for ignoring an Imperial Ministry of Information ban against the publication of his new book, *The Inevitability of Night.*

¶Imperial authorities expressed their regret at the death.

¶"Professor Trane's suicide is another in the list of crimes for which the ultimate responsibility belongs to Archduke Dulinor," a spokesman said.

Anaxias/Delphi (1724A263A86-D)   Date: 309-1120

¶Speculation and rumors about Duchess Margaret's children continue to flood the local press.

¶Dr. Bakala Setree, a physician with over 40 years of service in the duchess' household, claims that the recent birth of twins was a result of artificial insemination.

¶The father of the children, according to Dr. Setree, is the late Emperor Strephon.

¶Dr. Setree said Duchess Margaret will soon file a petition with the Moot to act as regent in behalf of her daughter, Julia Iphegenia Cassir Tukera, who as the direct descendant of Strephon would be next in line for the throne.

¶Spokesmen for the duchess refuse to confirm or deny Setree's allegations. Neither of the children has been seen in public since their birth, but holorecordings of the twins have been released.

Capital/Core (2118A586A98-F)   Date: 342-1120

¶Capital police are investigating the recent death of Viscount Roberto Avery, a member of the Moot.

¶The viscount was killed instantly when his air/raft exploded in the air while approaching the home he shares with his wife and two daughters.

¶Assassination is suspected, but police have no leads at this time.

¶The Moot has not met since the assassination of Emperor Strephon by Archduke Dulinor more than four years ago. Viscount Avery was known to be a strong and vocal supporter of Margaret.

Hexos/Spinward Marches (2828 B534420-8)   Date: 343-1120

¶Imperial authorities under Archduke Norris are investigating claims that Aslan *ihatei* using biological warfare have slaughtered more than half the population of this world.

¶Spokesmen have not released complete details, but said "more than a dozen" warships drove away Aslani insurgents upon arrival at the system.

¶More than the 35,000 people have died in the last week, most of them in the capital city of Dione. Deaths of livestock are also reported.

Capital/Core (2118A586A98-F)   Date: 351-1120

¶Naval spokesmen for Emperor Lucan have announced continued success in their rimward campaigns.

¶"Solomani forces cannot stand up to the technological developments that our weapons researchers have recently completed," said Rear Admiral Daadushaa. "We are, in fact, calling back some of our fleet elements in other areas so that those ships can be retrofitted.

¶"The emperor is preparing an ultimatum to be delivered to the false claimants around the Imperium once this update has been accomplished."

¶Daadushaa said he could not comment at this time on the nature of the experimental weapons, but said Lucan's message would be announced publicly at the same time that ambassadors carried it to outlying regions. Ω

Robert J. Cosgrave
and Michael B. Cosgrave

HPPE

EVA CommLink Log. *Adrienne*. 14:32:254:1117.

Suit 1: <indistinct>

Bridge: Ah, em—what was that Simon?

Suit 1: Oh, nothing, Kalen—just these thrusters.

Bridge: I've said it before, and I'll say it again, Simon—we should rip out that bank and replace the whole works. They're just not reliable.

Suit 1: Yeah, maybe—I guess. Say, Kalen, why are you charging the jump capacitors? I'll be another hour here.

Bridge: An hour—man, you jacked the course tape and set the jump for, um, let's see....

Suit 1: Course tape? I never....

Bridge: OHMIGODSIMONGETBACK! Simon! Oh noooooooo!

Suit 1: Kalen! Stop the....

JUMP INITIATION COMPLETE. EVA IN PROGRESS. PROBABLE CREW FATALITY <CONFIDENCE HIGH>. MANDATORY COMMLINK LOGSTORE <IMP DIR 241567/BETA>.

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he player characters may detect the deserted *Adrienne* in space and attempt a salvage or may be hired by a salvage company to fly the *Adrienne* to their HQ for a refit. Alternatively, they may have bought the vessel from a salvage dealer. Whatever happens, they will end up flying the *Adrienne* through a hyperspace jump.

THE *ADRIENNE*

The *Adrienne* is a standard Type S scout equipped with a single beam laser in its hardpoint. When recovered, it will be deserted and open to vacuum. Many loose papers and fixtures from the interior are gone, but no sign of them can be found in the vicinity. The vessel is virtually undamaged, except for a minor short in thruster bank B. The maintenance hatch to that bank is missing, and it seems that a repair was attempted on it, but suddenly abandoned.

The jump fuel tanks are empty, and the log is blank for a four-day period coinciding with the start of the last jump. Players with computer skill will realize that the data was copied into a locked file, then the original was erased, probably by an automatic function. No life support utilities have been used since that time.

The ship's locker has two vacc suit racks, but one suit, identifiable as Number 1, is missing. Some small sidearms are also present, but no unusual provisions. The cargo bay is half full of mixed cargo, primarily textiles and machine parts. Three of the four staterooms show signs of occupancy. If the PCs purchase the ship from a dealer, the thruster bank will have received a "quick-fix," but the dealer didn't bother to clean out the ship before selling it to the first suckers who came along—you buy it, you clean it.

Stateroom A: This stateroom contains some men's clothing in storage. A small safe is located behind a picture here. If it is opened, it will be found to contain ordinary ship's papers and documents, and two matching gold rings.

Stateroom B: This stateroom contains some women's clothing in storage. A diamond ring is in the bedside drawer.

Stateroom C: This stateroom contains some men's clothing and a half dozen starship engineering handbooks. The PCs may notice that there are two copies of one of the texts. The second copy is a dummy, and actually contains a written diary belonging to Kalen McFarren, the room's former occupant. This diary is quite patchy, but the main theme of the last few months' entries is Kalen's "loss" of his love, Joelle, who was wooed away by Simon. The entries become progressively less coherent and more like the scribblings of a madman. These are the last three:

253.1117: Finished loading this afternoon. Don't know why that man Colenso bought this load of junk. No, I *do* know why he loaded us with a low-profit cargo—he's a fool. I don't know what my darling Joelle sees in him. How can he have blinded her to his deliberate bankrupting of this ship? Surely something must happen to free the two of us from this evil man? I know it will—I know it.

254.1117: It happened. He killed himself—he did. He did it to break my Joelle's heart. He even made it look like I could have done it so that she would lose her one true love as well. He jacked in the course tape, then went out in a suit. He could have had a ship waiting to escape in. Maybe he did. He probably took most of the credits from the safe, too.

255.1117: He's done something to her. He must have been a psion. He must have hypnotized her—that's how he took her away. He even planted voices in her mind,

coming from hyperspace, calling to her. I'll get him. I'm sure he had a ship waiting at the jump point. I'll make her better, no matter how long it takes.

WHAT HAPPENED ?

Once the PCs find the diary, they should be able to figure out that Kalen McFarren was unstable to the point of being dangerous. They may determine that Kalen jacked in the course tape and set the jump to kill Simon. If the course tape has not been handled much, any character with Forensic skill can get prints from it and check them on the crew record on the ship's log. Kalen's instability and motive should be obvious to the player characters from reading the diary. A character with Computer skill may discover from the ship's log that the course tape was jacked in after Simon left the ship (see below).

The computer has stored the commlog extract quoted at the beginning of the scenario. The recording and ship's log information for a four-day period starting the day before the jump and ending with the decompression of the ship has been datalocked for access by Imperial accident investigators and insurance company representatives only.

EVENTS

Die	Event
2	Amber light warning from thruster bank B
3	Kalen programs jump
4	Joelle goes to bridge
5	Joelle screams
6	Kalen engages drive
7	Incoming message from Simon
8	Kalen talks to Joelle
9	Joelle goes to air lock
10	Airlock opens
11	Kalen rushes to air lock
12	Scream in air lock

EXPLANATION OF EVENTS

2   A routine fault is noted in attitude control thruster bank B, near the stern. This will be a constant occurrence after it is rolled twice.

3   The jump control panel records a jump being programmed into it. This is stored in memory. If examined it is found to be a jump to the system the vessel was recovered in, from another nearby world.

4   Initially, the computer notes that doors in a path from stateroom B to the bridge have opened and closed. On the second occurrence they actually do so, and on later occurrences footsteps are heard.

5   For the first occurrence nothing will happen, but on later occurrences the scream will be heard, initially faint, but getting louder with each successive occurrence. Later, words will become audible before the scream: "Kalen, what happened? You *killed* him!"

6   The jump drive panel records the jump drive being engaged. As the vessel is in jump, an error message is the result. After two occurrences, every second occurrence is an alternative attempt to kill the ghost of Simon working on thruster bank B. These attempts may involve firing thrusters to dislodge him, suddenly rolling the ship, or firing at him with the ship's weapons (a single beam laser turret). These methods eventually put the ship at risk. Later Kalen's ghost may even attempt to kill whichever of the PCs is the closest approximation of Simon.

7   The computer records an incoming radio message from EVA Suit 1 (missing form the locker). Initially this will be too faint to hear, but it can be picked up on the first occurrence if the PCs go to the communications panel and enhance the signal (the message will remain on tape for three days before being automatically wiped from the commo log). The message is: "Kalen! Stop the..." followed by a scream.

8   In a random location somewhere in the ship, voices are heard. For the first two occurrences, the voices are inaudible, but they will grow in strength on successive occurrences. Kalen's voice is attempting to comfort the bereaved Joelle and convince her that he is a sympathetic shoulder to cry on. On later occurrences, Kalen's ghost may attempt the same with any female character among the PCs.

9   This event is similar to event number four, but Joelle's ghost is proceeding from her stateroom to the main air lock.

10 The computer records the air lock cycling, but it is not actually doing so. After the first two attempts, every second occurrence involves Joelle attempting a different method of suicide—sleeping pills may disappear from the medical locker, or a bloody knife from the galley may be found in stateroom B (Joelle's). On the last day of the jump, Joelle's ghost will have sufficient strength to operate the manual override on the air lock, thus venting the ship to vacuum. In the meantime, the PCs would be wise to disarm any weapons in the ship's locker.

11 This is similar to event number four. Doors open and close for no apparent reason as Kalen's ghost rushes to the air lock, or wherever Joelle's ghost is attempting suicide.

12 Several screams, initially inaudible but growing in strength with each successive occurrence, are heard in the vicinity of the air lock (or wherever Joelle is attempting suicide), as Kalen's ghost attempts to stop her. Both ghosts apparently "die" in the process. The ghosts themselves are not destroyed, it is just a part of their reenactment.

NEURAL WEAPONS

TL	Type	Psi-Pen	DMs	Dam	Difficulty
16	Neural Rifle	10	As direct fire	7	Rifle
16	Neural Pistol	10	As direct fire	5	Handgun

PSIONIC DISRUPTORS

TL	Volume	Weight	Price	Range
16	5 liters	10 kg	Cr10,000	40 meters

MISHAPS

Roll	Type	Result
3+	Superficial	+ or −2 points damage
7+	Minor	+ or −3 points damage
11+	Major	+ or −4 points damage
15+	Destroyed	+ or −6 points damage

The player characters cannot find this commlog entry until after event seven from the Events Table has occurred twice. Then, the computer will inform them it is recording triplicate messages, but it won't release the access code for the original, which is datestamped and timestamped.

To find the access code to the log:

Difficult, Computer, Int, 30 minutes (safe).

The log will contain everything that occurred during the four days recorded—all air lock and door movement, all malfunctions, and all conversations on the communications system. This routine information is normally deleted automatically after a week, except when an accident occurs. Then it is stored and datalocked to prevent interference until the accident is properly investigated.

DEJA VU

The events which occurred on the *Adrienne* will begin to repeat themselves the first time the ship is taken into jump. At first they will occur infrequently and in a random order, but as time progresses, their frequency and intensity will also increase. The events are listed on the

Events Table in the order in which they occurred. Two rolls should be made on this table on the first day of jump, four on the second, and eight rolls for every day thereafter. Initially there will be no visible manifestations accompanying the events, but after day three, faint outlines of people may be seen. These will gain substance until, on the last day, the ghosts will be completely opaque and human in appearance. As time goes on, the events will become more cohesive and will begin to occur in the proper order (the referee should feel free to modify die rolls). On the last day of jump the ghosts will reenact the entire affair in the correct order, exactly as it happened.

GHOSTS

Technically termed hyperspatial paranormal psionic entities (HPPEs or "hippies"), the ghosts' power increases over time spent in hyperspace. They gain psionic power at the rate of two points per jump drive unit per day. Thus on the last day of the *Adrienne's* jump, the ghosts will have a psi strength of 14. They regain psi points at a rate of two points per hour (twice the normal rate).

HPPEs are plainly detectable by neural activity sensors and telepathic characters using the Detect Minds task.

The entities themselves are

capable of all psionic activities at a skill level equal to their current maximum strength, up to a limit of 15. They do not retain the stats of the being they were when alive; all stats revert to zero. Physical attacks will not harm them.

Realspace paranormal psionic entities (RPPEs or "rippies") also exist, and are essentially the same in principle, except they have a fixed psionic strength. This strength varies from haunt to haunt, but is generally in the region of 20 points.

A wide variety of motivations are available for both types, from implementing senseless physical destruction at irregular intervals (poltergeists) to physically manifesting themselves in a certain location (common garden ghosts). Some may, on rare occasions, even retain their predeath stats and skills. This type of manifestation is very, very dangerous if it has harmful motivations.

PSIONIC CHARACTERS

The ghosts are easily detectable on neural activity sensors or by a telepathic Detect Minds task. Psionic characters will feel ill at ease aboard the *Adrienne* once it enters hyperspace. They will be unable to pin down exactly why, but they will feel that

something evil is going on. Any telepathic character will be able to detect the nature of each of the ghosts. Joelle is innocent and grief-stricken, and Kalen is evil and insecure.

If a psionic character comes face to face with Kalen's ghost, he may be compelled to attack it by Mind Assault, if he is capable. Kalen's ghost will overcome the character, but will leave him once he loses consciousness. When and if such a character recovers, he will not fully understand what happened. The haunts will not use psionic attacks on each other; these attacks are only an automatic defensive measure if they are attacked psionically.

IN HYPERSPACE

As the events occur with increasing strength, the PCs will be unable to ignore them. They should recover Kalen's diary before day four in hyperspace, and may piece together what happened. They then have to limit the danger of the ghosts by cutting off the manual override on the air lock and securing anything the ghosts may use which could endanger the PCs.

The referee should play the ghosts as dangerous and unnatural creatures; the PCs should not be allowed to slip into the trap of treating them as harmless spooks because the PCs don't know how dangerous the ghosts can get. In reality, if sufficient precautions are taken, the ghosts are relatively harmless, for now.

AFTER THE FIRST JUMP

When the *Adrienne* comes out of jump the PCs have a number of options. They should have a fair idea of the nature of the ghosts and will know that, while not necessarily dangerous, the ghosts are not conducive to calm jumps or passenger trade. Should the PCs attempt repeated jumps without dealing with the ghost problem, the ghosts will become more dangerous, causing expensive damage or even a misjump.

Scuttling: ("There ain't nothin' a seven-kiloton scuttling charge won't fix"—Eli Perri, starship engineer, 1057-1109.) The PCs may decide to scuttle the vessel, but this would not please the vessel's current

owners (the salvage company or the PCs themselves).

Recruit Ghostbusters: The player characters may try to locate a psionic institute and get them to clear the haunts. This would eventually result in a voyage being made with six skilled psions, who would "exorcise" the ship, using psionic combat if necessary.

Use Neural Weapons: Alternatively, the PCs may try to acquire some neural assault weapons and fight it out with the haunts themselves.

Take the Problem to the Government: The characters may also hand the problem over to the Imperium. While this may not seem to be a very good idea, since the problem is psionic in nature, the PCs may have little choice.

COMPLICATIONS

If the PCs cannot seem to come to a solution to the haunting themselves and things are beginning to drag, the referee may wish to instigate the involvement of the Imperium. A customs boat, making a routine neural activity sensor scan of the *Adrienne*, detects three rapidly fading sources (the haunts). To them, it will look like three dying characters. They promptly board the vessel and, finding no bodies, impound the *Adrienne* and report the incident to the system commodore.

The PCs are shipped to the local Imperial Intelligence bureau and interrogated, using truth drug if the PCs do not cooperate. Once the truth comes out, the system commodore will have an interesting problem. He has a ship which has displayed unusual psionic phenomena and a bunch of PCs on his hands. He will decide to dispatch the PCs and the *Adrienne* to the nearest Imperial research station aboard the heavy cruiser *Nimbus*, currently in the system on a stopover, en route for that area.

The *Adrienne* will be kept in the shuttle bay of the *Nimbus* under constant guard. Two of the guards will be armed with neural rifles. The PCs will be detained in the brig.

Once the *Nimbus* jumps, begin rolling on the Events Table again.

For the first two days the ghosts will confine their activities to the *Adrienne*. The guards will report unusual occurrences in and around the ship. The ghosts will gain in strength much more quickly, however, and by day three will realize they have a larger ship to play with. They will proceed to positions on the larger ship equivalent to those they occupied on the *Adrienne* and will proceed as normal with their hauntings.

BAD TO WORSE

At this point, a number of things may go wrong. A scared sentry may fire on one of the haunts with a neural assault rifle and be stunned. A short psionic firefight would ensue as other crewmembers take up his weapon and open fire, continuing until they realize the danger and hang back. This would leave the captain with a number of unconscious crewmembers in his medbay, physically unharmed but mentally drained or even dead.

Joelle's ghost will be able to open air locks manually very early on in the jump, due to the stronger jump field giving her more psionic power. And there are *lots* of air locks on the *Nimbus*. If the air locks are secured, she may attempt to kill herself using whatever is handy in the ship's armory. Explosives seem simplest.

Kalen's ghost may also endanger the cruiser by taking control of turrets and opening fire for no apparent reason on an external thruster bank, doing untold damage.

By day three the PCs will be called up from the brig for an interview with the captain, who, having had the brig area monitored, will begin to believe that the PCs cannot be behind all these occurrences. After briefing them on the events of the previous few days he will inform them, "If you guys are not part of the solution, then you're part of the problem—and I can sure solve you, if I am forced to. But I am hoping to elicit your willing cooperation.'"

NEURAL ASSAULT

Five neural stunners are aboard the cruiser, enough to make a fair fight of it if enough bodies are available to take up the weapons of

stunned crewmembers. Against a paranormal adversary, morale will be low, and the struggle will be a tough one.

Dumping the *Adrienne* out the launch hatch will be of little usefulness as it is no longer haunted—the *Nimbus* is now the ghosts' home.

If the situation becomes dangerous the captain may release the psionic disrupter in the ship's locker. Its effect on the ghosts will be slight, but it might be enough to gain the PCs an edge. With the ghosts having given the player characters a serious problem in the first part of the adventure, this is where the characters have a chance to get even.

FIGHTING BACK

To effectively combat the ghosts, the characters will probably need to use psionic combat, neural weapons, or the psionic disrupter on the *Nimbus*.

Psionic Combat: Damage points for psionic combat is equal to a character's Psionic Strength points, whether the character has been subject to psionic examination or not. If the psi-point level is reduced to less than 0, the character is unconscious until he recovers Strength in the usual way. If the psi-point Strength is reduced to -5 or less, the character is dead. If the character loses more than four psi-points of damage in a given combat round, he is disoriented for his next turn.

Armor: Physical armor values have no psionic effect. All characters have a basic psi-armor value of Intelligence÷5.

Telepathic characters may add their skill level to this. They may also, at the cost of one psi-point per round, create a shield of psi-armor whose armor value is equal to twice Telepathy skill. They may not perform any other activity with the shield raised.

Armor penetration and damage are calculated as for ordinary weapons in the **Player's Manual**, but psionic armor is full-body protection, *and thus any task success beyond marginal has no effect on damage applied.*

MEGATRAVELLER™

To hit with a psionic attack:

Formidable, Telepathy, Int (confrontation).

Referee: Due to the high point cost of tasks on the Psionic Attacks Table, most telepathic characters will be unable to perform them. They are primarily for use by paranormal psionic entities.

Neural Weapons: Neural weapons have two settings: stun and kill.

Stun will inflict as many damage points as necessary to render the target unconscious, up to the weapon's limit.

Kill inflicts the full damage point capability, whatever the target's condition. For psionic assaults, any amount of damage can be inflicted, up to the limit, at the firer's discretion. Should a mishap occur (marginal success) roll 2D on the Mishap Table for neural weapons, 3D for psionic weapons.

Whether the damage modifier is added or subtracted can be determined randomly or using Murphy's Law. (If the intention was to stun, increase damage; if the intention was to kill, decrease damage.)
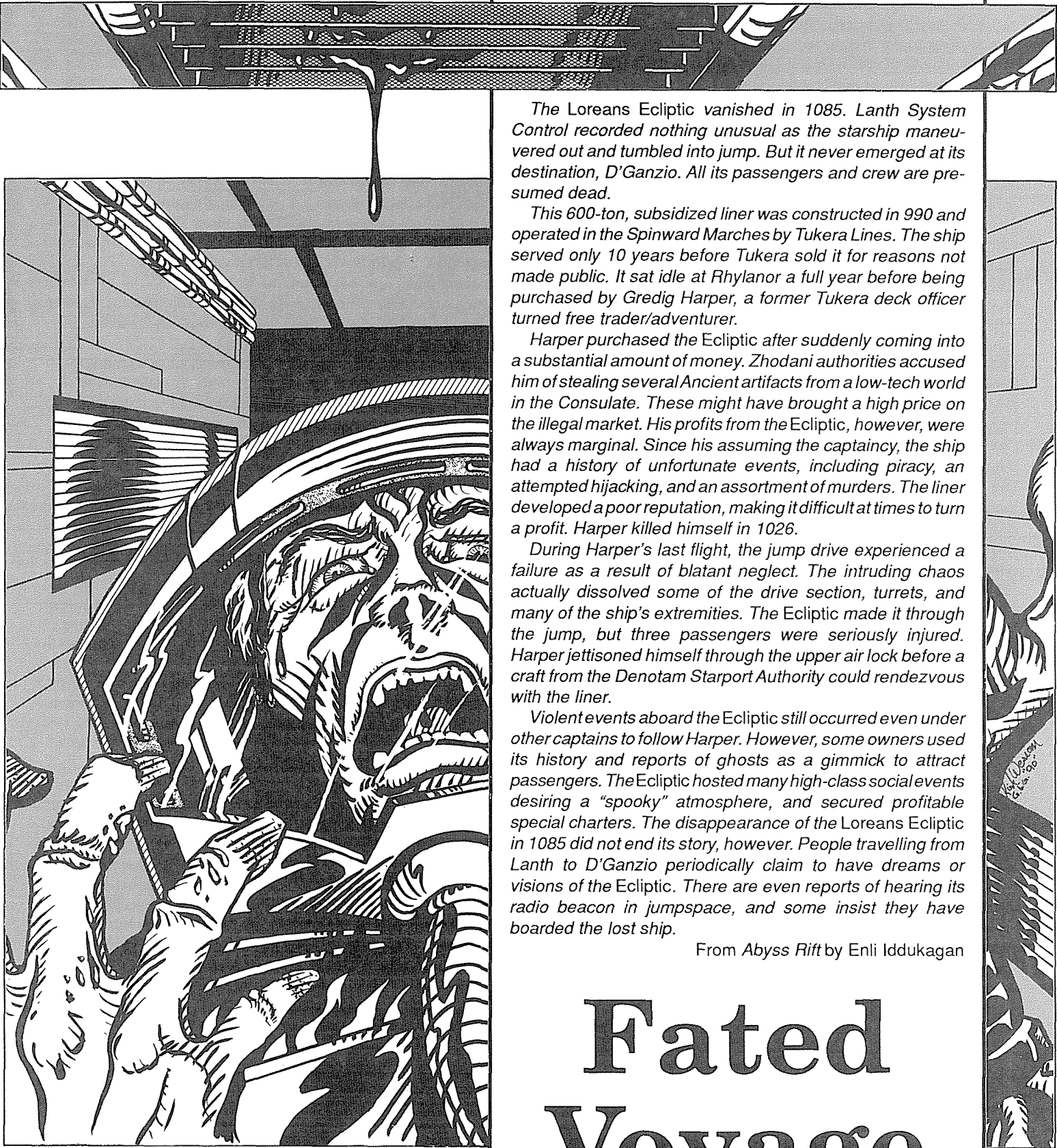
Psionic Disrupters: Available at TL16, these disrupters increase the difficulty of all psionic tasks within their range by one difficulty level. Neural activity sensor scans will become useless—they will pick up constant, high-intensity "white noise." Psionic disrupters operate continuously for one week before they need recharging.

Psionic disruption may be performed by a telepathic character using the following task:

To disrupt psionic activity:

Difficult, Telepathy, Int (uncertain).

Referee: Cost is one point per 10 meters radius of effect per combat round. The task must only be rolled to begin disruption, not rerolled each round. Ω

The Loreans Ecliptic *vanished in 1085. Lanth System Control recorded nothing unusual as the starship maneuvered out and tumbled into jump. But it never emerged at its destination, D'Ganzio. All its passengers and crew are presumed dead.*

This 600-ton, subsidized liner was constructed in 990 and operated in the Spinward Marches by Tukera Lines. The ship served only 10 years before Tukera sold it for reasons not made public. It sat idle at Rhylanor a full year before being purchased by Gredig Harper, a former Tukera deck officer turned free trader/adventurer.

Harper purchased the Ecliptic *after suddenly coming into a substantial amount of money. Zhodani authorities accused him of stealing several Ancient artifacts from a low-tech world in the Consulate. These might have brought a high price on the illegal market. His profits from the* Ecliptic, *however, were always marginal. Since his assuming the captaincy, the ship had a history of unfortunate events, including piracy, an attempted hijacking, and an assortment of murders. The liner developed a poor reputation, making it difficult at times to turn a profit. Harper killed himself in 1026.*

During Harper's last flight, the jump drive experienced a failure as a result of blatant neglect. The intruding chaos actually dissolved some of the drive section, turrets, and many of the ship's extremities. The Ecliptic *made it through the jump, but three passengers were seriously injured. Harper jettisoned himself through the upper air lock before a craft from the Denotam Starport Authority could rendezvous with the liner.*

Violent events aboard the Ecliptic *still occurred even under other captains to follow Harper. However, some owners used its history and reports of ghosts as a gimmick to attract passengers. The* Ecliptic *hosted many high-class social events desiring a "spooky" atmosphere, and secured profitable special charters. The disappearance of the* Loreans Ecliptic *in 1085 did not end its story, however. People travelling from Lanth to D'Ganzio periodically claim to have dreams or visions of the* Ecliptic. *There are even reports of hearing its radio beacon in jumpspace, and some insist they have boarded the lost ship.*

From *Abyss Rift* by Enli Iddukagan

Fated Voyage

Michael R. Mikesh

*I*n this adventure, the player characters encounter the *Loreans Ecliptic* trapped in jumpspace, while they are en route from Lanth to D'Ganzio (Spinward Marches 1719 and 1920). This encounter may happen by accident or as part of the PCs' deliberate investigation. If this adventure is intended for a Halloween gathering of players, it is perhaps best to let the group happen onto the *Ecliptic* by accident or complete the investigation portion in a prior session.

PATRON

An agent for Natton Bonner will contact the player characters and interview them for an assignment. He has considered other groups, but was not satisfied with their reliability. The agent's investigation of the characters has not uncovered anything that would make them seem like poor candidates.

Bonner is a man of substantial wealth on Rhylanor. The agent will hint that he is also a private collector of Ancient artifacts. Bonner wants the characters to track down an Ancient artifact he knows of through private records from about the year 1000. Called the Ottem, it was the only item Capt. Gredig Harper did not sell to buy *Loreans Ecliptic*.

Harper did inquire about selling the Ottem in 1026, but died before he could begin serious negotiations. Even then, it apparently was not passed on to any inheritors, and in any case did not appear on the illegal market. Bonner believes Harper hid the item aboard the *Ecliptic*, perhaps in a secret compartment of his cabin, and it was never discovered by subsequent owners. He wants the characters to track down the *Ecliptic* , search the ship, and bring the Ottem to him.

If the group has a ship, Bonner will pay the cost of its operation for a half year (maintenance, monthly payments, and so on). Otherwise, he'll pay for high passage for the group for a half year anywhere within the Spinward Marches, subsistence pay between travel at ordinary levels, and Cr1000 per month for each character. Monthly funds for the group may be collected through an interstellar banking system. Upon reporting back to Bonner or his agent, the group will receive Cr50,000 (or Cr500,000 if they recover the Ottem), a letter of recommendation, and possible referrals to other private collectors. Bonner might also use his influence to assist the party (e.g. resolve some legal problem the characters left somewhere).

These are minimums, however, and the group can try to negotiate for more. If the negotiation is successful, the referee may adjust the agreement so as to satisfy the characters (yet not so as to overbalance the campaign).

SEARCH

If the group does not already have a copy, the agent will at least mention *Lost Treasure Ships of the Abyss Rift*—once the characters have the book, allow them to read the excerpt at the beginning of this article. Bonner believes the *Loreans Ecliptic* was not destroyed in jump, but was hijacked to Tavonni (Spinward Marches 1520). This is consistent with other hijackings of the time. If a ship could not jump to the Sword Worlds, it was stripped of cargo and abandoned at a Tavonni asteroid.

Since searching all the space around Tavonni would not be possible, the best leads may be obtained among the Sword Worlds. If port records of the time describe the arrival of cargo similar to that carried by the *Ecliptic*, the crew of the ship that brought it might have been involved with the hijacking and know where to find the liner.

This is in fact a red herring—but not necessarily a fruitless one. Stories about the Abyss Rift are also popular at bars around Sword World ports, and the *Loreans Ecliptic* is particularly well known and often mentioned.

The way the tales run, the *Ecliptic* is still trapped in jumpspace and is occasionally encountered between Lanth and D'Ganzio.

This facet of the Abyss Rift legends about the *Ecliptic* is strong in Sword World versions because Sword World ships trading in the Imperium claim to have encountered the *Ecliptic* (at least more often than Imperial ships).

If the group tries hard enough, it can even find someone who claims to have boarded the ship. Arna Grundsen was originally a steward, now a starport tramp. She will be only too happy to tell her story in exchange for liquor. In 1101, Arna was serving aboard the *Cross Mark*, a free trader bound for D'Ganzio, when a rash of nausea came over a number of passengers and crew. About that time, she also found a heavy, gray fog blocking the passenger deck corridor. Arna passed through anyway so as to call engineering. But in rushing through the corridors looking for a call station, she realized nothing around her was familiar.

To make matters worse, the only person she could find was a corpse a few days dead. As Arna made her way back, she heard an eerie noise coming up behind her. It quickly resolved into the screams of a child, and a young girl appeared from nowhere running at her with a bloody head and hands. Arna dashed to the gray fog and jumped through.

On the other side, she once again found herself in the ship she belonged in. After a few hours, the engineers did something to make the fog go away.

In telling this story, the referee should embellish it as much as possible to give it color. Arna has made a career of telling it, and has learned to apply showmanship. Although this has earned her a great many drinks, she is not necessarily believed. Nonetheless, her story is true, and is consistent with similar tales about encountering the *Ecliptic*.

The events the player characters experience while in the Sword Worlds should encourage them to try to jump from Lanth to D'Ganzio in hope of finding the *Ecliptic*. Statistically, this would not be likely to produce the desire result, but for the sake of the adventure, assume the PCs get lucky on the third try. Their chances are improved if they examine the logs of ships that purportedly met with the *Ecliptic*. Studying the navigational records, the characters can potentially find navigational parameters shared among those jumps that found the ship.

To identify navigational parameters common to flights that encountered the *Loreans Ecliptic*:
Difficult, Navigation, Int, 1 day (safe).
Referee: Allow the usual chance for a retry if a failure occurs.

If the adventurers intend to use the navigational parameters, it is also important that they leave the Lanth system and enter the D'Ganzio system at carefully defined locations to have the best chance of encountering the *Ecliptic*. The navigational task roll for the jump is no different than under ordinary circumstances, but assume that they do find the *Ecliptic* on exceptional success. If after two jumps from Lanth to D'Ganzio the PCs still do not encounter it, assume they automatically do on the third try.

GATE

Late during the ship's flight through jumpspace, nausea will suddenly come over a number of the player characters and any other passengers and crew. This effect is the same as occurs when a ship misjumps, but in this case, it signals the appearance of the gate to the *Ecliptic*. The specific location of the gate on the PCs' ship is left to the referee's discretion.

As a suggestion, it could appear someplace where an intruder could initially slip aboard through the gate unnoticed and steal something (e.g., a passenger's necklace or drive component). After the intruder flees back through, the adventurers will be even more motivated to enter the gate than by just their search for the Ottem.

When the gate is discovered, read the following to the players.

You find an indistinct patch of gray fog more than 1.5 meters wide and almost three meters high, coming up from the floor. The perimeter is hazy and ill-defined. It seems illuminated by a light of its own, giving it an unreal appearance. A shadow cannot be cast upon it, nor will a spotlight make it any brighter.

Technically oriented characters might regard this as a rare flight anomaly called a jumpspace node, and it is indeed related. However, this has the additional effect of acting as a gate to another ship in flight, although in a different time. Characters passing through the gate will have a difficult time communicating with comrades on the PCs' ship. Sound, radio, and light do not pass through it. Line interference on communication cables through the gate will be high, but will work. Cables can slip along the gate perimeter with little danger, but if pulled to one side or another with enough force (25+ lbs), they will suddenly disintegrate.

ENCOUNTERS ON THE *ECLIPTIC*

"Spooky" happenings set the tone for the adventure as the characters explore the *Ecliptic*. Although most events are characteristic of traditional ghostly occurrences, these are really just sights and sounds from out of time. The types of phenomenon the PCs encounter should be regulated by the referee as the adventure progresses. Initial encounters ought not to involve personalities. The referee should instead employ mysterious happenings—things like shadows, fresh blood, strange sounds, etc.

As their time on the *Ecliptic* passes, the PCs should begin to encounter "ghost" personalities, but only for fleeting moments. Beyond this, the encounters become longer, allowing the adventurers to more fully interact with the personalities.

Through this interaction, they may be able to develop a fuller understanding of what is actually happening.

The referee should keep in mind what is actually going on. These "hauntings" are not caused by restless spirits, but by the Ottem still with the ship. The images, sounds, and other sensations are "live" projections across time. These are usually two-way (but not always). Thus, an encounter with a "ghost" is simply a communication with a person from another time, who in turn might believe the adventurers are ghosts.

This makes it possible that contact with the player characters was recorded somewhere in ship's records. The events that are projected are largely governed by witnesses on board the ship and usually triggered by fear or an emotionally traumatic event. Because of this subconscious human guidance, images need not be complete. For instance, a pool of blood and shadow might come across, but not necessarily a body. Thus edited, the scenes and visions can be quite terrifying indeed. However, they pose no direct threat to the characters since physical contact is not possible (except when in touch with the Ottem itself). The images are merely sensations generated by psionics (which might also be interpreted as supernatural). Because they are psionically generated, they cannot be seen, heard, or sensed in any way by characters psionically shielded. Likewise, a shielded character cannot be seen by a ghost.

Encounter Frequency

Encounters should be selected and used at the referee's discretion. Optionally, a roll to see if an encounter occurs can be thrown every five minutes (2D for 11+) that elapse. Below are several examples of what the characters may encounter. The referee should devise others that he feels are appropriate for the group and situation.

Elusive Shadows: Randomly selected characters notice movement some distance away from time to time. When the movement is investigated, however, nothing is found.

Noises: Scratching sounds are heard from behind a wall, or murmuring behind a door. Again, no apparent cause can be discovered.

Blood: A growing pool of blood becomes visible, accompanied by a fuzzy shadow of a dying man. The body will remain completely invisible and intangible, but the shadow will seem to grope and move toward the characters.

Sword: A bloodied sword is stuck in the floor in front of a stateroom door. (Markings belong to that of a Sword Worlds order.) A struggle is audible within, along with a woman's cries for help. The sword and sounds disappear as soon as the sword is touched or the door opened.

Darkness: Regions of darkness make their way along a corridor toward the adventurers from two opposing ends. The group will likely wish to duck into a room to avoid being engulfed. (A beam of light cannot penetrate the darkness, although passive IR will work.)

Invisible Barrier: The characters will find that they cannot pass through a door or hatch even though it was left open. In fact, the opening is closed. What they see is just an image from the past.

Hanged Man: A corpse hangs by the neck from knotted sheets. It vanishes almost immediately after the characters open the door.

Head: A woman's head appears floating in space. It looks about with a terrified expression. The woman tries to speak to the characters, and even screams, but there's no sound. (Only the image of her head was projected to the adventurer's time. Likewise, the adventurers are all she can see.)

Funeral Procession: Men, dressed in formal black attire, carry a casket along the corridor to the main lounge. They pay absolutely no attention to the characters. Neither can they be touched.

Under the Bed: A woman bursts from her stateroom screaming hysterically that there's something moving under her bed. She runs off in a direction other than toward the characters. If they investigate, the adventurers will find a corpse on the floor on the far side of the bed.

Klaxons: Alarms sound as soon as a character touches a door. Smoke seeps out around the edges. If the adventurers open the door, they see a man trapped at the far corner of the room. Characters will feel choked by the smoke and will notice a sensation of heat, but they are not harmed.

Searching Spirit: A woman in a white burial gown and veil slowly walks the corridor, seemingly oblivious to the characters. She carries a lantern which lights her way. After passing by, the woman slowly turns and points to one of the adventurers. She shrieks in rage, then fades away. (This was really an actress playing the role of a spirit for visiting children.)

Pirates: Boarders in vacc suits, firing gauss rifles, engage the characters in combat. The encounter ends when it comes clear to the players that neither side is taking casualties. (Any shot from either side simply passes through the image of the other side, but might be viewed as a miss.)

Axe: A madman with a bloody axe will come at the characters. Weapon fire will have no effect, but neither will a blow from the axe on the adventurers. After the first stroke, he disappears.

MYSTERIOUS LADY

If this adventure is part of an ongoing campaign, the referee might also include a ghost that appears several times (she is actually a beautiful Zhodani agent named Tlinjatl). She a is tall, dark woman with a cold manner. Encounters with her will generally not last any longer than 60 seconds before fading away.

She seldom speaks, but simply observes the group with an expression of disdain. After the adventurers recover the Ottem, but before leaving the *Ecliptic*, Tlinjatl will appear once more and address the group. *She will ask what date they came from and what is the name of their ship.* Then she will tell them an agent will meet them at D'Ganzio to take the Ottem and return it to the Zhodani Consulate. The characters will be paid Cr50,000.

The Zhodani woman will not have much time in the contact to involve herself in lengthy negotiation, nor will she be willing to do so.

She might reluctantly answer a few uncompromising questions, and perhaps raise her price as high as Cr100,000. But if she feels the group is not cooperative, she will express her distaste for the characters—calling them looters and thieves who have but the thinnest veils of morality—and will break contact.

Tlinjatl was frequently aboard the *Ecliptic* as Madame Tryna from Arden between the years 1059 and 1062. Her mission was to return the Ottem to the Zhodani Consulate.

Although she failed to find the artifact, she could telepathically interact with it. Using psi-drugs, she could sometimes project herself through the Ottem to the *Ecliptic's* last jump (and only to that time). During these instances, she watched visitors (player characters and others) roam the ship.

Even if the adventurers do not reveal who or when they are, Tlinjatl will probably have seen and heard enough of the characters without their knowing to be able to track them down later. However, that job will probably fall to Zhodani agents in the characters' time, as by that time Tlinjatl will be old or will have died.

Alternatively, if the PCs provoke her enough, she will wait out the intervening years in a cold berth and deal with the characters herself.

Lt. Tlinjatl: 587A8B, Age 26, 2 terms, Cr12,000.
Skills: Gun Cbt-1, Admin-1, Forgery-1, Bribery-1, Streetwise-1.
Psi Skills (10): Telepathy, Clairvoyance, Telekinesis.

OTHER BOARDERS

The adventurers are not the only living beings aboard the *Loreans Ecliptic*. There are other gates to the liner from other ships in other times (all after the disappearance of the *Loreans Ecliptic*). Keep in mind that these other visitors will be frightened by what they've encountered and will more readily shoot first than anything else. Direct encounters with these groups should be held until later in the adventure, especially after the adventurers have learned that the "ghosts" are harmless. The surprise of running into something with very real weapons should quickly restore a sense of danger to the situation.

BOARDERS FROM OTHER TIMES

Num	Qt	Description	Tactics	Leader	Weapon	Armor
1	2D	Corsairs	2	L	Autorifle	Cloth-1 (vacc)
2	2D	Merchants	0	L	Shotgun	None
3	1D	Navy/scouts	1	—	Gauss pistol	Cloth-2 (vacc)
4	1D	Merchants	0	—	Snub pistol	Cloth (vacc)
5	1D	Marines	2	L	Laser rifle	Combat armor-12
6	1D	Merchants	1	—	Autopistol	None

The referee should try to avoid letting the PCs encounter other gates, since this could distract them from their purpose and generate complications. Just assume that the location of the other gates happens to be where the group has not looked. If a character should go through another gate, assume that the gate leads to a ship perhaps a year or two forward in time. Should the character stay long enough to gain useful information of the future, either have him captured or have the engineer purge the gate, cutting him off from returning to the past.

LOREANS ECLIPTIC

The *Loreans Ecliptic* is a *Stellar*-class subsidized liner. Further details about this ship class are presented in **Adventure 13: Signal GK** (GDW,1985), although that book is not required for this adventure. The adventurers will board the liner when the *Ecliptic* is only two days into its jump. Of course, the ship has been lost for decades, but the gate has displaced the characters in time. The

ship is in good working order, although it is dark.

When the characters board, the *Ecliptic* will be at early evening in its day cycle. Thus, the lighting will be low, and other environmental cues will suggest night. Everyone aboard the ship, however, is dead. Most will be found in twisted positions with expressions of agony. A successfully performed Forensic or Medical task will reveal that they all died two days ago.

That they all died from some sort of brain disorder can only be determined by an autopsy. (In fact, the cause was an intensely powerful form of psionic mind assault generated by the Ottem itself.)

DECK PLAN KEY

1.	Reception area
2.	Lift shaft
3.	Ramp
4-13.	Passenger staterooms
14-19.	Passageways
20-29.	Passenger staterooms
30-32.	Bridge area
33-43.	Crew staterooms
44.	Low berths
45.	Common area
46.	Engineering
47-49.	Cargo hold
50.	Aft turrets
51.	Passenger lounge
52.	Galley
53.	Storage
54-56.	Engineering
57.	Forward turret
58-60.	Launch dock
61-64.	Launch

GATE FROM PLAYER SHIP—ROOM 13

When the adventurers pass through the gate, read the following to the players.

You find yourself in a darkened room, which appears to be a study, judging from the books and tables. The walls are stone, and so is the ceiling that vaults overhead. Moonlight shines in from high, narrow windows, offering as much light as the feeble lamps on each column. Four people sit around a table in contemporary-style chairs which are out of place among the heavy wooden furnishings. None of them stir. Nearby, a wispy apparition forms. The transparent image of an Imperial merchant ship captain turns to the characters and speaks in mournful tones. "I am without hope. No soul can right the sins of my greed, and so I am banished. Leave me as I must endure my misery alone." His head droops, and the vision fades away.

The group has actually entered a well appointed stateroom, which includes holographic projector panels on all the walls and even the ceiling. The occupant, Bernard Vuuton, brought with him an expensive decor program to make his surroundings appear Gothic.

To recognize that the surroundings are actually the result of holography:
Difficult, homeworld tech level, Int, 1 min (safe).

Quarters Deck

2

4

20

1

21

Computer 30 3

Avionics 31

Ship's Locker

5

Bridge

22

6

Helm

32

Forward Hold

47

33

36

23

7

16

39

19

34

37

8

24

35

38

40

25

Midships Hold

48

9

45

41

44

Low Berths

26

Fuel

Fuel

10

15

42

18

11

43

27

12

14

E-1

17

Aft Hold

49

13

29

46

28

E-2

E-3

Fuel

Fuel

50

Hold Deck   **Aft Turret**

Quarters Deck

Ecliptic

51

52   53

Passenger Lounge

1

Deck Plan Symbols

— Interior Wall

⊢— Sliding Door

— Bulkhead

▨ Lift Shaft

IRIS VALVE

✕ Iris Valve

○ Overhead

○ Floor

◎ Both Floor and Overhead

Typical Humans

1.5 meter squares for use with Snapshot or Azhanti High Lightning

Forward Turret

57

58

59   61   60

62   63

64

Launch Dock

54   55

E-4

56

E-5

Fuel

Drives

9

6

3

Typical Human

Scale in Meters

0

0   3   6   9   12   15

Upper Engineering Deck

Ecliptic

Referee: Use this task if the character is examining the surroundings or otherwise has wandered far enough to possibly collide with the real stateroom wall.

If the latter occurs, and the task roll fails, the character automatically hits the wall. He takes no damage except to his dignity. The homeworld tech level for the character, divided by five (rounded down), is used as a positive DM. The referee may secretly roll this task himself at his option.

The people around the table are passengers—Ulaya Naakra (a fashion designer), Harren Borr (a financier), and Julie Borr (his wife). All were here participating in a seance conducted by Bernard Vuuton as the ship entered jump. In that moment, all four painfully died, their hands locked together in a death grip. "Dr." Bernard Vuuton was a popular author and host of occult documentaries, known for his showmanship and flair.

One of his favorite shipboard activities was to conduct seances for fellow passengers, summoning the spirits of the dead who presumably wander jumpspace. The spirits, however, were just images projected by the holographic paneling. He has a good number of pseudoreal personality programs in his collection, the newest being Captain Gredig Harper.

The Harper program was created with great haste for this trip aboard the *Ecliptic*. Being incomplete, Vuuton set it to make just a brief appearance and not stick around to converse with his guests. However, with everyone dead, the program never found an opportunity to perform for anyone until the adventurers emerged from the gate.

Among the other items Vuuton brought with him are books (mostly his own), a divining rod, rune stones, tarot cards, and stage magic equipment, plus a variety of clumsy looking sensors and cameras, portable electroencephalographs, seismographs, holorecords, and a home-built psionics detector.

The psi-detector is an item of dubious reliability, but looks like an impressively sophisticated hand-held item that generates clicks, hums, and pulses of uncertain meaning. Someone with Sensor Ops skill can handle it in much the same fashion as a neural activity sensor.

To locate sources of psionic activity:
Routine, Sensor Ops, Edu, 60 sec (uncertain).
Referee: Even if total truth is rolled, the result can never be better than partial truth. The sensor will miss sources, indicate false sources, and distort the readings. This sensor is a very useful referee device. By exercising referee prerogative, the group can be maneuvered by the readings to go where the referee would prefer they go on the ship.

This way, the adventure can be better paced and the events ordered so as to enhance the enjoyment of the game. As soon as the adventurers emerge for the first time from Vuuton's stateroom, and if they have not previously reviewed a copy of *Abyss Rift*, assume that one is laying outside Vuuton's door. It was dropped by other boarders, like the characters. They walked as far as, but did not enter, Vuuton's stateroom. This way, the referee may read to the PCs the material on the *Loreans Ecliptic* found at the beginning of this article.

STATEROOMS

Except Dr. Vuuton's room, no other specific passenger staterooms are described here.

The focus of play, at the beginning of the explorations, should be on "spooky" encounters as discussed in the Encounters on the *Ecliptic* section above.

With the staterooms left generic, the referee is free to pace himself so as to heighten the haunting atmosphere for his group. The stateroom assignments are given in the table to the right.

The occupation of the individual may be determined by selecting it from the Patron Encounters lists in the **Referee's Manual** on page 41.

MEGATRAVELLER™

STATEROOM ASSIGNMENTS

Room	Passenger Name	World of Origin
4.	Harren & Julie Borr	Mora/Mora
5.	Baron Ummadkuar	Lanth/Lanth
6.	Pheter Wong	Invendo/Lanth
7.	Derek Stargard	Sacnoth/Sword Worlds
8.	Mykel Nihlor	Mire/Darrian
9.	Ulaya Naakra	Regina/Regina
10.	Eler Aut Swizen	Icetina/Lanth
11.	Dorothy Middleton	Ivendo/Lanth
12.	Aram Murdaur	Rabwhar/Lunion
13.	Dr. Bernard Vuuton	Rhylanor/Rhylanor
20.	Stewart Vernon	Rabwhar/Lunion
21.	Siku Kurlikiran	Mora/Mora
22.	Alda Schwartz	Gram/Sword Worlds
23.	Teryi Rice, Jr	Equus/Lanth
24.	Capt. Jonn Myers	Aramanx/Aramis
25.	Jale Enidre	Esalin/Jewell
26.	Kahu Ayherer	Zamine/Darrian (Aslan)
27.	Dar Oltur	Junidy/Aramis (Vargr)
28.	Admiral Gagikiim	Lunion/Lunion
29.	Wm. A. J. Crofton	Natoko/Rhylanor

Room	Crewmember	Position
33.	Dale Seneker	Captain/pilot
34.	Arnold Deering	Chief steward
35.	Sadku Nuasiar	Second steward
36.	Gari Akim-Leames	Navigator
37.	Margi Elson	Third steward
38.	Kimu Enu Laun	Third engineer
40.	Dougal Strom	Chief engineer
41.	Tob Giko	Second engineer
42.	Dr. Oscar Henrik	Ship's medic
43.	Vander san-Barin	Chief gunner

To determine the number of bodies in a stateroom, roll 1D. On a 1, there is one corpse (probably the assigned passenger). On a 2, there are 1D bodies. On 3+, the stateroom is empty, as the occupant died in another area. If the stateroom was occupied, the door is unlocked on a result of 3+ on 2D. If it was not occupied, the door was unlocked on a roll of 7+ on 2D. However, the characters may happen onto the body of a steward. His key can access all staterooms, as well as the bridge area. Even if they do not find the key, they may be able to open doors using the following task.

To open the door to a locked stateroom:
Difficult, Intrusion, Edu, 30 sec (safe).
Referee: The door uses an electronic key. Either Mechanical or Electronics may be used at DM-1 instead of Intrusion skill. If the character does not have proper tools for the skill applied, the task is Formidable.

Characters looking for the Ottem may search each stateroom. Although the Ottem is not in a stateroom, searchers could find some things of value. The referee can suggest this activity by describing corpses with turned-out pockets or an open stateroom obviously ransacked, or through an encounter with something of value in the open, such as a tourist camera.

Individual adventurers might refuse to pick up items out of fear of reprisals from the "spirits." This is fine. The referee can even encourage

such fears by letting the group later find a boarder, laden with loot, dead. (He died by happenstance, but the PCs don't know this.) Some characters might refuse to loot on moral grounds, or might just look for mementos of the passengers and crewmembers to bring back to their families.

To search a stateroom:
Difficult, searchers, Int, 10 min (safe).
Referee: This is rolled by the referee. The number of searchers in the room is a positive modifier to the roll, but only one character may apply his Intelligence as an additional modifier. The character whose Intelligence was applied is also the one to make the check for determination, if necessary. On success, refer to the Stateroom Valuables Table. The results of the table below may be applied to passenger or crew staterooms.

STATEROOM VALUABLES (ROLL 2D)

Die	Item
2	Currency (2D×Cr10,000)
3	Currency (2D×Cr1000)
4	Currency (2D×Cr100)
5	Item of equipment (see table)
6	Liquor or wine
7	Nothing or already searched
8	Jewelry
9	Item of equipment (see table)
10	High passage ticket
11	Drugs
12	Courier pouch

Explanation of Stateroom Valuables: Special items are detailed further below.
Equipment: Refer to the Found Equipment Table.
Liquor or Wine: Brands often transported through the Spinward Marches are Brownie Old Isle whiskey (Cr15 per bottle), Blue Valonaise wine (Cr12), and Zilan Eiswein (Cr50). The number of bottles found are 2D-6 (minimum 1).
Nothing: Either the adventurers find evidence that the room was already searched by other boarders, or there never was anything here of interest. The referee might want to roll or select something from the Innocuous Items Table to give the characters anyway.
Jewelry: 1D items will be found. Throw 2D. On 6-, the items are just costume jewelry amounting to about Cr50. On a throw of 7+, however, the jewelry is real, each item valued at 1D times Cr100.
Drugs: To determine the type and number of doses found, throw 1D. A result of 1=Medical slow (2D doses), 2=Fast (2D), 3=Slow (1D), 4=Combat (1D), 5 =Truth (1), 6=Anagathics (1).
Courier Pouch: The occupant of this room was a special courier, either for the Imperial Navy or a commercial interest. At the referee's option, this could lead into another adventure. Otherwise, the sealed pouch can be returned for a Cr10,000 reward and a letter of appreciation. The letter may earn the characters favorable treatment in later encounters with the navy or company.

INNOCUOUS ITEMS (ROLL 2D)

Die	Item
2	Dead animal
3	Religious book
4	Prescription drugs
5	Letters/messages
6	Souvenirs
7	Fine/unusual apparel
8	Tour book/maps
9	Pictures
10	Hotel voucher
11	Bar chits
12	Lucky charm

FOUND EQUIPMENT (ROLL 2D)

Die	Equipment
2	Assassin's weapon
3	Map, electronic
4	Kit, professional
5	Hand computer
6	Psionic shield helmet
7	Camera (video recorder)
8	Vacc suit
9	Translator, language
10	Respirator
11	Weapon
12	Robot

Explanation of Equipment Found: Special equipment is detailed further below.
Assassin's Weapon: If this is rolled, reveal that bullets spill out of the hollow rod of a luggage clothes hanger when it accidentally comes apart. This should be enough of a clue that other common items in the luggage are in fact parts that can be assembled into a 7mm rifle with silencer, stock, and scope.
Kit, Professional: This will probably be a medical kit. However, on subsequent occurrences of this result, it can be replaced with other kits, such as electronic tools.
Weapon: This might be a body pistol smuggled into the stateroom. However, it could be a heavier weapon if this were a crewmember or an Imperial officer, agent, or nobleman. Sometimes swords are allowed, occasionally carried by Sword Worlders.
Robot: This is a personal valet (probably a Rashush) initially found in a reduced power mode. If it's not a more sophisticated model, it might be insane. Otherwise, it will stay by the remains of its master much as would an honor guard.

The robot will prevent characters from disturbing its master's personal effects (short of violence) and will insist that the characters leave the stateroom. However, skill in Robotics or Robot Operations can be used to make it cooperative if not overly eager to assist and serve.

RECEPTION AREA—ROOM 1

This area involves a "ghost." If this encounter will disrupt the pace of the adventure, the referee can ignore it and run the event when the adventurers pass through this junction later. This goes for the other areas as well—the referee is encouraged to use his own discretion. When the encounter begins, read the following to the players.

A bright light catches your attention. You see the lift begin descending from the launch dock above to your level. The sides are transparent, and its interior lighting contrasts sharply with your darkened surroundings. You see a man inside. From his dress, he is obviously a clergyman from a more conservative order in the Church of the Stellar Divinity (Deneb). He smiles pleasantly, carrying a travelling case in one hand and a book in another. As he steps out, he tucks the book under his other arm so as to shake hands. "Good dawning to thee, Children. I be Reverend Zelrin. If thou art my fellow passengers, I can see I will have happy company."

Zelrin will fully expect to shake hands with the adventurers. As soon as he discovers the characters are intangible, he will begin a religious tirade, believing them to be unholy beings. The reverend will use lines like, "Be gone foul demons! Remove thyselves from Glory's Light and return to the Darkness from whence you came!" He will keep this up, while waving a book of scriptures, until the encounter ends.

From the console in this area, the group can easily call up the list of stateroom assignments.

BRIDGE—ROOM 32

Entry through the iris valve at times of minimal alert requires a crewmember's electronic key. If the adventurers do not have a key, they may try Demolitions or Intrusion, the latter now being a Formidable task with an interval of 10 minutes. The group will find the crewmembers at their posts for entry into jump, but all will be posed as if they died in anguish, some with eyes wide and mouths open. At the slightest disturbance, the captain will roll from his chair, the keys at his belt clattering loudly as they hit the floor.

The captain's key ring is adorned with an elaborately tied, green leather thong. The keys will enable the characters to open hatches, lock and unlock turrets, override ship systems, and the like. The ring also includes a set of large keys. Although these no longer work with any current ship system, they are important in recovering the Ottem. Most consoles around the bridge will still be reporting a successful entry into jump. Others, however, will apparently have been used since (by other boarders), particularly the main computer console. Through the main computer console, the characters can call up such things as all ship's logs, the cargo manifest, and the passenger and crew roster.

CAPTAIN'S QUARTERS—ROOM 33

Bonner or his agent will have described the type of "captain's hole" Harper probably used to keep items of special value. It is a metal safe hidden in the stateroom's framework. Of course, the room's original paneling, which incorporated a concealed access to the safe, has long since been replaced. Still, careful reasoning could lead the characters to the most likely panels to check behind.

To find Harper's hidden safe:
Routine, Mechanical, Int, 20 min (safe).
Referee: Intrusion skill may substitute for Mechanical at DM-1. The characters will find that the safe is not conventional, but is a clever, metallic "puzzle box" of Vegan design disguised as a component of the framework.

To open the Vegan safe:
Difficult, Mechanical, characteristic, 5 min (safe, unskilled OK).
Referee: There are three distinct steps that must be completed before the safe will open. Each step requires a successful task roll to complete. The first step uses the Education characteristic; the second uses Dexterity; and the third uses Intelligence. A second character may pick up where the first left off if the first character desires.

If the characters do not succeed in opening the safe by solving its puzzles, they may use weapons fire or explosives (which may call the attention of other boarders on 7+). The safe will take 100 damage points to open. Inside, the characters will find personal letters, a replacement board to a psi-helm, a leather bag, and a document pouch.

The leather bag contains 36 gold coins, each valued at Cr400. This is, in fact, a full set of Droyne coyns.

The pouch contains a ledger of Harper's shadier dealings, correspondences with agents for artifact collectors, and letters from Zhodani Consulate representatives demanding the return of the artifacts—particularly the Ottem. From these documents, the characters will learn that the Ottem was more than a fancy bauble to the natives who owned it. The beings were Chirpers, and the Ottem played a focal role in their particular culture. The loss of the Ottem was immeasurable.

LOW BERTHS—ROOM 44

The low berths found here are of a "coffin" style. All of them are in working order. Only three are unoccupied; their lids have been left open. When the characters arrive, read to them the following.

The lid on one of the furthest low berths begins to open. As its hinges are toward you, it is hard to see what or who lies inside. Heavy breathing is audible even from this distance. A woman with tangled hair and deathly pale skin sits upright and climbs out. Stains of blood are obvious on her lips and chin. As soon as she sees you, she drops to the floor and hides behind her low berth.

When the characters advance, they will find no one here. The space behind the low berth will be empty, as will be the open low berth itself. A short search will determine that the woman is nowhere else in the room. It is as if she simply vanished.

In fact, there were four unoccupied low berths, this being one of them. What the characters saw was not a vampire, but another vision from the past. The woman was a victim of a low berth mishap. She revived too quickly and went into convulsions, during which she bit her tongue. What the characters saw and heard was the woman immediately after she regained consciousness. She dropped to the floor thereafter merely because she fainted.

If the group tries to revive the low berth passengers, none of them will survive. As soon as a passenger is at a point where he is expected to awaken, he will begin to convulse violently, then die. The passengers' brains were damaged beyond hope by the Ottem even as they lay frozen in their berths.

ENGINEERING—ROOM 46

The group will find a few of the more transportable components missing from engineering, having been taken by other boarders. This ship section may serve as a good setting for the adventurers to confront the intruder to the player ship and recover what was stolen, if this plot element was used.

PASSENGER LOUNGE—ROOM 51

The adventurers will initially find active passengers gathered in the lounge, apparently involved in a costume ball. All wear masks and uniforms or styles from different Imperial periods. As the characters arrive, a ship's steward will call for attention and read the

news message in the sidebar on page 33.

Stunned, many of the passengers will unmask and begin murmuring among themselves. This is an opportunity for the characters to interact at greater length with the personalities. As they have just begun their trip, the passengers will believe that the adventurers are simply fellow passengers. They will disregard any lack of proper dress (this is a costume ball) and will readily engage the group in conversation. To prepare for this encounter, the referee should be familiar with the material on the Solomani from the **Imperial Encyclopedia**. This will provide enough material to form nonplayer character dialogues.

At a dramatically appropriate moment, a woman in the crowd will shriek. Ghastly forms will begin to appear, either seated or on the floor. These are in fact the dead passengers in the characters' own time, invisible to all until now. (An adventurer might even have accidentally stumbled over one prior to this.) The confusing fusion of images will cause hysteria among several people.

After a minute, however, things will return to normal, and the player characters will be able to see nothing but what is in their own time. The story of this event was recorded in the *Ecliptic's* log. Characters who have already scanned the ship's log, or who eventually do so, might connect the record to this experience. Such a deduction could lead them to the truth: The ship is not "haunted"; rather, the unusual events are communications across time.

CARGO HOLD—ROOMS 47-49

Nothing of particular interest is in the cargo hold. When the characters arrive on the cargo deck, things will at first seem normal. However, soon thereafter, a mist will form (the result of a hydraulic malfunction from an earlier time). A little further into engineering, the group will discover a richly appointed coffin (records indicate that it contains the prepared and sealed remains of an honor noble, Count Vlakura, being returned to a world rimward). This is merely a harmless red herring and is not a vampire.

CARGO MANIFEST

Cargo (A-B Ni)	Quantity	Cost
Computers	13 tons	Cr3100
Radioactive ore	14 tons	Cr4100
Writings (paper)	15 tons	Cr5100
Raw hydrocarbons	11 tons	Cr5100
Nitrogen compounds	11 tons	Cr5100
Electronic parts	7 tons	Cr3100
Special alloys	8 tons	Cr3100
Spices	7 tons	Cr5100
Raw crystals	8 tons	Cr5100
Tools	11 tons	Cr4100
Incidental (coffin)	2 tons	—
Reserved (high psg)	22 tons	—

As the characters explore the cargo hold, call for the following task.

To spot the boarder as he leaps:
Difficult, Recon, Int (fateful, unskilled OK).
Referee: This task is Routine for someone using a psionic shield or electronic visual aid. Pass the following information to those who succeeded in their roll.

You catch a glimpse of a hairy animal form as it leaps across from one tall stack of cargo containers to another.

Thereafter, describe the sounds of snarling and the movements of a heavy creature somewhere above. It will continue to move along the tops of the cargo containers. When the characters succeed in finding the creature again, read the following.

The creature suddenly comes into view, a half-human thing with luminous eyes. It bares white fangs and issues a deep bestial growl.

If the players respond quickly, they can fire. The form has no armor, but will try to move to cover. As long as it is outnumbered, it will remain under cover, occasionally voicing a loud, wolfish howl.

This is not a werewolf, but is an impetuous Vargr corsair, in the adventurers' own time, eager to find valuable goods to report to his fellows. He has grown furious over not having found anything special. His single-mindedness will cause him not to notice the characters after they have been in engineering awhile.

Fortunately for him, his fellows, who had the sense to prepare themselves, are not far behind. (Use the first line in the Boarders from Other Times Table.) They will arrive in either four rounds, three rounds if they hear gunshots, or two rounds if the Vargr howls. The corsairs will not pursue if the characters withdraw.

UPPER AIR LOCK—ROOM 60

While exploring the launch dock, another light will attract the PCs' attention, this time coming from the upper air lock window. If the characters look through the window, read to them the following.

A man stands in the air lock wearing the uniform of an Imperial merchant ship captain. He reads aloud from a prayer book. You recognize the solemn words, coming from the air lock speaker, as the same as those often spoken over the dead or dying. After a moment's pause, he turns his face toward the window. "If you've come looking for the Ottem, you need not search here."

This is the "ghost" of Gredig Harper. As the group might already guess, this is the scene of his suicide. The adventurers are free to try to coax additional information from him, but the referee should liberally call for interpersonal task rolls involving Liaison.

Harper knows much, including the Ottem's erratic ability to project images across time. He kept the artifact hidden in the forward turret. Unfortunately, during his last voyage, the forward turret was sheered away by a failure in the jump field. With the Ottem lost, he had no means of recovering from impending financial ruin.

The ship captain will express deep regrets for his theft. He even thought often of trying to return the Ottem to the Chirpers. But he would never give it to the Zhodani. He is convinced that the Zhodani would not return the artifact until after they determined if it could be used against the Imperium.

At some point, Harper will select a large key from a key ring, adorned by a green thong. Inserting it into the control panel, he will then engage the overrides so as to jettison himself. Flashing warning lights and klaxons will come on.

At this point, rush the PCs for their actions. The characters can open the hatch in an attempt to stop Harper. The hatch is not locked unless they have the captain's keys. Harper will try to interrupt the first character to come at him. Even if he fails, the adventurers are still powerless since everything they see in the air lock is a projection.

A clearly displayed, five-second countdown will commence. All characters in the air lock must roll their Dexterity or less on 2D to get out in time. At the end of the countdown, the outer hatch will spring aside. The air will scream out, sucking Harper into space. However, the characters will feel no wind at all, regardless of whether they got out in time. In the next round, the interior of the air lock will again be dark, with the outer hatch securely closed.
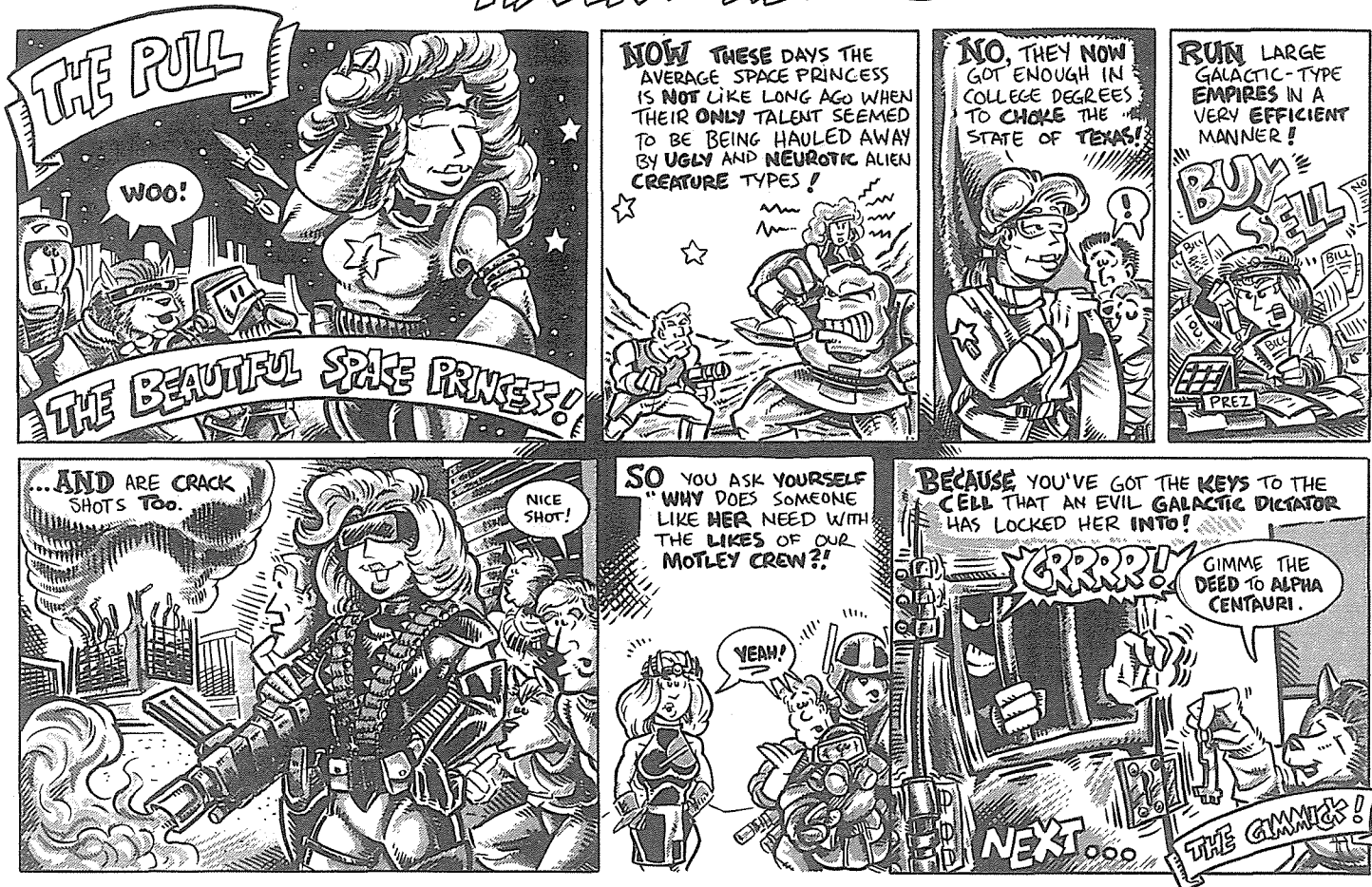
FORWARD TURRET—ROOM 57

The *Loreans Ecliptic* has two turrets, but no forward turret. This hardpoint was simply capped over after it was lost. But when the characters find it, they will see a normal turret access hatch, locked

THE ULTIMATE MEGA TRAVELLER™ ADVENTURE! Part 3

BY: PHIL MORRISSEY

THE PULL

WOO!

THE BEAUTIFUL SPACE PRINCESS!

NOW THESE DAYS THE AVERAGE SPACE PRINCESS IS NOT LIKE LONG AGO WHEN THEIR ONLY TALENT SEEMED TO BE BEING HAULED AWAY BY UGLY AND NEUROTIC ALIEN CREATURE TYPES!

NO, THEY NOW GOT ENOUGH IN COLLEGE DEGREES TO CHOKE THE STATE OF TEXAS!

RUN LARGE GALACTIC-TYPE EMPIRES IN A VERY EFFICIENT MANNER!

...AND ARE CRACK SHOTS TOO.

NICE SHOT!

SO YOU ASK YOURSELF "WHY DOES SOMEONE LIKE HER NEED WITH THE LIKES OF OUR MOTLEY CREW?!"

YEAH!

BECAUSE YOU'VE GOT THE KEYS TO THE CELL THAT AN EVIL GALACTIC DICTATOR HAS LOCKED HER INTO!

GRRRR!

GIMME THE DEED TO ALPHA CENTAURI.

NEXT... THE GIMMICK!

and sealed. The group may well overlook this.

In fact, this is a "ghost" of the turret hatch, permanent since the *Ecliptic*'s entry into jump. However, it is a bit more than a mere projection, since it can actually be touched and felt. Characters using a psionic shield will still see only a hardpoint cap, and their hands will pass through the hatch image. Although unshielded characters can touch the hatch, they cannot manipulate it. Cutting tools and explosives will do no good.

There is, however, a prominent key opening in the center of the hatch. The necessary key is still on the captain's key ring, which is the same one Harper used to override the air lock safeties. This will unseal the hatch.

Unshielded characters may open the hatch and look inside to see the interior of the weapons turret. Shielded characters will still see only a cap. If shielded characters enter, those who remain unshielded will see their fellows disappear from their sight as each passes through the opening.

The situation created here by the Ottem is extremely dangerous to characters in the turret. Should one decide to put on and activate a psi-helm while inside, he will vanish forever.

Exploring the turret, the characters will discover that it is not conventional. Equipped with a single pulse laser, it doubles as a one-person escape pod. Characters get their normal search roll, but the first success is a pouch of diamonds (Cr50,000). Only if they continue the search and make a second successful search roll will they find the Ottem.

At first impression, the Ottem will look like a 10-centimeter-diameter chunk of marbled glass that was recovered from a flaming wreck. One surface is rippled, another area smooth, another impressed flat with a dimpled pattern, and so on. It has an oddly tapered stem, and a deep hole is pressed at right angles from that.

Note that Tlinjatl will probably make her last appearance at this time if the referee is using her in this adventure. Of course, she will not obstruct the characters, but a final encounter with other boarders might make for an exciting climax to the adventure. As soon as the Ottem is brought through the gate to the players' ship, all gates to the *Ecliptic* will begin to oscillate. The gates will then vanish after 60 seconds. Any boarders still on the *Loreans Ecliptic* will be marooned on a ship doomed for oblivion. Ω

For more information on the Abyss Rift, see "Lost Treasure Ships of the Abyss Rift" by Michael R. Mikesh in **Challenge** *44.*

The Tree of Souls

Eric W. Haddock

A group of Belgians is planning to ransack the ancient Martian temple of Torisna and loot it of the riches rumored to be stored there. A Martian priest, Linwaik, asks the PCs to rid the temple of the Belgians and prevent any treasures from being taken. The temple is guarded by a terrible curse, Linwaik says, and the Belgians must be stopped before they die like other greedy temple robbers before them.

When the characters arrive at Torisnak, they find that the Belgians have been taken captive by the same Martian mercenary force they hired to do their temple-robbing dirty work. The PCs and Linwaik are also taken captive and ordered to empty the temple's vault—the mercenaries fear that whoever disturbs the vault will die of the curse.

Before play begins, one of the players whose character is a scientist or inventor should read the information contained in the Background section regarding Iyrairis and his fame.

BACKGROUND

To aid the referee, some background information is detailed here:

Torisna: Torisna is an ancient Martian religion whose seat is at Torisnak (the main temple of Torisna). The church of Toris, originally a religion based on the worship of a god of mountain fastnesses and their dangers and benefits, was reformed years ago by one of its high priests, Marllyr, who reshaped it into a quasimilitaristic force bent on acquiring power and wealth through strong-arm tactics. Marllyr and the corrupt priests who followed him all died from an unknown wasting disease.

Those priests who did not wholeheartedly follow Marllyr's self-serving doctrinal reforms decided to return to worshipping their god, Toris. They reformed their church a second time with honest virtues as its founding principles so that the corruption which fostered Marllyr would not rise in the church again.

Torisnak: This temple of Torisna was constructed thousands of years ago on a high mountain north of Copratia. Heavy fogs and mists hang about the temple year round, attracting bilairs, rarely seen predatory flyers. Nearly all of the temple was carved out of the mountain. The only structure of note is the 50'-high wall which surrounds the central courtyard.

The temple has enough staterooms and facilities to house 28 priests. Near the temple is a small farm used to grow all the temple's food. In addition to the staterooms and farm, Torisnak has an enclosed worshipping and meditation area, and a vault to store collections gained thousands of years ago. A small docking area houses the church's screw galley.

DALY

Ageless Paper: Ageless paper was created in the Seldon Empire to resist decay. Material on scrolls made of this paper will never fade, nor will the paper disintegrate.

Iyrairis: Iyrairis was one of the most famous Martian shipbuilders of the Seldon Empire. His designs are much sought after by archaeologists as such plans offer clues as to how advanced the ancient Martian empire really was. Iyrairis' plans represent the pinnacle of Martian technological advancement and are priceless treasures.

PROPOSAL

Linwaik, a priest of Torisna, will contact the PCs, who should ideally be somewhere near the Belgian Coprates when they are approached (to minimize overland trek time) but not in Melas or Copratia (unless little or no wilderness travel time is desired). Ophir, New Amsterdam, Nectar, Protei, Aurora, Erythria, and Baetis are possible sites for the meeting.

Arranging the Meeting: Linwaik can contact the player characters in any number of ways. An ideal place for him to look for help is in the British military, for it has the necessary armament and is known to be generally opposed to the Belgians. If one of the player characters is a military officer, the priest could contact him. If none of the characters have any connection with the military, the priest could approach a scientist or inventor who is known to have an interest in Martian religion, history, archaeology or technology. If the player characters don't have a scientist or officer in the party, perhaps the characters will overhear the priest complaining about how he cannot find anyone willing to assist his church.
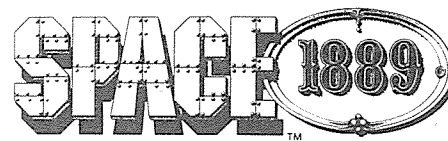
A Plea for Help: Linwaik addresses the PCs:

The church of Torisna is in trouble, and I, Linwaik, have been sent to get help. The Belgians are going to attack our temple and throw us all out. We've had some trouble with the Belgians before. Often they've tried to buy our temple from us or take it from us by claiming the mountain it's built on as their territory. But now they've grown tired of our resistance and are going to assault us with their weapons and kill us all. They've boasted about it! We don't know when they plan to attack, but it will be soon. There's nothing we can do against their rifles and airships. We have a ship of our own, but it's a screw galley and is no match for their airship. We only have one thing that could help us, and that is the curse of the Tree of Souls.

The Legend Told: If the PCs ask why he is seeking help from humans, rather than Martians, or what the curse of the Tree of Souls is, Linwaik will relate the legend of the Tree of Souls.

Centuries ago, when our culture was at its highest, a terrible event forever changed the nature of Torisnak. The great temple of Torisnak had been built on a mountain within the range of mountains north of Copratia. At first, the temple was typical of others that devoted themselves to the god Toris. But one of the high priests of that temple, Marllyr, became corrupt.

He started to covet the donations given to the temple by the villages near the mountain. Soon he asked the villages to increase

Linwaik (Experienced NPC)

Born on the mountain Torisnak is built on, Linwaik seemed destined to become a priest of Torisna. Offered to the temple because he was an orphan, the Hill Martian youth was ushered into the church at one year of age. From the first time he saw the Tree of Souls, he was fascinated by the legend, mystery, and danger inherent in the tree.

Because of his great charisma, Linwaik rose quickly through the ranks of the church and at one time was a nominee to become high priest. Unfortunately, his rambunctious nature prevented him from settling down enough to take on the administrative responsibilities of the office. Instead, Linwaik's wanderlust spurred him to travel across Mars to see if he could find any other trees like the one at Torisnak.

After years of searching, he concluded that the Tree of Souls must be unique and returned to Torisnak. What he found when he returned was a temple nearly under siege by Belgians. The Belgians had tried political force and bribery to oust the priests from Torisnak, but the priests had thus far resisted their efforts. Nonetheless, the priests knew the humans would eventually use force of arms and brutally assault the temple, as they had no fear of the legend of the Tree of Souls (as most Martians do).

Since Linwaik's devotion is so high, he will not allow the player characters to remove anything from the vault, for any reason. If they do, he will make every attempt to destroy whatever the characters remove.

Linwaik's native tongue is Thaumasian.

Attributes		Skills
Str:	1	Fisticuffs 1, Throwing 1, Close Combat 3 (bashing weapon)
Agl:	2	Stealth 1, Marksmanship 2 (throwing net)
End:	6	Wilderness Travel 6 (mountaineering), Fieldcraft 2, Swimming 3
Int:	4	Observation 4, Science 3 (geology)
Chr:	5	Eloquence 5, Bargaining 4, Linguistics 5 (English, French, Memnite, Koline, Alaanawaak)
Soc:	3	Leadership 3, Medicine 1

Motives: Adventuresome, Honest, Loyal.

Appearance: Although he is quite old, Linwaik's extraordinary endurance has enabled him to weather his global trips quite well. Rarely does any work fatigue him, and his health has always been near perfect despite the fact that age has ebbed most of the strength from his limbs. He carries a gnarled walking stick which has served him well in his travels (and can serve as a club in a pinch).

Perhaps the most striking feature of Linwaik is his incredible willpower. He has a fierce loyalty to his church, and this manifests in his eyes and expression whenever he talks about his church or the Tree of Souls.

their donations. As time went on, he insisted the donations become larger and larger. In addition to gold, objects of great value were given (sometimes unwillingly), including a set of scrolls drawn by Iyrairis, the great airship builder.

Eventually, the villages could give no more. Marllyr, not believing the villages' claims of poverty, had the airship in the Iyrairisian scrolls built.

It was a fantastic warship, and Marllyr wanted to use it to raid the villages that resisted him and to extend the range of his greed to cities as far away as Protei and Po-Poo-Hanna-Kitai.

The day the ship was completed, a terrible sickness fell on the temple. Nearly all the priests were stricken with pain and sores. Marllyr was the most sick, but he insisted on planning a raid using the warship he had built. But on the day he was supposed to leave on the raid , he fell to the ground and died.

On the spot in the central square where Marllyr fell, a tree began to grow. As it matured, it grew to become a tall twisted mass of slick, black branches. All around the trunk were knots which bore the likeness of Marllyr and his loyal priests (those who had also fallen ill and eventually died). Everyone who died of the sickness appeared on the tree, which we named the Tree of Souls.

The remaining priests of Toris reformed the church, and throughout the centuries have honored the power that killed the greedy and malicious Marllyr and his priests. Our church at Torisnak protects the wealth stored in the mountain temple, for we believe that anyone who has the greed to try to remove anything from the vaults which have remained sealed for centuries will die a horrible death from the curse of the Tree of Souls. And we do not want to see anyone, even the Belgians, die that way.

Iyrairis' Ship: If asked, Linwaik will explain that the ship was taken apart and stored in the temple's main vault. If questioned further, he will say that all of the parts of the ship should still be intact and that the ship could be reconstructed and restored to its original condition.

ACCEPTANCE

If the player characters agree to help the church of Torisna, Linwaik will promise to allow them access to the vault for research purposes if they, in turn, agree not to take anything from it.

Linwaik will offer the characters the use of the church's screw galley (similar to the Small Bird class), which is unarmed. If the characters have a ship of their own and want to use it instead, Linwaik will ride with them, leaving the screw galley in the city

where he met the characters. He will ask if his acolytes can travel with him.

JOURNEY

Torisnak is located about 400 miles north of Copratia. If the characters take the church's screw galley, the trip will take about two days after the group reaches Copratia (or Melas). The referee should calculate the travel time to Copratia based on the city from which he begins the adventure (the ship's best speed is 200 miles a day).

Until the character's ship reaches the mountain Torisnak is built on, there will only be the standard hazards of air travel as described in the **Space: 1889** rule book (page 119). The referee may wish to run a diversionary encounter if a longer playing time for this scenario is desired.

ARRIVAL

The characters see the mountain Torisnak is built on from many miles away. But thick fog and clouds prevent a clear picture.

As the characters close with the mountain, examining it with binoculars will reveal the following:

The temple hugs the top of a tall, steep mountain. Much of the temple seems to have been carved out of the mountain, with little outside construction visible through the clinging vapors which oddly seem to persist in this area of Mars.

The only temple structure which is clearly visible is a large wall, which probably surrounds an open air courtyard of some sort. Further down the mountain, an airship flying the flag of Belgium can be seen, anchored to docks set into the mountain.

From a distance, it's difficult to determine whether any people remain on board the Belgian airship. To see if anyone is on board is a Formidable Observation task. If successful, the character will conclude that the ship appears to be empty.

As the characters' vessel closes on the temple, Linwaik will comment that no one is at the watch towers, nor is there any of the usual activity along the courtyard wall. This worries him. If the characters listen, they will not hear any gunfire or sounds of an attack (which they would in all likelihood be able to hear from this distance, if a firefight were occurring).

DOCKING

Three mooring spaces are set into the mountain. The Belgian ship is docked in the middle one. Four people are needed to dock the ship (at least two on the ship and two on the dock). It is possible to steer the ship close enough to a dock for some player characters to jump off and tie up the ship. As the ship docks, there will be no interference from the temple. No one is on board the Belgian ship.

Falling: The temple is surrounded by mist which makes its every surface wet and slick. Any characters participating in combat or making other sudden moves along the dock risk slipping. To avoid slipping is a Moderate Agility task. If a character slips off the docks, he will fall about 10 feet to the mountain below the docks, then slide a few feet, coming to rest 15 feet below the docks. The fall will not seriously injure a healthy character, but he will have to make his way back up. The other characters can lower ropes to the stranded character, but none are available (the ship's mooring lines are being used to hold the ship to the dock). Extra rope can be found if a character succeeds in a quick roll against his Intellect (he remembers seeing where some is stored).

If no rope is available, the character who fell can climb back up the mountain face (a Moderate Wilderness Travel (mountaineering) task or a Difficult Agility task). Failure means the character has slipped—have him make a quick roll against Agility. Failure here indicates that the character falls back to where he started climbing, taking one wound in the process.

SURPRISE PARTY

Waiting for the characters in the room beyond the docking courtyard is a group of six Hill Martians, each hiding behind stone chests. These Martians will surprise the PCs unless the characters have been taking sufficient precautions. The chests serve as hard cover (+3 to missile saving throws while behind them). When the characters enter the room, the Martians will attempt to take them prisoner. Two of the Martians speak choppy English. They are all armed with bolt-action rifles.

To capture the player characters without wounding them, the Martians will throw three large nets which are 10 feet in diameter. To entangle the characters is a Moderate Throwing task. To dodge the net requires a successful Moderate Observation task at –1 to Observation skill level (to notice in time to dodge) combined with a dodge action (quick roll against Agility). Success at both rolls means the character has thrown himself out of the way of the net. To break free of the net once it entangles a character requires success at an Impossible Strength task. Characters who are entangled can still try to fire (but not melee). It will take them 1D6 turns after making a successful quick roll against their Agility to ready a pistol (if they don't have one drawn); no rifles may be drawn now.

They will then be at –1 to their skill level for purposes of firing, in addition to other modifiers. The referee may require entangled characters who are firing make rolls to maintain balance, avoid further penalties to hit, etc. as the Martians holding the nets will

spend actions yanking on the nets to reduce the characters' combat effectiveness. If circumstances dictate that a firing character is jerked off his feet while entangled and firing, he may fire no longer—he is too off-balance, and his weapon is too snarled in rope.

If the player characters choose to resist and shoot at the Martians, the resulting gunfire will attract seven Martians standing by in the courtyard at the top of the stairs, one of whom speaks English.

They will concentrate their fire first on the characters who are wearing military uniforms; failing that, they will base their target selection on who has the largest gun.

For the plot to proceed apace, the PCs need to be taken prisoner, but the conclusion should not be a forgone one. The mercenaries have numbers on their side and are ruthless. They will not hesitate to sneak up on noncombatants and use them as hostages to force others in a firefight to throw down their weapons. They are also not above threatening to shoot entangled characters unless fighting ones put down their weapons. This is a good place in the scenario to allow PCs to behave heroically, giving up the fight to save their friends or an NPC. The mercenaries will not fall for any obvious ploys.

GUESTS OF THE TEMPLE

Once the player characters are captured, they will be taken to one of the rooms overlooking the central courtyard. If there are too many (more than eight) characters to fit into one room, they will be split up at random and placed in adjacent rooms. Medical attention will not be provided by any of the mercenaries, but they will not interfere with characters who treat others or themselves. The characters will be held until morning.

Courtyard: As the characters are taken to the staterooms, they pass through the courtyard. The first thing they will notice when they enter the courtyard is the Tree of Souls. It is a 100-foot-tall, slick, black tree which does not seem to have any bark. As the characters look more closely at the tree, they will notice the many large knots scattered over its oily-looking surface. The tree's branches are thin and grotesquely twisted. Toward the top of the tree, the branches look distinctly like Martian arms and forearms. The mist about the temple coats the tree with moisture, making it as wet as the mountainside below the docks. No wind stirs the mist inside the courtyard, so the tree stands absolutely still. The mist carries with it the hint of a sickeningly sweet scent— old incense or, perhaps, disease and decay.

If the characters get close enough to the tree to examine it in detail, they will notice that each of the knots is in fact an imprint of a face which looks as if it were pressing itself outward from inside the tree. Each face is twisted in agony, captured as if in the midst of a scream or groan.

The characters' footsteps echo loudly in the courtyard as they pass near or under the tree. In the southwest corner of the courtyard is a large structure which Linwaik will say leads to the temple vault. Four mercenary guards are posted there, two on each side of the door.

Staterooms: The six-inch-thick doors are made of a specially fired ceramic that is quite strong. They are barred with two iron rods in addition to being secured by a lever-

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Martian Mercenaries (Experienced NPCs)

These mercenaries were hired to aid the Belgians in taking over the temple. When they got to it they decided to take the temple, and the riches inside, for themselves. The 20 mercenaries are completely ruthless and did not hesitate to kill the priests. Only some of the mercenaries believe in the legends concerning the Tree of Souls. However, when the bilairs attack, all are afraid enough to be persuaded to let their prisoners go free. The mercenaries' native language is Thaumasian.

Attributes		Skills
Str:	4	Fisticuffs 5, Throwing 4, Close Combat 3 (edged weapons)
Agl:	2	Stealth 1, Marksmanship 2 (throwing net)
End:	5	Wilderness Travel 5 (mountaineering), Fieldcraft 4, Tracking 4, Swimming 2
Int:	3	Observation 3
Chr:	1	Linguistics 2 (English or French, Memnite)
Soc:	2	Riding 2 (gashant), Medicine 2

Motivation: Greed.

Appearance: The mercenaries are practically dressed to allow for unrestricted movement (nothing too close-fitting or binding). They wear no decoration on any of their clothes. The only unique items of clothing they possess are their boots (whose special qualities are not visible to casual observation). These boots have special soles designed to allow the mercenaries to walk on the slick surfaces of the temple without fear of slipping. The mercenaries are armed with knives and bolt-action rifles (part of their pay for the job from the Belgians).

Bilairs

Bilairs are flying predatory creatures which have never been seen before by any human. They seem to be evolutionary remnants of a wetter Martian age. Their seven-foot-long bodies are coal black, as are their eyes and talons, while their wingspan is only about two feet. A bilair's primary mode of attack is to bite its prey and hold it down while rending the flesh from the bones with its talons. A bilair's wings are used to supplement the lift generated by its lifting gland, which is slightly undersized. The wings produce a low, humming noise similar to the hummingbird of Earth. However, the humming is faint—the wings are much larger and have no need to flap quite as fast since they are only necessary to supplement the bilair's basic lift.

Bilairs require a great deal of moisture compared to other Martian animals, so they never fly beyond the mist-shrouded mountains north of Copratia. They usually travel in family groups of three to 18, but under certain peculiar circumstances swarm in groups of 200 to 1200 (such as when attracted by the Tree of Souls). During a massive swarm of 500 or more, the humming and screeches can be deafening.

# App.	Size	Move	Wnds	Save	Weight	Weapons
3-18	2×3	F50	6	1	600	Fangs (2, 2, 0, 1)
(200-1200)						Talons (3, 2, 1, 2)

type latch. If the characters want to break the doors down, it will require a total Strength of 8 and a successful Impossible Strength task. Unfortunately, the door is only three feet wide, so only two characters can put their shoulders to the door at once.

Small, three-inch-diameter holes are cut at eye level into all of the doors. The windows are rectangular, measuring only three inches high and four feet wide. The rooms the characters and Linwaik are placed in have been cleared of all objects. Other rooms contain only a bed, table, chair, and tapestry depicting the Tree of Souls (a dif-ferent view in each room). The beds are too fragile to make useful battering rams.

Company: In addition to their party, the PCs will discover that Belgian prisoners are being held as well. The Belgian prisoners' voices will carry from the opposite end of the hall facing the courtyard. If any of the characters speak French, they may overhear enough conversation and, after one or two successful Linguistics rolls, deduce the following:

● All the priests who occupied the temple were killed by the Belgians and the Martian mercenary force.

● After the priests were killed, the merce-naries betrayed the Belgians, killing half of them (nine are left).

● These mercenaries plan to raid the temple for themselves and use the monies to fight the humans on Mars.

● Some of the Martians believe in the curse of the Tree of Souls.

● The Belgians do not have a plan of escape.

MORNING

The characters will be rudely wakened when five Martian mercenaries, each armed with rifles, enter the room and drag out two of the strongest looking characters. Those two characters will be taken to the court-yard, given axes, and instructed in broken English to chop down the Tree of Souls. If no one has previously noticed the disturbing knots on the tree, they will see them now.

When the characters try to chop down the tree, their efforts will have no effect on the surface of the tree—as if they where chop-ping into iron or rock. The mercenaries will not seem deterred by this and will make the characters continue their efforts. This is tiring and bone-jarring work (not to mention being irritatingly and eerily futile), but the mercenaries will force the characters to continue until they are obviously exhausted.

The entire spectacle can be observed by the remaining PCs in their room through its narrow window.

MIDDAY

By the time the two PCs are finally al-lowed to cease hacking at the Tree, it will be midday. Just as they stop, they will hear a terrible moaning sound throughout the temple, creaking up almost through its foun-dation and the courtyard's flagstones. The Martian mercenaries look slightly concerned (and a couple are obviously afraid), but as a group, they will remain calm.

Linwaik (in the room with the characters) will turn white at the noise, and with some agitation, he will relate the following.

The tree is mourning for those who have tried to harm it. Its wail will call the bilairs down to the temple from the surrounding mountains. The bilairs serve the tree. No one knows how, but they know to kill anyone who's not a priest. I—I don't think you hu-mans are in danger.

The bilairs are merciless and, according to legend, impossible to kill.

They'll come in a huge swarm. Legends tell of a time in ancient days when the bilairs appeared just as the Sun was rising. The sound of their wings could be heard long before they were seen. The hum was so loud that the priests of the temple could not hear each other speak.

When they appeared, there were hun-dreds of thousands of them—so many that

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Marllyr Reborn (Elite NPC)

From the beginning of his career in the old church of Toris, Marllyr planned to rule. Every move he made was calculated to bring him the power he craved. Eventually, through several deals and "arrangements," both aboveboard and underhanded, he acquired the position of high priest.

Using the position, he changed church doctrine and managed to turn the church into a small quasimilitaristic force. With this force, he was able to compel more and more villages to donate to his church. At its height, Marllyr's reformed church had extended its influence to a 500-mile radius. One of the treasures his priest/troops "acquired" was a plan for a war-ship designed by Iyrairis. Seizing the opportunity, Marllyr built the ship, hoping to radically extend his influence to the point that it might rival a prince of Mars.

At about this time, Marllyr suddenly succumbed to a terrible sickness which also affected his immediate council of corrupted priests. Realizing that he might be dying, he rushed the construction of the warship. During that time he prepared for his death using magics that only high priests knew about. Using those mysteries in ways in which they were never originally intended, he ensured that his body would be preserved for ages to come. On the day he was supposed to depart with the ship on its maiden flight, Marllyr died while walking toward it. Marllyr's native language is Thaumasian.

| Attributes		Skills
Str:	1	Fisticuffs 1, Close Combat 5 (edged weapon)
Agl:	1	Stealth 1, Marksmanship 1 (throwing net)
End:	1	Wilderness Travel 1 (mapping), Swimming 1
Int:	4	Observation 4, Science 4 (biology), Engineering 2 (naval architec-ture)
Chr:	6	Eloquence 6, Bargaining 6, Linguistics 4 (Memnite, Alaanawaak, Son-Gaaryani, Koline)
Soc:	5	Riding 4 (gashant), Pilot 6 (screw galley), Leadership 6

Motives: Greed, Ruthless, Arrogant.

Appearance: To look at Marllyr is to be sucked into his dark and sunken eyes, which glint feverishly and intensely. Even as a corpse, his eyes are obscenely alive with evil and ruthless ambition, for even after his death Marllyr has found a way to to attempt to regain his hold over Torisnak.

Although his body is little more than a skeleton with loose flesh hanging on it, Marllyr retains his powerful charismatic influence. Much of the damage of the sickness can be easily seen. Marllyr's twisted limbs, scarred skin, and malformed skull serve as visible and constant reminders of the cause of his death.

Marllyr is dressed in his burial robes, which have grayed and frayed with age. Carried at his side is a large, jewel-encrusted dagger in a red scabbard.

Journey To Another Time — and Space
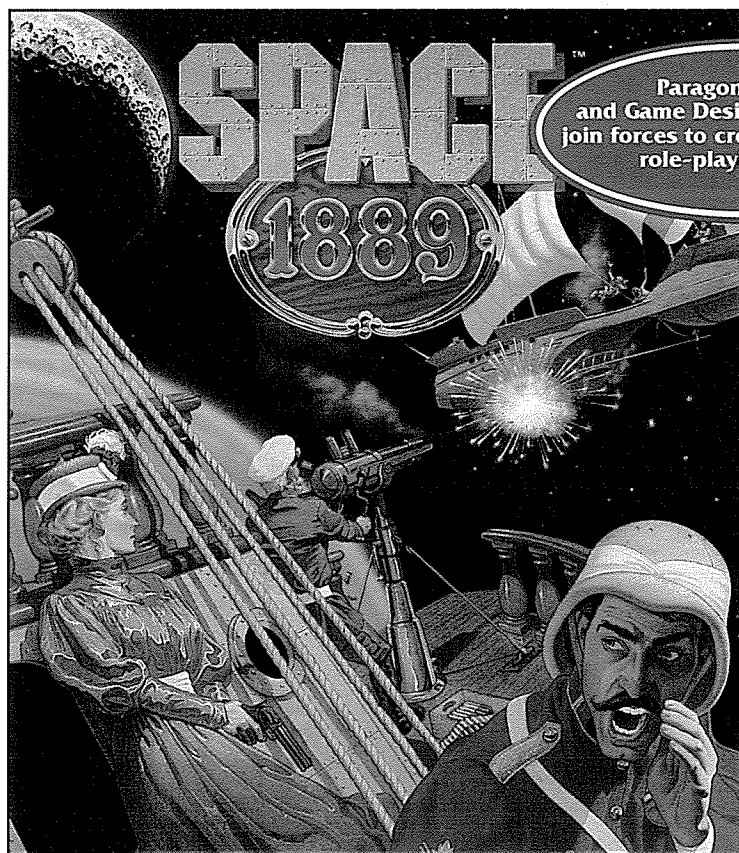
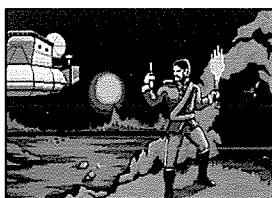**Paragon Software and Game Designers' Workshop join forces to create two computer role-playing classics!**

MEGATRAVELLER 1
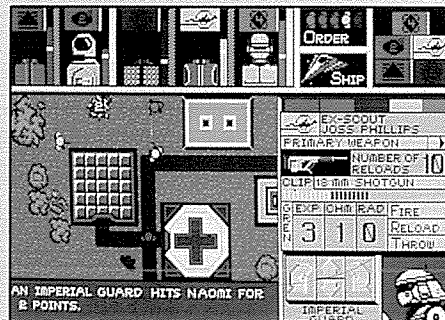## THE ZHODANI CONSPIRACY

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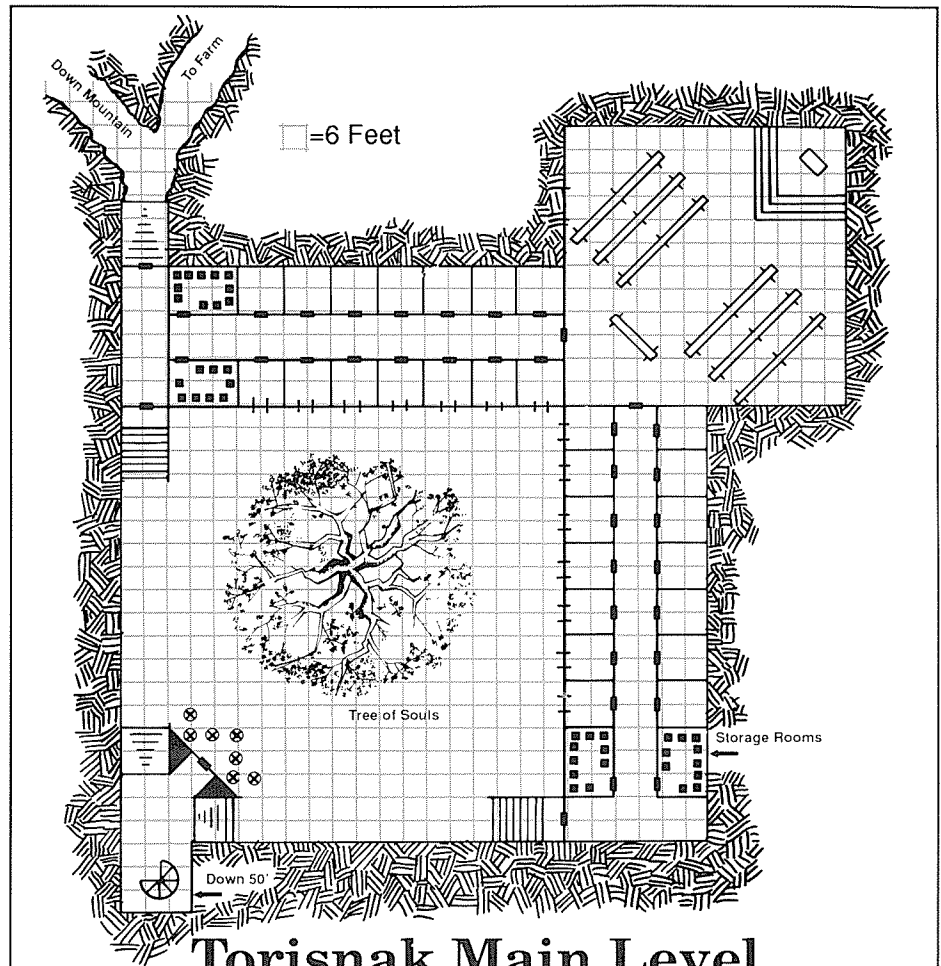

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Torisnak
Vault Level

□ =6 Feet

1

2   3

Key

Mountainside

⊗ Martian mercenary

Chest

Stairway up

Stairway down

Door

Spiral staircase

Pathway

Window

Bench

Altar

Rubble

Torisnak Main Level

Down Mountain

To Farm

□ =6 Feet

Tree of Souls

Storage Rooms

Down 50'

Torisnak Docking Level

□ =6 Feet

Docking Courtyard

Belgian Airship
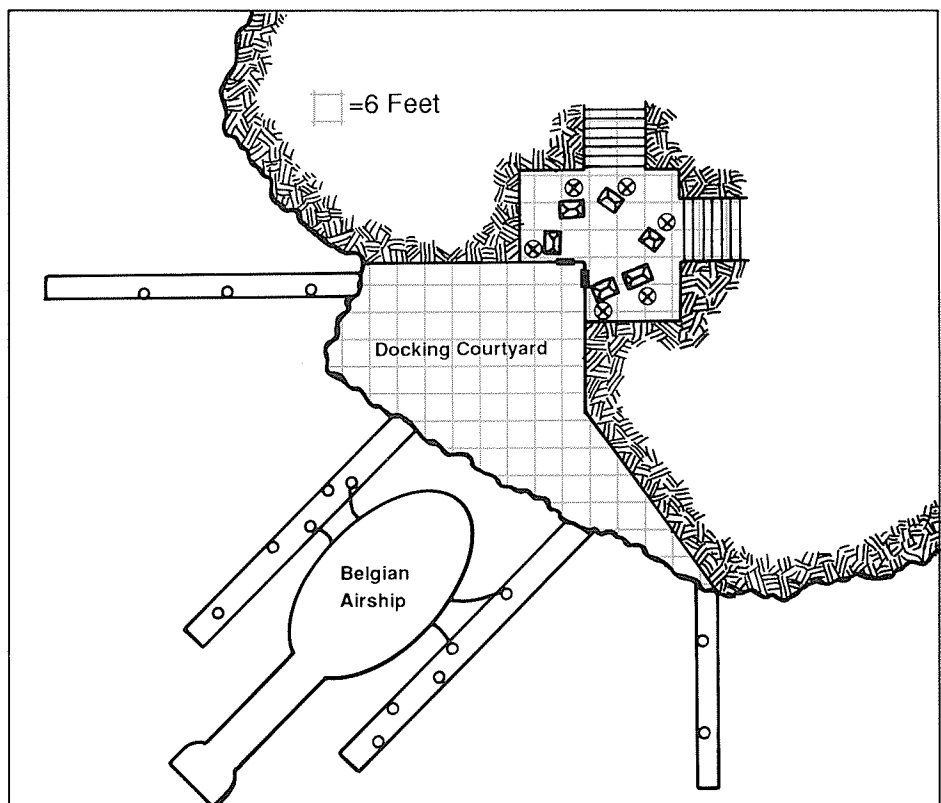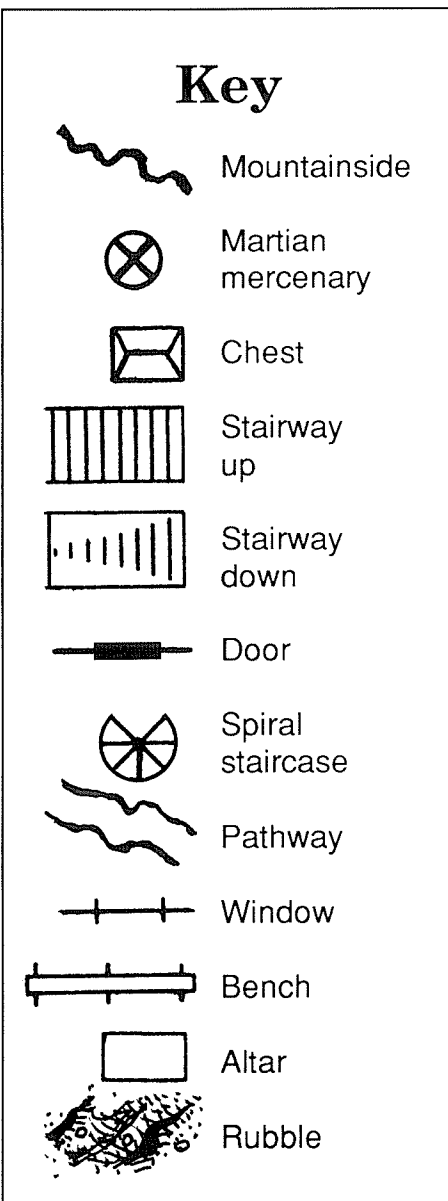
they blotted out the Sun, casting a moving shadow over the entire mountain. They swarmed around the temple, their screeching and the hum of their wings producing a deafness which persisted for hours after they had finished their grisly task.

BILAIRS

Shortly after Linwaik stops talking, the characters will hear a low humming noise which is getting louder. The mercenaries' fear is much more visible when they hear the humming, although they do stay relatively calm and turn their eyes to the sky. One mercenary begins shaking, starting with his hands, then arms, then his whole body. Finally, as the humming slowly, but steadily, increases, he breaks and runs for a courtyard door, throwing it open and bolting inside. The PCs can hear his footsteps pounding in counterpoint to the humming, which has grown to a throbbing and seems to almost occupy the PCs' skulls.

In five minutes, the bilairs appear. At that point, all the Martians will panic. The ones in the courtyard with rifles begin shooting wildly until their ammo runs out or they are killed. Martians without rifles will run out of the courtyard and onto the docks, where they try to take refuge in the Belgians' ship, hoping the armor will protect them. One of the Martian mercenaries will let the Belgians free, knowing that only the Belgians can pilot their airship away from the temple.

During the attack, the characters in the courtyard will miraculously not be harmed. If they make their way back into the temple, opening doors other than the ones the panicked Martian has already left gaping will allow more bilairs into the temple, where they will attack the Martians inside. As one of the PCs fleeing the courtyard turns an interior corner, he will encounter the remains of the merc being worried by two bilairs, one of which will look up and almost through the PC, as if dismissing him as inconsequential, before returning to its meal.

AFTERMATH

It will take the bilairs about 10 minutes to kill all the Martian mercenaries.

Presumably, the characters will be using the attack to escape the mercenaries and free their friends. After the mercenaries have been killed, the bilairs will fly off, leaving the humans and Linwaik.

If the player characters want to leave the temple, Linwaik will remind them that the vault is now unguarded and can be opened for the research he promised the characters they could perform.

Belgians Return: The Belgians left the temple when freed by the mercenary, and as the bilairs fly away, the Belgian airship leaves the docks. But when the Belgians see that the bilairs have left, they will return, thinking the player characters have also been killed.

If the player characters notice their return from the courtyard, they will have 10 minutes to prepare.

The Belgians will dock hurriedly, tieing only one line to the dock. They will then go to the courtyard and to the vault, thinking it unguarded. Because of their haste, only five of the Belgians will take their weapons with them. The Belgian force is composed of four Experienced and five Trained soldier stock NPCs armed with light revolvers and cutlasses.

If the player characters do not offer any resistance, the Belgians will open the vault themselves. If the player characters ambush the Belgians, the five with pistols will fight while the other Belgians run back to the ship to get their forgotten weapons (light revolvers and cutlasses).

If the Belgians defeat the characters, they will place them in an undamaged stateroom; the referee will have to improvise a "prison break" episode. If the Belgians badly fail a morale roll, they will retreat onto the airship (a Small Bird type), cast off, and leave. However, at least four must be alive for them to control the ship very well. If fewer than four are left, they may surrender to anyone who makes them the offer (especially military officers), or run down the mountain to the farm.

VAULT

The door to the vault, made of the same material as the stateroom doors, is not locked. However, it is a foot thick, six feet wide, heavy, slippery, and stuck! Opening it will take a combined Strength of 15. Luckily, the handle to the door is large, enabling four characters to work at once.

When the door opens, a loud cracking sound, like a sharp gun report, comes from the tree behind the characters, but nothing about the tree appears to have changed.

The walls of the antechamber beyond the vault door are lined with tapestries depicting previous high priests of Torisna. In the dim light, their slightly dusty countenances seem ghostly. Just inside and beside the doorway are five lanterns. Covered urns of oil sit next to them, along with slightly damp lighting materials (a PC's matches might work better). Along the floor are several urns containing incense sticks.

The stairway in the antechamber descends 50 feet.

LOWER LEVEL

The door at the bottom of the spiral staircase is like the door to the staterooms, but is not equipped with any kind of latch and will swing open easily. When the characters open the door, cold air will pour from the room beyond. The air inside is just above freezing. The mist which persists around (and within) Torisnak will thicken perceptibly as the door is opened.

Inside the vault, the characters see the chests. The center holds a pile of disintegrated wood, and amidst the pile are a few metal instruments which have survived the ages. Curled into a tube on top of the pile is a large scroll of ageless paper, held together with a brittle ribbon, which details the construction of Iyrairis' ship.

The metal instruments are largely unassembled and are essentially without value unless reassembled using the ageless scroll as a guide. If the characters reassemble the ship, they will find that the instruments are navigational instruments for space travel (if they succeed at a Formidable Science task roll due to the weird configuration of the instruments). This is an astonishing discovery, as it had been previously thought that Martians did not have the technology to travel in space. (The instruments were actually a mystery to even Iyrairis, as they are an artifact which was uncountably ancient when even he was alive. They are a remnant of the intelligent humanoid race which existed on Mars previous to the current Martian races. For more information on this race, see **Beastmen of Mars**.)

The chests sitting along the wall are full of Martian gold, minted in hundreds of places, the heads of long-dead princes adorning each coin. The chests around the wood pile are full of scrolls and texts, all made of ageless paper. Linwaik will point out three chests containing artifacts made of precious metals (on Mars any metal is precious). There are equal amounts of brass, copper, tin and even lead, along with gold and silver, plus a variety of gems.

The chest marked 1 on the map contains written histories of the Seldon Empire which will answer many unanswered questions historians have. Chest 2 contains maps showing locations of ancient water pumping stations, which are complete mysteries to human technology. Chest 3 contains several books detailing Martian religions across the globe.

All of the chests weigh 200 pounds without their contents. The chests with gold and artifacts are extremely heavy, weighing about 500 pounds.

UNINVITED

When the characters open chest 3, a faintly glowing mist will rise out of the chest. As they watch, it slowly takes the form of a Martian high priest of Torisna. Linwaik, making motions with his hands obviously intended to avert evil, will identify it as the likeness of the cursed Marllyr.

Marllyr will coalesce until he takes on a relatively solid form. At that time he will speak the following:

Thank you for freeing my body. It's been contained in this chest for centuries, waiting to be let out. Tell me what manner of creature you are.

After the PCs have explained who they are, Marllyr will identify himself and continue:

Now that my body is free, I must ask you for another favor so that it can be joined with my soul. I would ask that one of you surrender your body to me, so that I can use it to perform a ceremony to free myself from the Tree of Souls. It is a painless matter, and will last only an hour. I need a healthy body to perform the ceremony."

Actually, Marllyr needs any body that has a soul. (His doesn't at the moment—it's in the Tree. Or at least, he believes it's in the Tree.) If one of the characters decides to "lend" Marllyr his body, Marllyr will tell him to lie down. Marllyr will then attempt to kill the selected character by stabbing him through the heart with the dagger he carries at his side, but since Marllyr's body is so fragile, he will not be able to persist in the face of any physical resistance. If he is shot, the bullet will do no damage other than to knock him back—he can't be killed as he is dead already.

After being thwarted from killing one of the player characters, or if no one accepts his request for a loaner body, Marllyr will speak the following:

It is foolish not to submit to my demands. I command forces which could kill you all if I wanted. I'll take one of your bodies now by force!

At this point Marllyr will start to speak an incantation. Linwaik cannot identify it other than to say it's a ritual involving the dead. The incantation is short—only one sentence—and Marllyr will repeat it as many times as he can. If the characters want to prevent him from accomplishing whatever it is he is trying to do, they will have to do it before he completes the first sentence. They probably won't be able to succeed, as by the time they ask Linwaik what Marllyr is doing, he will have spoken the incantation at least once.

DARK CAVALRY

The incantation is a spell to animate the dead Martian mercenaries. After he speaks the first sentence of the incantation, the dead Martians will begin to move. The more times he repeats the incantation, the quicker the results will be. It will take 10 minutes for the bodies to become partially animated (they can crawl and grab at nearby characters) and 20 minutes for them to become totally animated. Until then, they will squirm

and moan loudly. If the characters pounce on Marllyr and destroy his body (hauling him out into the stairway, holding him down, and setting him on fire is one possibility), the powers he evoked in the incantation will still take effect, although his evil presence will have exited the scene. The characters may then have time to complete their inspection of the vault before fleeing or being attacked.

Science Deserves to Know: Since Linwaik will not allow anything to be taken from the vault, the characters will have to copy any of the scrolls they want to keep. Getting to the airship from the lower level of the vault will take a few minutes—how many depends on how burdened the characters are (with equipment or fallen companions). At least five minutes is recommended; add to this as is seen fit. Copying one scroll will take at least 30 minutes (for a poor copy in optimal time).

Dead Rise: If the characters get to the courtyard before the first 10 minutes have passed, they will notice that all of the Martians are squirming and moaning, even the ones that were horribly mutilated during the bilair attack. There isn't anything they can do to stop this (other than further mutilating the Martian bodies so they are unable to moan or squirm—a messy and squeamish business). After 10 minutes (but before 20), the zombies will actively fight back against anyone trying to "lay them to rest," and will also try to grab onto PCs to pull themselves upright. The Martian zombies will not attack the PCs.

Once the 20 minutes have passed, the reborn Martians will march down to the lower level of the vault as if drawn by an irresistible force. As they walk, what is left of their faces bear a lonely, lost look. Their eyes are dull and sunken, and they moan softly as they shuffle toward the vault.

Traffic Jam: The circular stairway presents a problem for the Martian zombies. As they go down (stumble, shuffle, creep), it becomes progressively difficult for them to stay on their feet. Eventually, some of them fall. This blocks the other Martians trying to get down. Not really knowing what to do, the obstructed Martians just stand where they are (unless provoked from the rear) and moan loudly until something happens to clear the way.

It will be impossible for any of the player characters to get up or down the stairs while the Martian zombies are on the staircase. The best thing they can do is help the ones who have fallen to clear the path. If the player characters allow all the zombies to collect in the vault, the stairway will be clear, and they can leave.

Dilemma: The characters will have to make some choices. If they want to copy the scrolls, they will not have time to do so before the zombies start down the stairway and block it. If they decide to take the scrolls, Linwaik will protest. If the player characters insist, Linwaik will make every effort to de-

stroy all the scrolls he can, either right there or later. If the zombies get to the vault's final chamber and hear Marllyr's orders (see below), the characters will have to leave the temple to avoid death.

The best option the characters can pursue is to delay the zombies while they copy the scrolls. Some delay can be created by having some PCs exit to the courtyard and put some zombies to rest early on. The biggest benefit could come from strategic use of (or creation of) the traffic jam on the stairway. When the scrolls are copied, the PCs can let the zombies into the vault and leave the temple while the undead shuffle by.

Further Complication: When the Martian zombies arrive at the final chamber, Marllyr (if his body has not been destroyed) will command them to kill the humans, and they will attack. The reborn Martians are easy to defeat—their threat lies in their numbers. The zombies could conceivably wear the PCs out, especially if some of them have been wounded previously.

Like before they died, the Martians are ruthless and will fight until they can fight no more. (They can take three wounds before they cease fighting. At the referee's option, a shot to the head—for a reduced chance to hit—may immediately take one out.) All their attributes and skills are reduced by two. (While in the zombie state, they cannot think at a high level and can just barely comprehend language. They cannot form any words, but instead only moan ceaselessly and unintelligibly.)

THWARTED

If Marllyr's body was previously destroyed (or when the zombies are destroyed), a howling noise rises through the stones of the temple and up through the courtyard. Wind whips briefly around the courtyard (or through the halls of the temple, if the PCs are still there), tearing at loose clothing and items of equipment (like scrolls). Then the sound abruptly ceases. An uncanny quiet reigns. If Marllyr was not previously destroyed, his body glows briefly, seeming to swell, then explodes soundlessly into blackness, leaving the air full of foul-smelling dust.

If the PCs carry anything out of the vault, the referee will have to decide whether the curse of the Tree of Souls carries its legendary weight, and what form it might take.

The PCs should receive two to three experience points, and one close combat point if appropriate. Linwaik will allow them to take (or arrange to come back for) the Belgians' airship as a partial reward for helping him (if it is still here). The characters may gain renown points in Heroism, Scientific Achievement (especially if they recovered a copy of the lyrairisian scroll), and/or Exploration. Although the PCs might sell their story to a newspaper, most would not believe the more fantastic aspects of the experience. However, good money might be made in turning the experience into a novel. Ω

QUAD CON '90, October 12-14 at Palmer Auditorium, 1000 Brady St., Davenport, IA, sponsored by The Riverbend Gamers Club and The Game Emporium. This year's convention will be the fifth annual event. Scheduled are a variety of roleplaying games, including *AD&D, BattleTech, Call of Cthulhu, Champions, Marvel Heroes, Shadowrun*, and others. Plus historical and computer games, a silent auction, dealers' room, and miniatures painting competition. Send a SASE to Quad Con, The Game Emporium, 3213 23rd Ave., Moline, IL, 61265.

GAMEMASTER '90, October 20 in the Student Union of Boise State University in Boise, Idaho. Tournaments will include **MegaTraveller**, *AD&D, Car Wars, Warhammer, Battletech, GURPS, Star Trek RPG, Star Fleet Battles, Marvel Super Heroes, Champions*, and *Star Wars RPG*, plus a *Total Recall* adventure. Contact The Gamemasters Guild, 1511 Bergeson, Boise, ID 83706.

STAR CON '90, October 26-28 in the Americano's Center in Menasha, WI, sponsored by Star Base Alpha. For more information, contact Star Con '90, 1112 N. Lake St., Neenah, WI 54956.

COMMAND.CON TOO, October 27 at the St. Louis Community College at Forest Park campus cafeteria. Events will include RPGA network *AD&D* games, RPGs, boardgames, miniatures battles and the SAGA game auction. Write to Command.Con Too, PO Box 9107, St. Louis, MO 63117.

GAELCON '90, October 27-29 in Dublin, Ireland. Hailed as Ireland's largest convention, the gathering will include historical and roleplaying games, plus several shops. Write to Gaelcon '90, Riverside Center 8, Sir John Rogerson's Quay, Dublin 2, IRELAND.

ROCK-CON XVII GAME FAIR, November 3-4 at the Rockford Lutheran High School in Rockford, IL. Special guests include Jim Ward, Tom Wham, and Lou Zocchi. The convention features historical, fantasy, and boardgaming events covering the entire spectrum of adventure gaming, plus an auction, dealer area, and various RPGA events. The RPGA and Black Hawk Distributors will sponsor the Don Snow Memorial *AD&D* Tournament. Write to Rock-Con Game Fair, 14225 Hansberry Road, Rockton, IL 61072.

CANCON '91, January 26-28, 1991, at the University of Canberra, ACT, AUSTRALIA. Hailed as Australia's biggest convention, the event will feature special guest Jean Rabe. Scheduled are miniatures, board-games, roleplaying games (including several RPGA events), and a costume parade. Write CANCON, GPO Box 1016, Canberra City, ACT, 2601, AUSTRALIA.

PRAIRIE CON 13, February 8-10, 1991, in Brandon MB, CANADA. Brandon's 13th annual game convention will feature *AD&D* second edition, Champions, *GURPS Supers, Cyberpunk, Magic and Space, Shadowrun, Squad Leader, Star Fleet Battles, Warhammer 40,000*, and more. Write to Prairie Con, PO Box 1731, Brandon MB, R7A 6J3, CANADA.
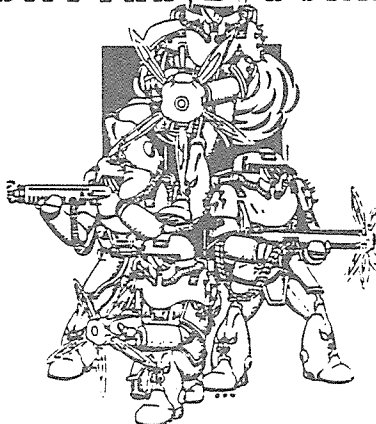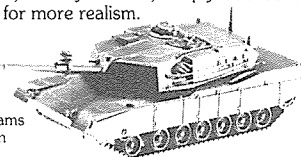
Announcements must be sent in a minimum of four months before a convention takes place. Challenge is not responsible for errors in convention announcements. Write to Challenge Conventions, PO Box 1646, Bloomington, IL 61702-1646 USA.
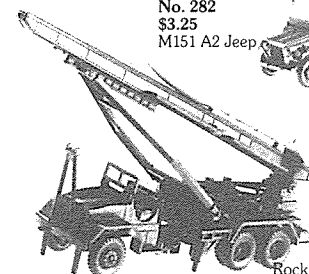
Contagion

Richard S. McEnroe

We were exceeding the speed of light in downtown Cairo, Illinois. Either that, or the diagnostics software had crashed again.

Danny and Cenovich were trying to figure out which, worshipping on their knees before the gutted nav console, offering arcane invocations from the faded, crack-spined manuals and circuit diagrams in merry contradiction to each other. The noise and the lack of results had Master Chief Drinkwine paying rigid attention to his engineering displays, but so far my instructions to let our shake 'n' bake ensigns learn from their mistakes were holding—although he was undoubtedly cursing the call-up clause in his retirement papers. It was safe enough, anyway. There just wasn't much trouble out here past the orbit of Mars for even a halfway-rebuilt yard queen like Vigilant to get into.

At least that's what I thought then.

The secure-channel printout came to life with a squeal of protest from the worn platen, bringing Danny and Cenovich up out of their argument with a look on their faces like a couple of jacklighted deer. By the time they got done looking at each other to see who was going to handle it, Drinkwine was tearing the printout off the receiver and running it through decrypt.

I watched his back stiffen as he read the clean copy. His expression didn't reassure me as he turned and handed me the form, a standard ASF operations order:

OPORD ASF 627/31 MAY 011631 HRS ZULU/ LUNA/SOL//

BACKGROUND

1. USS VIGILANT (PC-12) ATTACHED OPCON ORBITAL QUARANTINE COMMAND FOR LIMITED OPERATIONS//

2. OQC REPORTS LOST CONTACT W/IFN PLUTON (ACONIT-CLASS FFG) 1130 HRS ZULU THIS DATE//PLUTON MISSION INTER-CEPT/IDENTIFY INBOUND BOGEY NEG IFF NEG COMMO//LAST REPORT PLUTON GAVE VISUAL ID BOGEY AS FRENCH COMMER-CIAL CARRIER PROSPERITÉ (ANJOU-CLASS) AND DISPATCH OF BOARDING PARTY//NO FURTHER TRAFFIC//IFF INDICATES PLU-TON ERRATIC COURSE VICINITY LAST RE-PORTED COORDS BOGEY/PROSPERITÉ TRANSJOVIAN SPACE//

MISSION

VIGILANT WILL LOCATE/VERIFY STATUS PLUTON AND BOGEY/PROSPERITÉ//VIGI-LANT WILL REPORT STATUS SAME ASF/ OQC AND ACT PER SITUATION AND SUBSE-QUENT ORDERS//

EXECUTION

1. OQC REGS TO SUPERSEDE ASF RULES OF ENGAGEMENT WHERE RELEVANT//

2. AMENDMENT (ONE TIME) TO OCS REGS:

The New TWILIGHT: 2000™

War has raged on for years. The front lines sweep back and forth across the ravaged face of Europe. The high-tech ammunition is dwindling. The high-tech equipment is failing, piece by piece, as spare parts and maintenance time evaporate before the march of an endless campaign. The front lines are now held by a few grim and desperate soldiers.

The U.S. Fifth Division has tenaciously held the line in central Poland. Now, a Soviet encirclement has cut it off in a region ruled by ambitious warlords, local militias, and bands of marauding deserters. Headquarters is 200 kilometers to the rear and helpless. Your last order sets you free...

Good luck.
You're on your own.

Twilight: 2000—the roleplaying game of World War III.

Characters: Nationalities, new career types, skills, characteristics, military and nonmilitary backgrounds.

Combat: Revised, realistic, easy-to-learn system.

Travel: Types of travel, time scales, vehicles, encounters, maintenance, fuel, repairs.

Encounters: Dangerous environments, radiation, disease, contaminants, reasons for encounters, typical adventures.

Equipment: Weapons, supplies, vehicles, munitions, costs, availability.

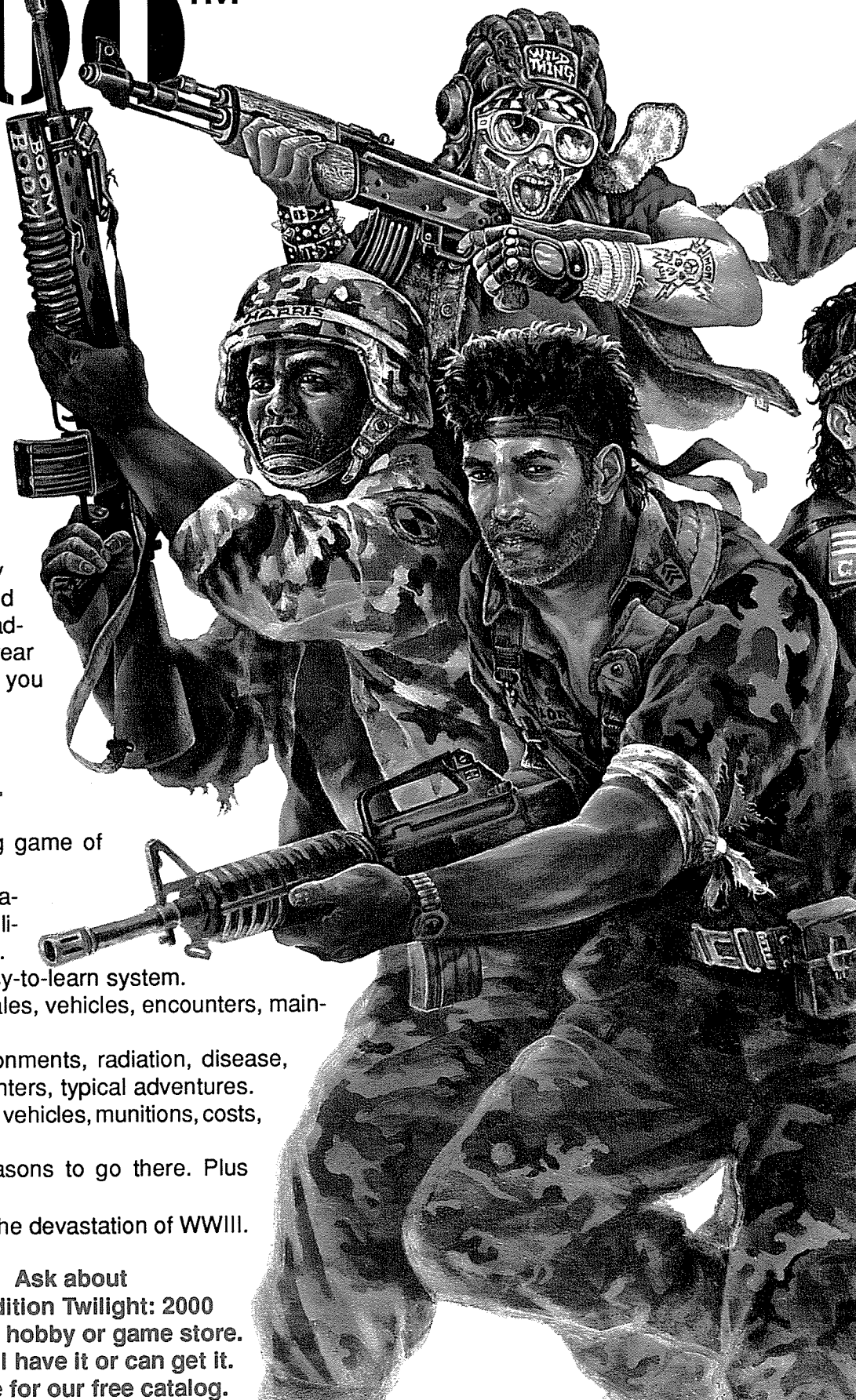**Danger:** Places to go and reasons to go there. Plus reasons to wish you hadn't.

Twilight: 2000: Roleplaying in the devastation of WWIII.

WORLD WAR III: **Twilight: 2000** traces the downward spiral in Europe as regional and ethnic conflict plunge the world into devastation. In the ruins of civilization, the adventures are fast and furious. The prize is survival, and maybe, just maybe, a safe place to spend the night.

CHARACTER GENERATION: **Twilight: 2000** calls for die rolling only for basic attributes (players can opt for a point purchase system instead). Prior career entries are based on minimum attribute scores.

Many Character Types: Character generation includes most nationalities and many nonmilitary backgrounds.

Skills: Skills are based on 1-10 skill levels (instead of the previous 1-100 skill levels). Skills are attribute based; improvement is based on experience. Default skills are available to everyone.

COMBAT: The **Twilight: 2000** advanced combat system is realistic, easy to play, and (above all) fun.

TRAVEL: **Twilight: 2000** covers travel in detail. Rules cover time scales, types of travel available, upkeep, and events. Travel as an introduction to encounters is also described, as are vehicle maintenance, fuel, and repair.

ENCOUNTERS: The new **Twilight** card encounter system emphasizes clearly organized, easy-to-use, short encounters perfect for a night's gaming. Rules cover the **Twilight** card format, creating your own **Twilight** cards, and administering encounters again and again.

Dangerous Environments: The **Twilight** rules cover radiation, disease, and battlefield contaminants.

Twilight Cards: Four typical **Twilight** card adventures are included in the book.

Buildings: Eight typical (and recurring) building interiors are included for use in any number of situations: a bar, subway station, farmhouse, etc.

EQUIPMENT: **Twilight: 2000** has expanded equipment coverage, with a more visual presentation and extensive illustrations. Vehicle statistics are based on up-to-date information and the latest intelligence.

ROLEPLAYING: Referees' responsibilities are spelled out in clear language. More material has been added to help referees in their quest for fast, fun adventures.

Nonplayer characters are carefully defined, with instructions on administering their motivations, describing their characteristics, and playing out their actions.

Tasks have been expanded and clarified.

The **adventures** section gives detailed instructions on how to set them up and describe them.

Plus administering experience, the types of rewards to offer player characters (and how much), and motivating players (and characters) to play out enjoyable adventures.

HAZARDOUS ENVIRONMENTS: The **Twilight: 2000** environment has become more colorful—it's a bigger, wilder, more threatening world out there. Referees can set adventures anywhere in Europe with no additional material. Other areas where U.S. troops are stationed are similarly treated: the Middle East, Far East, and the United States.

Background: The opening situation in **Twilight: 2000** covers Poland, with background and details for a "real" adventure with maps, NPCs, the works. It ends up in Krakow, with a lot of detailed coverage of the city.

Service Background: Military service details are included, with discussions of life in the service, definitions of weird terms (like MOPP, MOS, and klick), and explanations of what equipment is like and what a typical character might have experienced.

The New
TWILIGHT: 2000

The boxed set includes a 288-page basic rule book, 20×28" map of Europe, and blank forms.
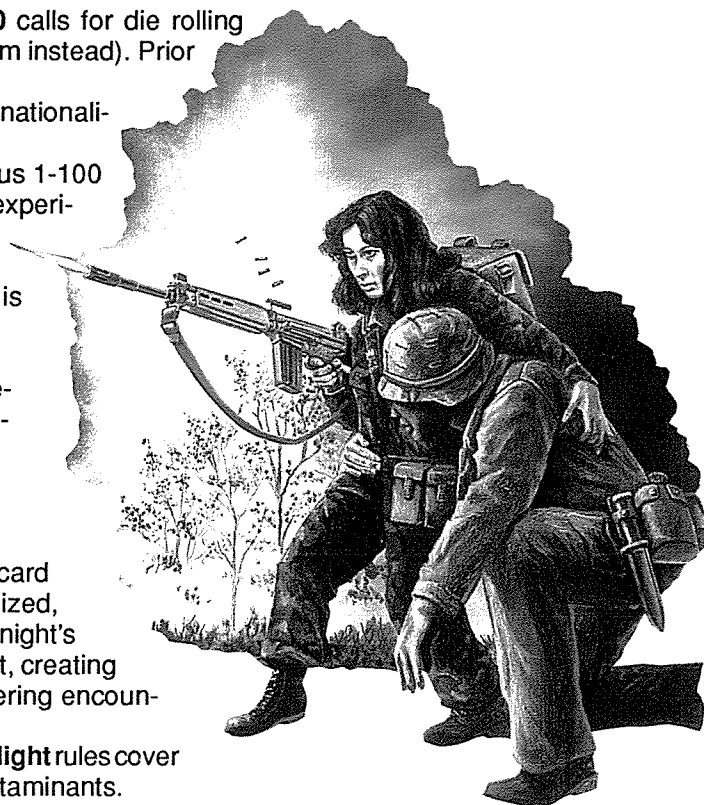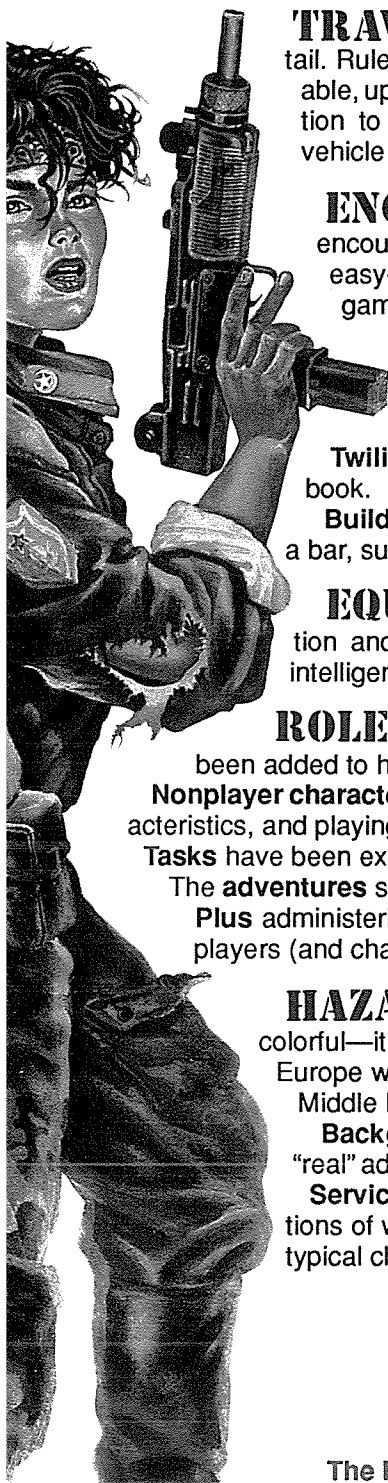
Service corridors above and below corridors, above and below holds. Ventilation ducts run between corridors

Bridge (upper level)

To Core

Spin Habitat
(cabins, sickbay, galley)

Core Hull
(spin systems, life support,
arms locker/vault, ship's stores)

Main Corridor

Hold 1

Hold 2

Main Corridor

Note: Two-level design. Ladders between
levels at all internal airlocks.

Stutterwarp

MHD Powerplant

Key

Fixed structural bulkheads (also between hold 2 and engineering)

◯ Access plates

... Emergency seals

⊠ Airlock (also between hold 2 and engineering)

⟨ Cargo hatch

Grill catwalk (upper level)

Corridors run above and below cargo hatches the length of the ship.

Light Internal Bulkhead
(manufacturer's original configuration)

Fuel Tankage
(external to engineering section)

Anjou-Class Prosperite

Not to scale.

VIGILANT NOT REPEAT NOT TO EXERCISE TERMINAL OPTION W/O CLEARANCE ASF/OQC//

3. VIGILANT WILL TAKE ALL NECESSARY STEPS TO FULFILL MISSION AND PRESERVE SHIP/CREW//

SUPPORT
NO FURTHER SHIPS/ASSETS AVAILABLE AT PRESENT//
COMMAND/SIGNAL: PER SOP

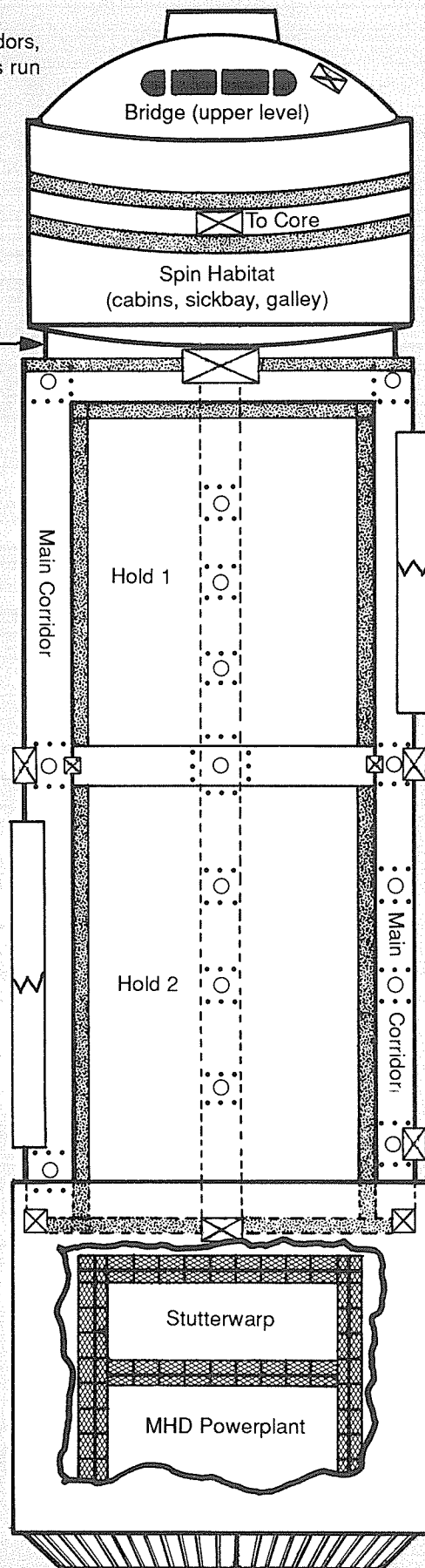*I looked up at Drinkwine. "There's a nav supplement attached, waiting for download,"* was all he said. The "God help us" was more or less implied—and I agreed with it. The official wordage all boiled down to: "Something happened. We don't know what. Go find out, and do something about it. Don't overreact without orders, but do whatever you have to do" (with the implicit "we can always hang you later"). More good news— whatever had happened had happened to an* Aconit-*class frigate, a ship at least as good as ours, in full commission and manned by experienced regulars.*

I'd been standing still too long. I looked up at Drinkwine and my clutch of ensigns. "Danny, reconfigure a workstation for nav. We'll try to get the main board up en route. Ceno, get off an acknowledgement to ASF Luna. Chief, be ready to download the nav supplement when we've got a working station.

"People, we just went operational."

NATURE OF THE BEAST

This scenario is meant to be gamed along the lines of 20th-century flat screen critic Joe Bob Briggs' famous horror movie dictum: "Anyone can die at any time." Picture a road-show company version of *2000 Maniacs* being acted out aboard a 747 if you want the spirit of the thing. As such, the referee should strive to incorporate certain horror traditions—the doofus who insists on going off alone should meet a grisly end, the macho types who want to tackle the maniacs head-on should find out they've bitten off more than they can chew, the coward who tries to abandon his companions to their fate (or even betray them outright) should run right into his own doom, etc.

CAST AND SET

The PCs are a crew of recently mobilized American Space Force reservists. They are refitting and recommissioning a mothballed *Virtue*-class patrol cutter for rear echelon duty along the American Arm to free up a first-line warship for service with the American forces participating in the Kafer campaigns. The refit has been rough going—even the minimal upgrades provided are proving difficult to integrate into the cutter's worn and aging systems. It does not help that the crew is fresh out of civvies and

either rusty or inexperienced. If the players want to use previously generated characters, balance out any excess experience by making the remaining crewmember NPCs a mix of 80% Green and 20% Experienced. (Given the nature of the scenario, the players will probably want to generate some new characters to whom they have less of an emotional attachment—if you get my drift.)

The *Virtue* is an obsolescent class of in-system patrol cutter (PC). In original configuration, *Virtue*-class vessels mounted a pair of dorsal and ventral (back and belly) single laser turrets using the Hyde EA122 laser. For game purposes, treat *Vigilant* as an *Exeter*-class system defense boat (from **Ships of the French Arm**, pages 32-33) with the following modifications:

- Targeting computer +1.
- The ship is unstreamlined.
- The ventral (belly) laser turret has been replaced with a Parke/Ezrael submunitions dispenser (see sidebar on page 57).
- The ship is fitted with one Hyde Dynamics SIM-14 missile pack. However, the pack only carries one missile; the other two stations are taken up with test and diagnostic hardware for the refit.

Refit "Difficulties": *Vigilant's* refit is a long way from complete. This could—c'mon, who're we kidding, this *will*—cause problems. On a roll of 1-2 on 1D6, the targeting computer will crash, leaving the ship with targeting computer -1. Computer skill on the part of gunners or engineers can be counted as a +DM against a crash roll; Computer skill or Electronics can be counted as a +DM to repair the glitch. Gunner skill still counts as a normal DM in the event of a crash. If the PCs try to fire their only SIM-14, it will malfunction—big time. Once the missile clears the launch cycle—as far as it's been tested already—it will start to receive all kinds of junk signals from the targeting telemetry. For the results, role 1D6 on the SIM-14 Firing Results Table.

SIM-14 FIRING RESULTS

1. It takes off straight ahead, unguided.
2. It veers off "up" (shipboard perspective), unguided.
3. It veers off left, unguided.
4. It veers off right, unguided.
5. It veers off "down" (shipboard perspective), unguided.
6. It flies out a maximum of two hexes, seemingly normally, then turns 180° and heads straight back at *Vigilant*—armed and tracking. The missile controller can abort/destruct the missile before laser detonation on a roll of 3-6 on 1D6, with a roll allowed once per hex moved by the missile. Use Remote Operator skill as a +DM. There is a -1 DM if the missile gets into the *Vigilant's* hex; if it does, the missile will target *Vigilant* and detonate.

2300AD

PLUTON AND *PROSPERITÉ*

Once the PCs receive the mission, they will proceed to locate *Pluton* and *Prosperité*. If you want to game out the actual search using the rules from "Lone Wolf" (**Challenge 33**) and "Three Blind Mice" (**Challenge 37**), remember that an approximate position is known for the French ships, and it should not be necessary to search more than a limited area.

When *Vigilant* arrives in the appropriate vicinity, the crew will find the *Anjou*-class freighter *Prosperité* tumbling erratically at All Stop (passive scan neutrino and IR emissions, however, indicate that the ship is still under power). One cargo hatch is open, venting at least its hold to space. The spin habitat is not rotating.

Prosperité will not respond to any communications attempts and will not react to active sensor scans. Her nav sensors are operating, but no visible attempt is being made to stabilize the ship aside from some seemingly random firings of the attitude thrusters. These thruster activations will make it impossible to match rotation and hard dock with the freighter.

There is no sign of *Pluton*. If the PCs perform a passive scan, they will find a bogey lurking at the absolute edge of their sensor range. Active scan will then do two things—confirm that the bogey is *Pluton*, and cause the French frigate to begin electronic jamming of all radio and radar frequencies. The frigate will not respond to any attempts to communicate. If *Vigilant* tries to close, the frigate will evade. If the Americans succeed in closing with the frigate or attempt to outdistance the jamming, *Pluton* will initiate an attack with both her Ritage-1 missiles and will close for a gun engagement (Crew Quality-0). She will not break off before one or both ships are destroyed. If the PCs elect to take no action regarding *Pluton*, the frigate will continue to hover around the fringes without getting involved—for now.

BOARDING PARTY

Because *Vigilant* cannot dock, the only real course of action available is a boarding party. *Vigilant* has only a token arms locker—five old M-2 "Nine-Forty-Fours" and three Traylor M-57 service automatic pistols from the basic game, with 300 rounds per rifle and three magazines per pistol. The crew has standard ASF military P-suits (treat as full-body inertial armor with high-threat helmets). In addition, there are five rigid breastplates designed for use with ASF P-

suits (and cannot be worn without them). If the PCs begin organizing a full-scale military assault on *Prosperité*, the referee should have an NPC (preferably Master Chief Drinkwine) point out that they do not know what is happening over there, and it might be nice if they brought along a couple of wrenches and band-aids just in case they came in handy, along with people who know how to use them. He should also point out that *Pluton* is still out there and is an unknown quantity, so the *Vigilant* won't want to load up the boarding party with all its skilled personnel.

The referee is encouraged to use Master Chief Drinkwine in the game regardless of whether other NPCs are used or not. He is the referee's best tool for controlling the action—the grizzled old pro who's been everywhere and seen everything. If all PCs go with the boarding party, Drinkwine should go along; if they split between *Vigilant* and *Prosperité*, the ref should use his best judgment as to where the master chief will do the most good.

BOARDING

If the boarding party first elects to enter *Prosperité* through the exposed hold, it will find six bodies wedged among the cargo and will discover that the interior hatches will not open. Instrumentation on the hatch panels will indicate a viable atmosphere on the far side of the hatches. Attempts to access the ship's intercom will show it to be inoperable.

If the party elects to inspect the corpses—a grisly task in the flickering scarlet emergency lighting—PCs with any level of Medical or First Aid skill, or P-Suit-3 or better, will recognize that many of their injuries are not vacuum-related. Explosive decompression does not produce what look like jagged knife wounds and laser burns matching those scarring the interior bulkheads.

Referee's Note: These bodies are the only remaining evidence of a savage death struggle that took place in this hold, in which the losers breached the hatch in order to take their assailants with them. If the PCs do not deduce there was a fight, have the most experienced NPC present suggest it.

BIZARRE MESSAGE

If any of the player characters have remained aboard *Vigilant*, the following will occur after the boarding party moves out of sight into the hold: *Prosperité*'s directional antenna will target *Vigilant* and briefly punch a signal through *Pluton*'s jamming. Visual will be nothing but hash. The audio channel will pick up a thunderous hammering and clanging, along with muffled shouting (incoherent, and in French on top of it) through which a single, female voice will cry: *"Les bêtes! Les bêtes fous ont ici!"* ("The beasts! The mad beasts are here!") The connection will then be broken after the sound of several gunshots is heard (because the freighter continues to tumble). When it comes back in line, the antenna will be pointing randomly, and communication will not be restored.

P-suit communications to characters on the *Vigilant* cannot break through the *Pluton*'s jamming; if the PCs have not thought to arrange a visual signaling system, too bad—it's in the manuals. The transmission will also cause *Pluton* to close to not less than three hexes from the other two ships.

RETREAT IS CUT OFF

If the player characters decide to retreat to *Vigilant*, they will be discouraged by a sudden flurry of thruster activations that send *Prosperité* into a fresh tumble, violent enough to leave *Vigilant* no choice but to move a good distance away. Characters aboard will have to roll against Dexterity to avoid injury (P-Suit skill as +DM). If the PCs decide to try and leave anyway, *Pluton* will close and initiate an attack at the first sign of personnel returning to *Vigilant*, targeting the personnel first and shifting fire to the cutter if it attempts to intervene. If surviving boarders withdraw to the freighter, *Pluton* will break off its attack, firing only in self-defense against *Vigilant*.

WHAT'S WRONG

The PCs can move from the hold to the internal air locks without challenge. Access will be possible at either fore or aft lock, although the locks will have to be opened manually. Once inside, the boarding party will find the following:

● If any player characters are reckless enough to crack their visors and check, they will find the air reeking of various chemical and metallic contaminants, and a smell anyone with combat experience will recognize as the stink of death.

● Something is wrong with nearly every electrical system aboard the ship. The systems are either dead, erratically operative, or functioning randomly.

● The spin habitat is presently immobile, but on a roll of 1-2 on 1D6 may begin to spin without warning in either direction (the referee should roll periodically). This rotation will last 2D6 turns and will not be limited by safety governors—it is possible to run the habitat up to a maximum of the equivalent of 2 Gs of simulated gravity, although the habitat will seize up violently and jam if allowed to run at that rate for 1D6 turns. The damage will result in friction/lubricant fires in the habitat core, giving the PCs the additional joy of dealing with clouds of halon extinguisher fumes from the firefighting system.

● The lighting is extremely erratic, with the main lights flickering on and off in irregular patterns, combining with the failing emergency battery lamps to throw eerie, seemingly moving shadows everywhere the increasingly nervous player characters look.

● If the party members open any service or access panels to inspect the dysfunc-tional systems, they will find that some seem to have been deliberately vandalized, and that every bit of exposed plastic and insulation is covered with a layer of downy fuzz. In many areas, exposed wire and conduit stripped of all insulation has led to short circuiting, accounting for many of the failures. Closer inspection will show the same fuzz starting to grow on the plastic of the circuit panels themselves. The boarding party should not need to be told the obvious—they are looking at a classic OQC nightmare—a catastrophic contamination—with themselves standing in the middle of it.

MANIACAL ASSAULT

If the party members decide to return to *Vigilant* (and have not already been warned off by an encounter with *Pluton*), the referee should have the most experienced NPC present point out that they cannot risk carrying the contamination back to the cutter. If they decide to try anyway, they should get a surprise:

Maniacs: Their way back to the air lock (either lock) is barred by a barricade composed of 2D6-3 men and women. The group of maniacs is a mix of passengers and crew of all ages and shapes, dressed in torn, bloodstained clothing and armed with a variety of improvised weapons plus 1-3 handguns from *Prosperité*'s arms locker (Stracher P-11Ms with one magazine each), as well as one modified welding laser (equivalent to a Rottman LK1 laser carbine, DPV 1). The laser has no sighting apparatus but is capable of continuous operation, and its user will slash it wildly along the corridor. Roll against Dexterity to avoid the slashing beam (P-Suit +DM).

The improvised weapons will include fire axes, power tools (rent a few horror videos for inspiration), at least one unmodified welder (DPV 1 at contact range only), and (one time only) a ship's grapnel gun with a penetrating head (DPV 1). The grapnel will not wound a suited figure. However, it will ruin suit integrity, and the built-in powered winch will drag the snared victim back to the waiting crew and passengers—and those fire axes are specially designed to chop through interior bulkheads (how much faith do you have in that ASF-issue visor?). Two PCs hanging onto a snared PC can provide enough resistance to jam the grapnel's winch, but PCs doing so will be unable to dodge the laser—a consequence that could have dire results.

Prosperité is a cargo vessel. Referees are invited to use their imaginations in improvising exotic implements of destruction from cargo and stores—compressed gas bottles, for example, sent ricochetting down narrow corridors as unguided missiles with their safety valves broken off, or used to fill sealed cabins with flammable vapor to make incendiary booby traps.

Barricade: The crew and passengers,

hidden behind a hastily emplaced barricade of cartons and repair materials, or concealed behind cabin doors, will wait until they have a clear shot, then attack in a frenzy. Individuals with contact-range weapons will wait until they can make an effective attack before revealing themselves, then strike without warning or quarter. They will have a berserker's Strength (determine their Strength normally, then add +3) and ignore any wound that does not immediately kill or incapacitate. The attackers are absolutely incoherent, and treat all attempts to communicate or reason as nothing more than a chance for them to get in close for a new attack. The maniacs will all bear signs of the plague, which are obvious if the PCs get close enough for hand to hand attacks (or examine dead maniacs after the fight).

If the PCs stand and fight, they risk ruining their P-suit integrity, which effectively maroons them aboard *Prospérité* unless they have no regard for spreading the contagion. However, 1D6-1 turns of melee combat after any PCs are engaged in combat, their assailants' strength begins to fall off rapidly. The crazed inhabitants of *Prospérité* will lose their berserker bonus at the beginning of the turn following that indicated by the die roll, and two points of strength on each turn thereafter, until at Strength 6 they more or less collapse in wheezing, coughing helplessness. They will *not* stop trying to kill the player characters, though, and they will remain incoherent.

EXPLORING

If the party members back off from the barricade and attempt to find another way out, they will discover the different locations in the ship to be as described below. An *Anjou*-class ship like the *Prospérité* can carry a maximum of 25 personnel. The player characters have no way of knowing how many were actually aboard or how many have survived this far. Use the maximum capacity as an upper limit for determining encounters with persons living or dead. If the PCs are having it too easy, pile 'em on—there are lots of sharp things aboard a starship. If the PCs are still having it too easy, the referee can even things up by having a binom of French ship's troops from *Pluton* stranded aboard, now also infected and deranged, in full combat armor with ready FAM-90s. Now don't you wish you hadn't fired off that last magazine?

Bridge

There are no living personnel. All bridge stations are down, either malfunctioning with the parasitic growth or destroyed by violence.

Forward Air Lock

If the player characters board by the forward lock, they will find 1D6-3 corpses in the corridor immediately outside the lock, obviously killed by high-powered weapons fire, and a handheld Beaulieu video imager of French military manufacture. The parasitic fuzz is already beginning to attack the seals and softer plastic parts. But if the PCs test it, they will find that the rugged imager still works and is capable of playing back its stored data.

The scene shown by the imager begins in the air lock. As the inner door swings open and the camera moves forward, the interior bridge hatch bursts open and the individuals the PCs found dead in the corridor throw themselves at the cameraman. There is a blur of tumbling motion as the imager is thrown skidding across the deck. It comes to rest facing back toward the air lock, where two enlisted French spacers are shooting down their last assailants—a French ensign and another figure in OQC colors are already down. The actions of the enlisted men indicate that the ensign is dead—the power drill through his visor is an obvious clue—but the OQC official is clearly only wounded. The panicky spacers hastily stik 'n' swear his punctured suit and bundle the casualties back into the air lock—with the OQC official fighting feebly not to go.

Spin Habitat/Cabins

The spin habitat has double berth accommodations for the ship's maximum complement of 25 individuals (the captain's cabin is a single) of standardized layout, including bunks along the rimward bulkhead, storage lockers (yes, big enough to hide in) and a fresher stall (tell me you're going anywhere near *anything* that even looks like a shower stall in this adventure). There is a 50% chance that the cabin doors will open automatically. All cabins can be opened manually, either because they are unlocked or because the locks were destroyed. The parasitic growth is everywhere, feeding on natural fibers as well as synthetics in the clothing, bedding, fixtures, etc. To determine the cabin contents, roll 1D6 on the Cabin Contents Table.

CABIN CONTENTS

1-2 The cabin is totally vandalized; its furnishings and contents are utterly ruined—and liberally stained with blood.

3-4 A deranged passenger or crewmember springs from hiding (we told you not to go near the fresher) with an improvised weapon, selecting one character and attacking until killed or rendered unconscious. If restrained ("Grab him!" "No, you grab him!"), the attacker will struggle and scream hysterically until passing out. He will be unable to be revived.

5 A horribly disfigured body, savagely attacked and tortured.

6 A baby—an infant girl who is approximately seven months old—placed in an inflatable survival ball and hidden in a storage locker. The exterior of the survival ball is suffering from parasitic infestation, but its airtight integrity has not been compromised, and the baby shows no symptoms of the infestation. Plainly, the party cannot leave her there. Equally plainly, the characters are going to have a problem getting her out of the ball without infection. One way that will work is to laser weld a length of plastic tubing to the ball's entryway in the air lock, sterilize the enclosed surfaces with a low-power surgical laser, then transfer the infant to a second ball from cutter stores. This procedure with the surgical laser can also be used to totally sterilize the exterior of the characters' P-suits, although it will be a time-consuming process. (Of course, this should be done once clear of *Prospérité*.) Vacuum exposure alone will not necessarily kill the spores—it will take at least an hour's exposure to do that, and the referee probably won't want to let the player characters stand still that long—will you?

Sickbay

Sickbay is a compact space with a multifunction examining table and two static automeds. There is a body on the examining table, covered with a bloodstained sheet, one arm dangling limply—an arm that will lash out with berserk strength to seize a player as the deranged ship's doctor slashes at him with a portable laser scalpel (DPV .6, contact range only). The doctor is insanely cunning, and will endure considerable poking and prodding to convince the player characters that he is actually another corpse—until one of them presents a vulnerable back. The two automeds are filled with the parasitic fuzz, at the heart of which the PCs can just see what used to be two human beings.

Corridors/Service Ducts

In addition to the cabin doors, other "surprises" might come jumping out of intersections, access panels, and under-floor grills at the PCs. Aside from murderous crazies, further hazards are exposed high-tension wiring due to eaten insulation, fixtures on the verge of falling due to decayed fastenings, and so on. Open floor grills could be lethal in the uncertain lighting and with the

random maneuvers of the crippled ship. Service ducts are so narrow that PCs have to move in single file. Ventilation ducts are accessible from almost everywhere aboard but are too small to pass a P-suited figure (something to keep in mind if the characters back themselves into a corner). Ducts also come equipped with razor-sharp emergency seals—and the systems *are* malfunctioning.

Holds

Encounters here are limited only by the referee's imagination and sense of unfair play ("With a howl of servos, a cargo walker lurches through the hatchway, manipulator claws reaching...").

Engineering

Engineering is a death trap (good, we were short of those), full of arcing, fuming, sputtering systems and consoles, extinguisher fumes and smoke. Many of the consoles and assemblies are covered with what look like scrawled incantations (in gibberish script) and nonsensical equations, written in what looks like (but probably isn't) red paint.

Now for the good news—the erratic course of the ship, resulting from system damage and Marie-Claude's actions, has allowed a near-lethal tantalum coil charge to build up. Within 1D6-3 hours of the PCs' learning this, the coils will discharge in a lethal burst of radiation. There is no way to stop this; the parasite has destroyed too many control systems and backups. The radiation may or may not kill the spores; it *will* kill any humans left aboard the ship.

At the referee's discretion, the characters may find Marie-Claude here in the clutches of 2D6-3 maniacs, who are trying to force her to repair the damaged systems (something utterly beyond her abilities, at this point). If the PCs succeed in rescuing her, they will have another problem on their hands (they needed another one). Marie-Claude will still be rational enough to recognize the threat the Kafer plague presents to all life on Earth and will do everything in her power to see that the contagion is contained aboard *Prosperité*, even if it kills her—and the characters. It would not be a good idea to leave her alone near the fuel controls.

Captain's Cabin

The door has been hammered open and punctured by numerous bullets fired from within. The cabin is full of scattered cartridge casings. A P-11 and several empty magazines float or lay abandoned. The captain's terminal, flickering and useless, is configured with several "windows" indicating that someone was trying to reconfigure it as a piloting/nav station. No one is present.

The captain's log recorder, or "black box,"

is still operational. Playing it back, the PCs can get the story of the *Prosperité* for the first time, narrated by the ship's captain, Marie-Claude Gastineau, a once-handsome woman in her middle thirties, now showing the first symptoms of Greypatch. Her gaunt expression reflects the horror she has seen.

STORY OF THE *PROSPERITÉ*

Scientific authorities on Aurore, in the beleaguered Eta Bootis system, have been unable to come up with a counter to Kafer Rot, the fungal blight that is devastating the terraformed ecosystem of that world. L'Institut des Études Xénologiques arranged permission to send samples of the blight to the OQC isolation labs at Earth's L-4 point, in hopes that Earth's superior scientific assets will make better progress. A French liaison officer transported the samples partway down-arm aboard a French naval courier, until fleet demands and time required the courier to return up-arm. Rather than delay his mission awaiting further transport, the liaison used his authority to charter passage aboard *Prosperité*.

What nobody knew, however, was that one of the samples had mutated during attempts to sterilize it with UV radiation. The mutated strain of Kafer Rot, even more virulent than the original, attacked a broader spectrum of materials, including certain synthetics—like the seal rings in its container. It also had a wholly new side effect, producing a potent psychotropic toxin which induces a violent, paranoiac state of mind, while incubating the normal symptoms of Kafer Lung and Greypatch.

Unaware of what had happened, the liaison was the first victim of the new strain, his toxin-induced paranoia leading him to isolate himself in his cabin until he died in his sleep of Kafer Lung.

By that point, the contamination was spread throughout the ship, breaking down life-support filters and infecting the majority of the crew and passengers. No treatment available seemed to help. The few who were not infected fell victim to the violent impulses of their diseased fellow travellers. *Prosperité* snuck through the fringes of the intervening star systems, loitering only long enough to discharge her tantalum coils. The infected members of the crew knew only that they must get to Earth, that nothing matters but reaching Earth anymore—even if they've forgotten why.

Barricaded in the captain's cabin, eating only packaged survival rations and canned water, breathing through a series of filter masks, Marie-Claude fought the madmen for control of the ship, realizing what could happen if the Kafer contagion reached Earth. It was a seesaw battle, with control of the ship passing back and forth, explaining the

ship's erratic course. As often as she was able to take control, system damage from the Kafer Rot snatched it out of her hands again and gave it back to the mad crew with their advantage of redundant systems.

The madmen in their paranoia were unable to organize a concerted attack on her bastion, or overcome her advantage of controlling the arms locker. That changed with the arrival of *Pluton* and the madmen's paranoiac realization that OQC would not let them reach Earth. After driving off the French boarding party—in the course of which the surviving bridge crewmembers were killed—the frenzied madmen stormed the captain's cabin. This was the point at which *Vigilant* intercepted Marie-Claude's last transmission.

If the party members haven't realized it before, they have a new problem—every player character who cracked his visor or who has lost P-suit integrity is now a potential homicidal maniac.

PLAGUE

Passengers and crew encountered with the plague will bear scabbed, dead-white patches of some kind of infection, accompanied by severe hair loss. The referee should describe these symptoms to the players the first time their characters get close enough to a victim to see the symptoms. As inexperienced spacers from the American Arm, they should not recognize the symptoms of Greypatch by sight—if one of them guesses, do not confirm or deny it. Perhaps have the senior NPC present confuse matters by pointing out that Kafer Rot has not been known to attack synthetics. Let 'em sweat.

If the player characters open their visors at any time while on the *Prosperité*, or if they suffer a torso or helmet puncture, they are infected (P-suits are inflated to less than normal atmospheric pressure unless otherwise stated, so contaminating spores will be drawn in). ASF P-suits have autotourniquet limb bands, so punctures on the arm or leg will not pass contamination onward. Infected players will contract Greypatch on the exposed limbs, however, and must roll normally against Kafer Lung if they breathe in contamination. No patching action will be fast enough to prevent contamination, which is carried in with the penetrating instrument.

The mental instability will begin long before any visible symptoms of the plague manifest. The referee should start to play on it at his own discretion, reflecting an infected PC's growing paranoia with goading, leading questions ("Why does he want you to stick your head in that locker?"). The best way to do this is to pass players with infected characters the questions on private notes. Make sure the other players get dummy notes so they can't tell who's getting special treatment. Personal experience with

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CONSPIRACY

An Ancient Horror
Grips the Earth

Coming in February 1991 from GDW.

the natural paranoia of gamers shows that, after a few rounds of note sending, you'll have a hard time telling the Kafer Rot crazies from the "normal" player characters. (It does a sadistic referee's heart good to watch a band of gaming brothers turn on each other like a pack of rabid burrowvargs: "Is he infected?" "Do they think I'm infected?" "I see it now, you're one of them! You're all one of them! Keep away from me!") Why, with any luck, the PCs will do each other more damage than the crazies will.

It is possible, though very time-consuming, to sterilize the exteriors of any noninfected PCs' P-suits with a low-power surgical laser, once the player characters are clear of the *Prosperité*, to remove the Kafer Rot spores. *Vigilant*'s corpsman will suggest this if none of the PCs do. It is also possible to kill the spores through exposure to vacuum, although over an hour of exposure is required. There isn't any known way to cure an infected character.

WE WANT TO LEAVE—NOW

By now, PCs should want nothing more than to *leave*. They can try to fight their way out an air lock or lure the maniacs away from it. Or they can try to breach the inner hatch on the evacuated hold if they have access to any cutting tools or lasers and enough time.

If the characters still aboard *Vigilant* don't think to conceal the exiting party by obstructing *Pluton*'s view, the referee should arrange for the cutter to do so. Once the cutter attempts to leave, the frigate will attack.

FINAL ATTACK

The panicked junior crewmembers who brought the wounded OQC official aboard the

2300AD

frigate brought the contagion with them. The official lived long enough to tell the frigate's rather inexperienced captain what has happened, and what the probable OQC response will be (something excessive). Since then, the captain has been holding his ship incommunicado, partly from the onset of the fungal madness and partly from the wholly sane fear of what he might be ordered to do if Earth becomes aware of his situation. He will not be so reluctant to do his duty regarding *Vigilant*, particularly since in his current paranoid state, he will regard the cutter as a threat to his own survival if it escapes. The ensuing battle will be rough on the surviving PCs trapped in *Vigilant*'s air lock (hopefully the PCs left aboard will not have been dumb enough to let them back in without decontamination), but it could be rougher yet: If the referee is really having fun, Earth and OQC have by now had time to send another ship to investigate *Vigilant*'s failure to communicate—a cruiser, which regards both frigates and cutters as a live-fire exercise.

This ship will have orders to expect the worst—orders which seem justified in light of the reports it receives en route of jamming and missile launches and submunition detonations.

If the PCs survive *Pluton*, they'll have to talk fast to convince the cruiser that *Vigilant* is not contaminated. If the referee decides to have the cruiser show up in the middle of the battle, it could make all the difference in the world simply whether it's a French or American ship. Ω

Dead Time

A series of bizarre vampire murders sweeps Night City. It is up to the PCs to solve the mystery and reveal the facts. This moderately difficult horror adventure is intended for a small group of characters, mostly Police or Medias.

Michael LaBossiere

Everyone in Night City knows about the latest series of strange killings. So far, 11 people have been killed by having their blood drained from them through double puncture wounds on the neck. Eyewitnesses report a man in dark clothes fleeing the site of some of the murders. After the first few murders, a group known as the Vlads came under suspicion—they are believed to have killed another five people by driving wooden stakes into their hearts, then draining out their blood.

STARTING THE PARTY OUT

Once the players have been provided with the above news on the street and any other information they may have access to, they are ready to begin. If they are Police, they will be assigned to the case and will be attempting to find and apprehend the killer. If they are Medias, they will be trying to track the killer and get a story. Other characters may be brought in with other motivations. For example, a player character may be related to one of the victims or hired by a victim's family.

The adventure will take place on October 12.

A STAR IS DEAD

The 12th victim is Vicki Gold, a moderately famous supporting star in the Sense Net drama, *Dead Time*. Since Vicki was a celebrity, her death will create a media sensation and will spur the police and media into further action.

Vicki's apartment is located in the posh section of Night City. The entrance to the townhouse apartment is on the 22nd floor of the Palatine Apartment Building. The apartment has two floors, only one of which is relevant to the case.

The apartment is very chic and expensively decorated. However, it is marred by the presence of four bodies:

Solo 1: Jack Stone, a veteran Solo bodyguard, is lying dead on the balcony. His left hand and wrist are shattered, and his right eye has been removed from the socket (it was a cybereye). He was killed by having his heart pulled through his body armor. An

unfired Uzi smartgun lies on the balcony floor nearby in a pool of blood.

Solo 2: Ann Gables lies dead on the floor. A 9mm pistol is in her hand, with two rounds fired. The rounds have not been found. She has a broken neck.

Solo 3: Miles Stewart's body has had both its arms torn off. They are lying by the kitchen door. His Uzi smartgun is still clenched in his right hand. His blood has created a rather large stain on the white carpet.

Vicki Gold: She was killed by having her blood drained through two puncture wounds in her neck. Unlike the other victims, she had a sensory recording device installed for her work.

Examining the Data

The damage to the bodies of the three Solos indicates that the attacker was very strong—far stronger than a normal human—and probably very skilled in the martial arts. The attacker must also be very fast and stealthy as he was able to take three skilled Solos by surprise and kill them.

Vicki Gold activated her sensory recorder, but it was damaged by the beating she took. All the techs are able to get off it is a blurred image of a man and the words, "Jani is next, my dear Vicki."

The Jani referred to is probably Jani Dark, the female lead of *Dead Time*.

During the investigation, apartment security reports that four of its guards have been found dead, with stakes in their hearts. Forensics will ascertain they were killed just before the attack on Vicki's apartment. These guards were assigned to patrol outside the building on the side where Vicki's balcony is located.

The evidence should suggest the following to the player characters:

● Jani is next to die, so she should be protected.

● The PCs should have a talk with the Vlads.

LAIR OF THE WHITE WORM

When the player characters decide to investigate the Vlads, they discover that it is

common knowledge on the street that they hang out at the Lair of the White Worm, a bar that caters to those who like horror. The Lair has a reputation for strangeness, even in Night City; it is also known to be a dangerous place to attend if one doesn't "belong"— like the player characters.

Exterior: The exterior of the bar is constructed to resemble the entrance to a dark cave. White gas vapors drift out of it, billowing in time to the music of a snake charm tune. Behind the bar is a trash-littered alley, featuring a couple of rats and a garbage can or two.

Entrance: The entrance looks like a cave and is filled with white gas. The Lair has a cover fee of $5 and a bouncer to back this up.

Interior: The interior of the building is murky and smoke-filled. A white mist constantly spills from the ceiling (obscuring it) and swirls around on the floor. Strange noises drift about the place. The walls are decorated with items ranging from implements of torture to what appear to be parts of monsters and human beings. Structural supports throughout the building have been decorated to look like stalagmites and stalactites.

The crowd consists of peculiar characters, mainly dressed to appear as the walking dead, with white, painted faces, black lipstick, and dead black clothes.

Bar: Each bar is equipped with the material to produce the rather nasty looking drinks the customers demand. The drinks range from "mixed bloods" to "brain renderings." The drinks are actually alcohol and various synthetics, but they look real enough. They cost from $1-4. If your taste as a referee runs to this sort of stuff, be sure to play up how sick-looking the drinks are.

Stage: The stage area is where bands perform. They are mainly notable for their loudness and bizarre appearances. They tend to have names like Walking Dead, Pus Maggots, and so forth.

Bathrooms: These bathrooms are fairly straightforward in appearance and function. They are surprisingly clean, but there are

Vicki Gold's Apartment

Balcony
Solo 1
Solo 2
Stairs
Kitchen
Solo 3
Bath
Tables
Dining Area
Vicki Gold

The Lair of the White Worm

Alley
Fire Exits
The Vlads
Fire Exit
Bathrooms
Building
Bar
Stage
The Cage
Bar
Entrance

Royal Oaks Condominiums

Office Building
Office Building
Apartments
Parking Lot (Private)
Gate
Walk
Walk
Jani's Condo
Pool
Bath House

Jani Dark's Condo

Closet
Closet
Dining Area/Living Room
Ladies' Room
Kitchen
Storage
Men's Room
Guest Rooms
Jani's Bedroom
Baths
Jani's Room
Study/Library
Den

rubber animals in the urinals.

Fire Exits: These doors open only from the inside. Opening one sets off an alarm, which will attract the bouncers.

A Hot Time at the White Worm

The Vlads are clustered in a section of the Lair of the White Worm where the tables are made of coffins. They are drinking what appears to be blood. They will leave (if not disturbed by the PCs) at 11 p.m. to meet their Master. Any approach by police who identify themselves as such will cause the Vlads to try to flee. If their escape is cut off, they will fight.

More subtle approaches will have somewhat different results. The Vlads are always willing to put on a show for the media and will talk about how they like to drink blood and so forth.

If one or two Vlads are captured and "persuaded" somehow, they may reveal that the gang killed some guards and secured the area while their Master went for a "drink" the other night. They will also reveal that they are supposed to meet the Master at the back of the Royal Oaks Condominiums at midnight tonight. They can only describe the Master as, "Way out. Totally vampire, you know, man."

If the Vlads are attacked and escape, they will keep their appointment, but will go to the meeting as stealthily as possible.

VISITOR IN THE NIGHT

Once the player characters are aware of the Master's plan to kill Jani, they will undoubtedly wish to prevent her death. Sense Net will be very willing to cooperate with Police or independent Solos to prevent Jani from being killed. Jani will also agree to use herself as bait for the killer. If the PCs are Medias or not the type of people Sense Net would allow near Jani, then they will have to find their own way into the action.

The Royal Oaks is very luxurious, with a walled-in area of green grass and trees. Various support buildings and condominium units are housed within this security area. It is well protected against intrusion.

Exterior: The complex is surrounded by a five-meter concrete wall. Access is gained via an electronically locked metal gate. Security cameras are spaced at intervals around the wall, providing complete coverage of the area. The condo is a wood and brick structure built in an octagonal shape. Beside it is a very large built-in pool and a bathhouse.

Interior: Jani's condo is fairly modest, for a star. The elegantly decorated dining area/living room is where she entertains guests and holds the required parties. It features numerous "conversation groups" of furniture. The kitchen contains the latest in food preparation equipment. The guest rooms are luxurious. The large rooms are for VIPs;

smaller rooms are for less important guests. The den is well appointed and features an antique wooden roll-top desk and a leather-upholstered sofa and armchairs. Jani's room is elegant, but reserved. Her library is well stocked with books and is equipped with a computer terminal. Most of the literature is 17th- and 18th-century philosophy (Descartes, Leibniz, Malebranche, Locke, Hume, etc.).

Jani's servants live in the apartment buildings next door to the Royal Oaks.

Attack

If the player characters are involved with the defensive planning, let them come up with the ideas. If not, plan out a reasonable defense. Everything will be okay until 10 p.m. At that time, David Sander, one of the Solos present, will say he feels ill and begin to act edgy. If the PCs act concerned, one of the Solos will tell them that David gets edgy at night—at least since his last trip to the body shop.

At a little before midnight, the Vlads who survived the meeting at the Lair will gather outside the building. David will offer to go out and talk with them. If he is allowed to do so, he will give them a key to the gate and the house, as well as the sequence to disable the security system. If a player character goes out with David, he will do his best to get the key to the Vlads, even if he has to kill or disable the PC.

At midnight, after returning to the condo,

David will start killing the Solos. If the Vlads have the key, they will swarm in and attack. The attacking Vlads will be supplemented by seven to 10 other Vlads who have Pistol skill (+2) and are armed with Llama Commanches (.44 revolvers) and wearing armored T-shirts (SP=10). The Vlads will try to kill everyone (except David, of course) and drive stakes through their hearts.

VAMPIRE

Unknown to Sense Net, one of its security Solos is the vampire murderer. What occurred is this: David Sander was close to the edge sanity-wise, and when he was injured during the last filming of *Dead Time*, he had to get more cybernetic parts. This drove him totally into cyberpsychosis.

His association with *Dead Time* focused his insanity into making him think he is a vampire—but only at night. During the day he acts fairly sane, and he is not aware of his nightly activities, except for bad dreams and a foul taste in his mouth when he wakes up. Of course, he can't drink all of his victims' blood. He first subdues them, then uses a portable suction pump to drain them out.

His intended victims all worked for Sense Net in some capacity, and he was able to trick them into letting him into their apartments under the pretext of being on Sense Net business.

In vampire mode, he eventually came in contact with the Vlads, and they have adopted him as their hero and esteemed leader.

END

If David kills Jani and escapes, he will continue to stalk victims, dropping further and further into the depths of insanity. The referee will have to improvise somewhat. Police will be slightly reprimanded, but left on the case. Less-than-scrupulous Medias may come off such an occurrence fairly well, as they may have actually gotten some really ripe footage of an actual celebrity murder! In either case, the referee will have to handle the PCs' continuing plans to catch David (or further milk the story).

If David does not kill Jani, but escapes, he will be back to try again.

If the PCs aid in defeating the vampire, they will be amply rewarded by either their department or media company and by Sense Net. If Medias get film of the vampire in action and turn in a good story, they can enjoy a brief moment of fame (while cyber-related insanity is getting more common, really unique insanities are still newsworthy).

NPCS

The characters may encounter the following NPCs in this adventure.

Bouncers

The bouncers at the White Worm keep order and ensure that the bar remains undamaged. They will try to keep violence to a minimum, but tend to have short tempers. There are six bouncers in all. One will be in the cage in the entrance making sure people pay, and the rest mingle with the crowd.

Int	4	Tech	3
Ref	7	Cl	5
Luck	4	Att	3
Emp	5	Bod	8

Skills: Athletics (+4), Melee (+4), Pistol (+2).
Hardware: Cyberaudio, radio splice (to communicate with each other).
Equipment: Nightstick, .45 Colt automatic, kevlar jacket (SP=18).

Bartenders and Customers

These NPCs will try to run to avoid trouble. If the referee wishes, he can put in some more exceptional types to liven things up.

Typical Vlads

Every member does his best to look like a vampire. This ranges from dressing up for the part to actual surgery. All of them are a bit crazy and earn their living in illegal ways. There will be eight to 12 Vlads in the Lair of the White Worm at any time.

Int	4	Tech	3
Ref	6	Cl	6
Luck	3	Att	4
Emp	3	Bod	5

Skills: Athletics (+2), Melee (+2), Martial Arts (+1).
Hardware: Vampires, some have cyberoptics with infrared.

David Sander

David is the "vampire" but does not realize it. During the day he will think and act normally, but as it gets darker he will start to slip into insanity. At 10 p.m. he will go completely over the edge.

When David is in vampire mode, he will tend to rely on his martial arts skills, but can still use his guns. He knows that the Sense Net Solos will trust him, and he will use that to his advantage.

However, he is insane, and he will not behave rationally. Further, in vampire mode he will have as a primary goal drinking Jani's blood. To maintain the mood of the scenario, when David switches over to vampire mode, be sure to describe him and his actions as if he really were a vampire and not just a cyberpsycho.

Int	7	Tech	5
Ref	9/11	Cl	8
Luck	6	Att	7
Emp	0	Bod	9

Skills: Athletics (+6), Pistol (+6), Rifle (+4), Basic Tech (+2), Martial Arts (+8), Rotorwing Pilot (+2), Gen. Knowl. (+4), Wardrobe/Style (+4), Awareness (+6).
Hardware: Vampires, cyberoptics (2) with infrared and targeting scope, interface plugs, cyberaudio with radio splice, Rippers,

biomonitor, two cyberarms, cutoff chip (see **Challenge 43** "New Cyber Equipment," page 54).
Equipment: Kevlar jacket (SP=18), smartchipped Styer GB80 and two clips, smartchipped CAWS and two clips.

Jani Dark

Jani is a college graduate (M.A. in philosophy) and a very skilled actress. She also writes some of the scripts for *Dead Time*.

While her character on *Dead Time* is a ruthless vampiress, Jani is a rather nice person. She is brave, and while she has no desire to die, she will do what she can to help capture or kill the murderer.

Int	8	Tech	5
Ref	7	Cl	7
Luck	7	Att	10
Emp	8	Bod	5

Skills: Athletics (+4), Persuasion (+3), Seduction, Wardrobe/Style (+6), Gen. Knowl. (+4), 17th- and 18th-Century Philosophy (+3), Martial Arts (+3), Pistol (+2), Acting (+6).
Hardware: Two interface plugs, cyberoptics, equipped for braindance recorder (see *Rockerboy*).

Sense Net Security Team

Normally, a couple of the members of Sense Net guard Jani and her home from weirdos, excessively inquisitive Medias, and overzealous fans.

With the murders and the possible threat to Jani's life, Sense Net has beefed up security measures somewhat. A full six-man Sense Net security team now guards her condo, including Sense Net's crack team leader, David Sander. These five normal, professional, but amiable, Solos work for Sense Net security for their living. They are loyal to their company. They have no idea that their leader has succumbed to cyberpsychosis.

Int	6	Tech	4
Ref	8/9	Cl	8
Luck	6	Att	7
Emp	5	Bod	7

Skills: Athletics (+4), Martial Arts (+4), Pistol (+4), Basic Tech (+2), Melee (+4).
Hardware: Reflex boost, cyberoptics with target scope and light enhancement, two interface plugs.
Equipment: Kevlar Jacket (SP=18), combat knife, HKP9S and two clips, smartchipped H&K MP5 and two clips, two-way radio headset. Ω
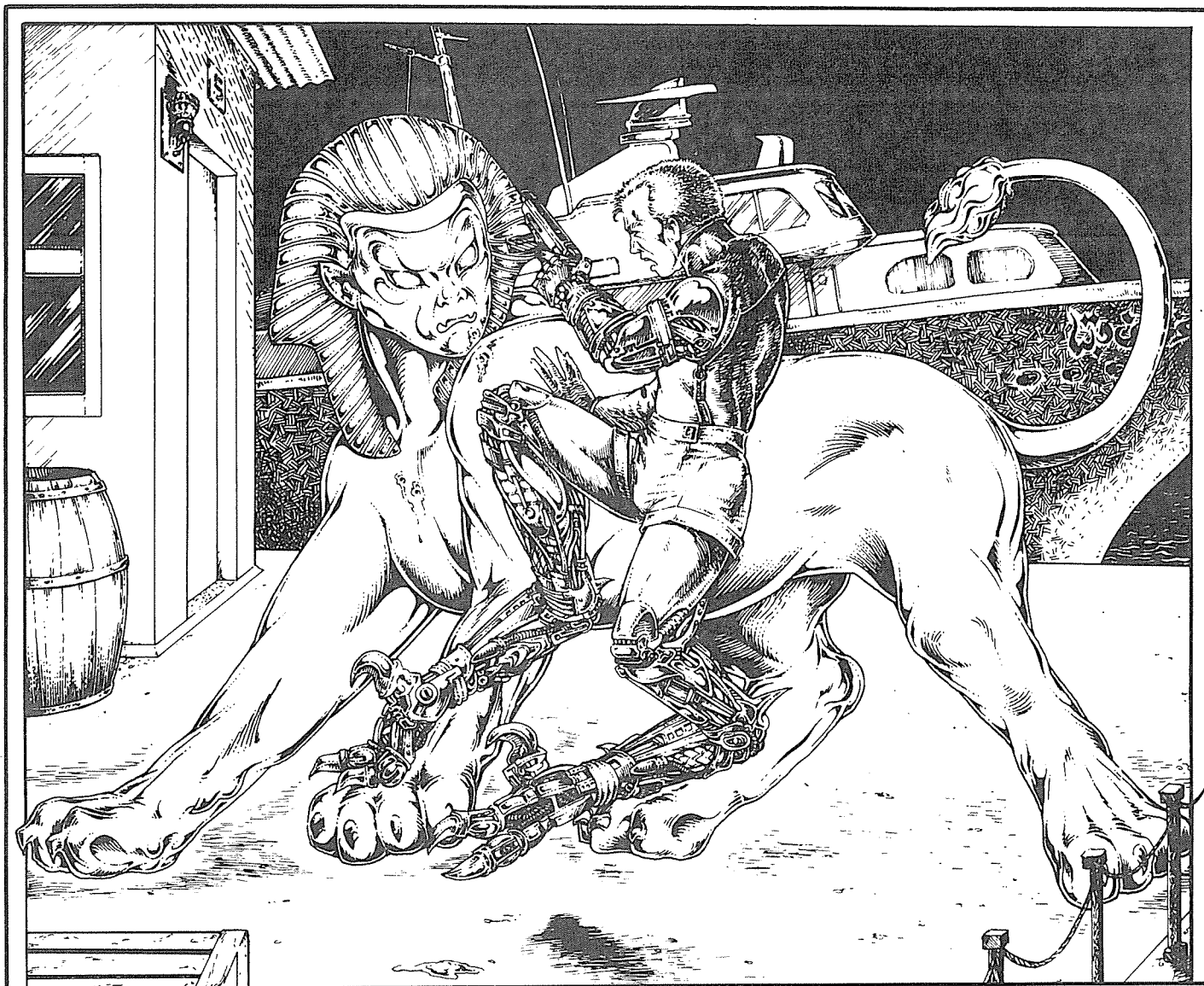
Quicksilver Sayonara

Michael A. Stackpole
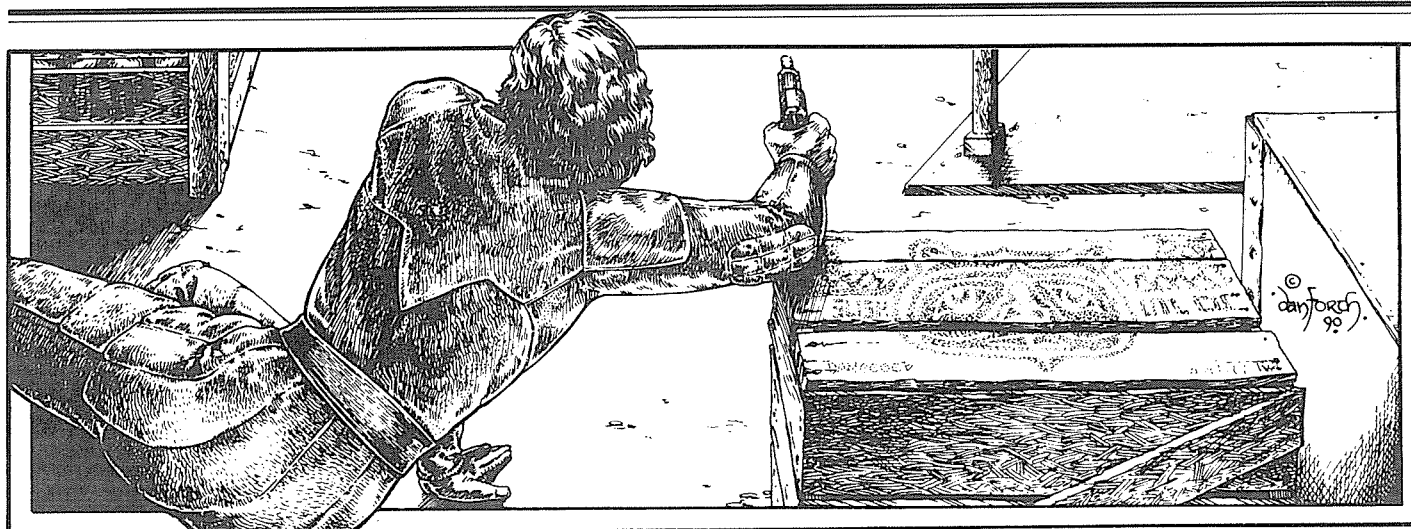
I normally define a "rude awakening" as any awakening that takes place before noon, but Kid Stealth gave that phrase a new depth of meaning. Stealth would maintain it was my fault because I was the one dreaming about cuckolding a chrome-fisted underworld kingpin when the Kid clapped his own steel hand over my mouth. The kiss of cold steel against my lips is not something I enjoy at the best of times, and two hours before dawn is seldom the best of times.

My eyes focused on Stealth and his identity registered in my brain a half-second before my finger tightened on the trigger of the Beretta Viper I'd snaked from beneath my pillow and pressed to his side. Stealth gave me a satisfactory grunt and dangled the gun's clip from his flesh and blood right hand. He pulled his metal hand away from my mouth and flipped the clip back to me. "Good instincts."

I pulled myself up into a sitting position, letting the sheets slip down my hairy chest to my waist. I pulled the slide back on the pistol, and one bullet popped out into the bed. "I keep one in the chamber."

Stealth nodded in the half-light, the laser tracker built into his right eye making a small cross on his pupil. "I know. Nine millimeter, silver bullet with inertial silver nitrate explosive tip."

The matter-of-fact tone with which he delivered his assessment of the bullet that had been aimed at his stomach somehow robbed it of all its deadliness. I'd survived six years with Doctor Richard Raven, and I'd seen aides come and go, but Stealth had to be the strangest of them all. The bullet in my gun, he had decided, could not punch through the kevlar clothes he wore, nor get through the subdermal armor that protected his body.

That, or he didn't care if it could.

"What the hell's going on? Is Raven back from the Elven Holdings?"

Stealth shook his head. "Still there. No word on his return."

I fed the loose bullet back into the clip, then reloaded the pistol. "That answered the second question, what about the first?"

"La Plante."

That one name, spoken in a sepulchral whisper like the rustle of a sidewinder slithering across dry gravel, answered lots of questions. Etienne La Plante was the kingpin who played a cameo role in the dream I'd been enjoying. I'd recently helped liberate an Elven princess from him. Unbeknownst to me until the middle of that little adventure, it turned out that Moira Alianha was betrothed to Dr. Raven. Raven had taken her back to the Elven Holdings south of Seattle two weeks ago, and then had been summoned back again after the Night of Fire and the battle for Natural Vat. That meant he left Kid Stealth, Tom Electric, Tark Graogrim, Valerie Valkyrie and me to watch over the store while he was away.

La Plante held a special place in Kid Stealth's heart. Stealth had first come to Seattle as La Plante's enforcer. Inevitably La Plante assigned Stealth the job of killing Raven. Stealth was good enough to get two of Doc's aides—my head missed being mounted on his trophy wall by a stroke of luck or two—before La Plante decided to put a pinch hitter in for Stealth. That individual, known on the streets as the Chauffeur, fitted Stealth's feet with a large pair of cement blocks, then dumped him in the Sound.

Setting the pistol on my nightstand, I threw the covers back, then turned on a light. "What did our friend do this time?" Naked—'cept for the silver wolf's-head amulet worn at my throat—I padded over to the closet as Stealth puzzled over how to answer that question in his customarily taciturn manner. I looked at the clothes hanging there and almost chose a normal T-shirt and pair of jeans to wear.

You're going somewhere with Kid Stealth.

I opted for black pants woven of kevlar and a heavy kevlar sweater with trauma pads over my chest and back.

"I don't know. An Ear says a VIP is Sprawling, and La Plante is calling in some heavy favors to make him happy." Even as he spoke, Stealth moved his head back and forth, letting his cybernetically augmented senses scan for the sounds of anything out of the ordinary. I silently hoped the Blavatskys down in 2D didn't decide to play "I've Been Bad, Teacher" while Stealth monitored the area.

"Your street source didn't know who the VIP was or why he was here?"

Stealth answered me with an exasperated expression that said, "If I knew that, I would have told you."

I refrained from answering with my you-never-know-unless-you-ask shrug and zipped up my pants. "La Plante was holding Moira for some Mr. Johnson from outside SeaTac. I bet there's a connection—I bet this VIP was the one who wanted her."

Kid Stealth's eyes narrowed for a half-second, and I knew he'd filed away both my conclusion and the fact that I'd made the connection. As tough as he was, and as much of a perfectionist as I'd seen him be, Stealth seldom advanced theories on his own. He'd study a situation and offer his observations, but he left the guesswork up to others. He'd made his living dealing in dead certainties before joining Raven, and since becoming one of his aides, he'd found plenty of people to jump to conclusions for him.

Most of Stealth's body part replacements and modifications were made by choice, to eliminate as much uncertainty as he could. His mechanical left arm—the original, I gathered, he'd lost in an old accident—had been improved so it could lock in position to hold a sniper rifle steady for hours on end if need be. It could also punch through concrete blocks, but that was a bonus that came from its design specifications. Stealth's eyes had been modified to include a laser sighting system, night vision, and infrared vision to aid in shooting targets. He'd probably have replaced his right hand but he needed it for the "touch"—whether squeezing a trigger or throwing one of the many stilettos hidden on his body.

He'd even gone so far as to have the upper left lobe of his lungs replaced with a slow-release oxygen system that eliminated his need to breathe when lining up those one-klick assassination shots. That special option saved him when the Chauffeur dumped him in the ocean—La Plante hadn't paid for it, so he didn't know about it. It gave Kid Stealth 10 minutes to figure out how to get his legs out of a rock or become fish food.

On my list of things to do with a spare 10 minutes, having to figure a way out of a deathtrap did not rank real high.

I pulled on a heavy nylon jacket with kevlar and shock pads sewn into breast and back. "Where?"

When that hint of a smile writhed onto his lips, I felt an immediate urge to dive back into bed. "The Rock."

I let my jaw drop open. "The Rock? Did they do a good sensectomy when you went in for your last lube and tune?" The Rock was the nickname given to what had formerly been a seaside resort hotel that La Plante had "acquired" when his organization cannibalized another criminal cartel. It had previously been used as a notoriously hedonistic retreat for criminal megabyters and corporate warlords deciding to "do the Sprawl." After word of Stealth's survival leaked out, The Chauffeur, at La Plante's request, had fortified the place and made it into an open challenge to the local government, Stealth, or Dr. Raven to close down.

Stealth looked at me as if I were the one operating in an alternate reality.

I raised an eyebrow. "We do have Tom Electric going with us, right?"

He shook his head. "He's *visiting.*"

I hesitated. Tom occasionally dropped out of sight, and that generally meant his ex-wife had come into Seattle. The six months between her visits were enough to let Tom forget why they had gotten divorced, and the week he spent with her always made him more than happy they had split up.

"What about Valerie or Tark?"

Another shake. "Valerie's a decker. She doesn't like guns. Plutarch is still nursing the chest shot he took in the Night of Fire. The Orks are reluctant to put him in the line of fire for something that
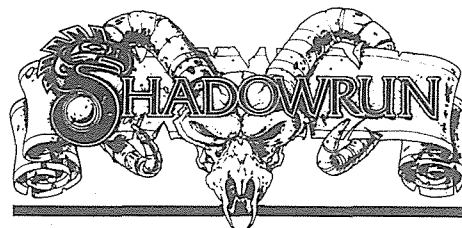
doesn't directly benefit them, so he's out." Stealth forced himself to smile especially broadly. "I did leave a message for Raven in case he gets back, and I decided not to call La Plante to tell him we were coming."

I exaggerated a sigh. "Thank God for small miracles."

His grin became purely evil. "It gives us the element of surprise."

That and an army division might get us in. Divine intervention and an army division might get us back out again.

Stealth tossed me the key ring from the top of my dresser. "You're driving."

"Guess again, Stealth." I shook my head and batted the flying keys onto my bed with my hand. "My Fenris is brand new, and I still remember what you did to the upholstery in the Mustang IV."

Stealth squatted down in that peculiar way only he can, but didn't look the least bit contrite. "I'll be careful." Balancing on his left foot, he extended his right leg and plucked the keys off the bed with his claws. "Besides, you have that new radarbane paint job and a sunroof."

I took the keys from his foot's titanium talons and suppressed a whole-body shudder. In that 10 minutes at the bottom of the ocean, Stealth could only see one thing to do—aside from dying that is. He used his belt and shirt to tie tourniquets around both of his legs above the knees. He pulled some plastique from a compartment in his left arm and created some very small shaped charges which he fastened to his own legs. He set them off and managed to make it to shore.

Raven found him and kept him alive. Both of Stealth's legs were gone from the knees down. He'd taken lots of other damage—his left arm showed scarring from a shark hit—but he refused to die or surrender to the depression that would have swallowed anyone else. Though he never said much during that time—or since—I knew it was his hatred for La Plante that kept him alive, and his awe of Dr. Raven that kept the rest of us alive.

Stealth worked with Raven to design himself a new pair of legs. The original humanoid design was abandoned when Stealth located a better one while scanning CD-ROMs on animal biology. Wearing an expression I've only seen on the faces of lottery winners or the criminally insane, he pointed it out to me. "Deinonychus," he said, reverently chanting that word like a mantra. "Terrible claw."

It took some convincing, but he prevailed on Raven to help him. *Human thighs grafted down into titanium shins and feet.* Birdlike in construction, his new legs featured the elongated foot bones that made it look as if his leg had an extra joint. Each foot had a dewclaw and three toes — the innermost of which was truly a thing to behold. Both stronger and larger than the other two, it had a huge sickle-shaped claw that pulled back toward the ankle while Stealth ran. It turned funny-looking legs into razorhook-equipped limbs capable of slicing through foes and, in Stealth's case, let him climb incredibly sheer walls as if he were a fly on a pane of glass.

No, he hadn't ripped up the upholstery in my Mustang. The claws just dripped blood all over it.

I tied some black, rubber-soled shoes on my street-legal feet, cocked the Viper and stowed it in my pants at the small of my back, then followed Stealth out into my living room. He leaned over the back of the couch, then turned and handed me my MP-9 submachinegun and a satchel bulging with clips. I felt the weight of the ammo pouch, then shook my head. "Planning quite the little war, aren't we?"

He shrugged. "We'll have surprise, but I don't know for how long." He pointed at the satchel. "I handloaded your silver bullets, but I used mercury in them instead of silver nitrate. I wanted to try a silver nitrate suspension in a gelatin of my own manufacture that approaches the viscosity of mercury, but I couldn't finish it this quickly. I also boosted the powder up to six full grains so your bullet will have the velocity you need to make a mess of the target. I hope you don't mind."

I felt an odd chill run down my spine. I realized he was speaking about loading bullets for maximum effect in the same voice my mechanic used to describe tuning the Fenris' 12-cylinder engine. I headed for the door as Stealth shouldered his Kalashnikov, carefully avoiding any bump or jarring to the boxy laser sight mounted on the barrel. When activated, the laser would send out an invisible, ultraviolet beam that would paint a dot on the chest or head of a target. With his eye, Stealth just located the dot, then pulled the trigger and put a bullet through it.

I let him precede me from the apartment, and then locked it. As we worked our way down to the basement garage, Stealth paused on the second story landing and stared at the door to 2D. "You've got strange neighbors, Wolf."

I shrugged. "The Blavatskys have hired a tutor."

Stealth's eyes grew wide. "They have tutors for that stuff?"

I waved him forward. "Get your mind out of the gutter. I think it has something to do with the new math."

Stealth remained silent until we reached the basement and stripped the cover off my Fenris' body. The sleek vehicle lacked the sharp angles and lines of a Porsche Mako or a Ford Astarte, but it still looked as though it were moving at Mach 1 while standing still. The flat black finish absorbed the garage's meager light and flashed none of it back. The Fenris might as well have been built out of shadow, so well did the radarbane coating Raven had given it prevent the reflection of electromagnetic radiation.

I unlocked it and climbed into the cockpit as Stealth folded himself up and dropped into the passenger seat. I slid the MP-9 into the door holster on my side. Stealth laid his Kalashnikov gently in the area behind our seats and produced an ugly little Nambu Hachi machinepistol to use if we ran into early resistance.

I reached over to punch in the ignition commands, but Stealth wrapped his metal hand around my right wrist before I could do so. I looked over at him and frowned. "You should have gone when we were upstairs."

That got to even him, and his fierce expression lightened for all of a nanosecond. "We might run into some difficulty before we get there." His eyes shut for a second, then popped open again. "There, I'm geared up for anything now. Don't you think you better do your stuff?"

I hesitated. Kid Stealth, being an amalgam of all the best technology money could buy, prepared himself for combat by opening circuits and running diagnostic programs built into the ROMs mated with his brain. In literally the blink of an eye, he went from being an abnormally vigilant and quick-reacting individual to someone who could move faster and accomplish more in a single heartbeat than even most other augmented people. He was that good—probably the best—and with him going from idle to overdrive was nothing but a change of perceptions.

Me, well, I'm not augmented in a mechanistic way. Growing up in the SeaTac sprawl of gray canyons and trash-strewn alleys, I never had the resources that allowed me even the most basic of modifications. In a day and age when almost any street tough had razor claws that popped from beneath his fingernails on command or an eye that could see in the dark, I was left to what the gods, in their perversity, gave me at birth. In a world where Man the Tool Maker took great delight in making himself into Man the Tool, I was consigned to the slender side of natural selection known as extinction.

I had nothing.

Then I discovered the magic.

Actually, the magic discovered me. From the time of puberty in which the monster inside me festered and grew to the day I met Richard Raven and gained control over it, my life was indescribably interesting. Street toughs learned quickly that he who assaulted me during daylight hours would end up a bloody smear along an alley at night. Those who lived—the majority, in fact—gave me wide berth, which made life a bit easier; but the blank times of which I remembered nothing made it a living hell.

I gave Stealth a hard stare. "I don't like driving jazzed."

Stealth shrugged philosophically. "You might not get the chance later."

Reluctantly I nodded in agreement. I settled myself comfortably in the seat and let my head drift back to the headrest. The fingers of my right hand drifted up and unconsciously caressed the silver amulet at my throat. Drawing in a deep breath—and savoring what I feared would be the last of the new car scent from my Fenris—I cleared my mind and started the journey within.

Six years ago a series of savage murders had most of SeaTac's citizens cowering in fear. They had been tagged the Full Moon Slashings by the Newsnet pundits, and the fact that I could not remember where I'd been during the killings preyed on me. Actually, waking up bathed in blood is what scared me, and that's when I heard the Elven high lord had sent some of his heavy hitters into town to clear up the problem.

Fortunately Raven found me before the Elven paladins did. He taught me that the beast within me was not always the enemy, but that it was a gift from the Wolf Spirit. He talked me through one of the changes I undergo when the spirit becomes overwhelming, and he taught me how to control the spirit. He also prevented the paladins from murdering me while I learned how to master my inner self. Then the two of us, to the paladins' dismay, brought the Slasher down by our lonesome.

Deep inside myself I stepped through the black curtain sheltering the wolf spirit from everything else that I am. As black as the Fenris, the wolf spirit let a low growl rumble from his throat. Bloody highlights flashed across his glossy coat, then evaporated like scarlet fog. "You come to me at the behest of The Murder Machine?"

I smiled, which increased the growl slightly. "Yes, Old One. Kid Stealth sends his love."

The old wolf lifted his head as if sniffing the air. "Had you let me take control of the situation, that machine would never have gotten your friends."

Ice water gurgled through my guts, but I turned my anger and fear back on the Old One. "No, Stealth might not have gotten them, but I might well have done his job for him."

The Old One shrugged. "I am, you are, *we* are a predator. Prey is ours to take, and our skills are to be employed in its taking."

"Then lend me those skills, Old One. Stealth promises plenty of good hunting."

The wolf dropped its lower jaw in a lupine grin. "Strike swiftly, Longtooth. I will make your strike sure and deadly."

I opened my eyes, and instantly my supernaturally enhanced senses reported to me a world to which I had been oblivious only moments earlier. From Stealth I smelled machine coolant, cordite, and anxious anticipation without a hint of fear. As the Fenris' engine roared to life, my head filled with chemical scents, and the desire to be out under the open skies almost overwhelmed me. Slipping the vehicle into gear, I drove it out into a nighttime that, while dark, held few secrets from me.

The arc light glare of the Fenris' headlights burned the hopeless expressions on the faces of the street people into black masks of despair. Some people shrank back from the harsh light as if it were a laser vaporizing them, while others shuffled forward zombie-like and raised grubby hands in mute pleas for some kindness. Their hands fell slowly when the afterimage of the vehicle faded from their sight.

A tiny knot of razorboys from the local grunge gang called the Bloody Screamers scattered as if I'd launched a grenade into their midst. I fought the Old One's attempt to drive the Fenris through the Orks. As soon as we sped past, the Gillettes slithered from the shadows and taunted us with the insane yelps and howls that gang uses as a trademark. Stealth glanced at the steering wheel and then the closed sunroof, but I shook my head. "Not worth the time it would take to mop up the blood."

Speeding through the streets, I interpreted Stealth's occasional grunts or nods and steered accordingly on a course he had chosen. I knew where the Rock was located, but Stealth had picked out a route that would be safe and would give us ample opportunity to see if anyone was following us. Finally he told me to stop the car, and I found myself parking in the shadow of the old Kitchner Fish Cannery—a property that abutted the Rock's fenced-in territory on the north side.

I turned the car's dome light off before either one of us opened the doors. As we alighted, neither of us shut the Fenris up—just as we didn't need the light to announce our arrival, we decided we could do without the sound of the doors slamming shut. Stealth's feet made less noise on the gravel outside the car than mine did, but I slid my MP-9 from the door holster more quietly than he pulled his Kalashnikov from behind the Fenris' seats.

Off to the south I could see the pink glow of the Rock's nightlights. I figured the distance we'd have to cover at something just under a kilometer, and that began to worry me. Stealth can hit targets at twice that range with ease, and I half began to imagine him up in the Kitchner building giving me all the covering fire I could handle while I went in alone. I turned to confront him with this new, startling conclusion, but he held his left hand out to forestall anything I might say.

He slid the fingers of his right hand beneath his black hair and pressed them to the mastoid bone behind his right ear. "Copy that, Outrider 1—our backtrail was clear. Bring it in. Let's do it, my friends."

I instantly knew he was using some of his built-in electronics to stay in contact with confederates who had been watching our approach, but before I could try to draw a conclusion about who they might have been, a door in the Cannery slid open and a weak, yellow light silhouetted a dozen figures of various sizes and shapes. Almost instantly, above the fish smell, I caught the scent of one or two grunges, and hackles rose on the back of my neck. *Who...what?*

Then it hit me, and I turned to Kid Stealth without trying to hide my anger. "You didn't tell me you'd brought the Redwings in on this—"

Stealth's head came up, and he unconsciously let himself rise to his full 10 feet of height. "I need you, Wolf, to bring this off. I also need them. Bury the hatchet. The enemy of my enemy...."

"...is still not anyone I'd want marrying my sister," I finished it for him. Stealth had developed a habit of doing anything he could to annoy La Plante after they parted company. One of those things was to rescue other La Plante loyalists who had somehow run afoul of the chrome-fisted Capone. Bloody-handed butchers and petty criminals alike, Stealth pulled them out of whatever terminal situation they found themselves in and had formed them into a band that called themselves the Redwings—a not-too-distant allusion to Raven's band of people.

I'd not liked them from the start because we'd tangled over their excessive use of violence in certain situations. While Raven left it up to Stealth to keep them in line, and Stealth freely offered them to assist whenever we needed some added talent, I preferred selecting my own gillettes from the over-abundant supply lurking in SeaTac.

I spat the sour taste out of my mouth. "Well, I'll have no trouble with target acquisition."

Stealth smiled in a most grimly amused manner. "I knew you'd think that way, so I also got you some backup. I hired Morrissey and Jackson—they're on the inside and will take this section of the warning grid down for us."

I frowned. "Morrissey and Jackson?"

Stealth settled back down on his spurred haunches. "The two
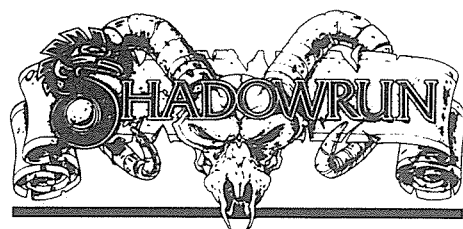
street samurai you used to rescue Moira Alianha. You know, the two who called us in on the Nat Vat thing?"

I laughed aloud, letting some of my tension go. "You mean Zig and Zag." I nodded with satisfaction. "Good. They shoot straight and fast."

"Glad you approve. When your two boys take the fence out, we go in hot." Stealth pointed off toward the seashore. "La Plante tends to concentrate his guards on the wet side because he expects me to bob up out of the water and come at him from that direction. We'll go in at the other end and just start ripping things up."

I tossed Stealth a quick nod, and he signaled the Redwings to move forward. The light from inside the Cannery went out, and the men deployed themselves with quiet efficiency. I followed behind Stealth and hunkered down when he did as we approached the 12-foot-tall cyclone fence topped with thick coils of razor wire.

Two figures silhouetted themselves against the Rock's glow as they sauntered toward our position. Stealth moved his head back and forth a couple of times, then allowed himself a grim smile. "A bit late, but it's them." He moved forward, and I joined him at the fence.

Zig, a solidly built razorboy sporting a long coat and a Kalashnikov, gave me a nod of recognition. "Sorry we took so long, lads. The VIP's yacht arrived late at the docks—only came in about an hour ago. Assignments got scrambled. It looks like something is going down very shortly—the yacht's owner and La Plante wandered off for a heated chat."

Zag—bigger than his Caucasian partner and wearing an orange and black gang jacket with the Halloweener insignia torn off—fished a remote control device from his pocket. He pointed it at the section of fence and hit a button. "There, it's down. I hope this thing is reporting back normally the way you said it would. If not, we'll have more trouble than we need in about two minutes."

Stealth answered eloquently by reaching out with his right foot and clawing away some of the fence. In a half-dozen passes—unaccompanied by warning sirens or the shouts of guards—he opened a hole large enough for us to drive the Cannery through. I crossed over first and took up a forward position with Zig and Zag as the Redwings came through. "Zig, tell me more about this yacht."

The streetfighter shrugged. "Don't know that much about ships. I make it a 60 footer at least and capable of transoceanic travel. The crew are wee, little, brown guys who find things like razor claws and the like to be amusing. I suspect they're like you—they rely on magic instead of chrome. All of them carry nasty looking daggers, but they're not strangers to guns."

I turned to his partner and gave the black man a gentle elbow in the ribs. "Yacht have a name?"

Zag shrugged. The red light in his right eye flickered as he tried to remember if he'd seen any name on the ship's hull. "Nothing I saw, but it did have some funny stuff where I would have expected the name to be. And in the cabin I saw there were no pictures, only geometric designs."

I frowned. Funny writing and geometric designs meant only one thing to me: Moslems. Growing up I'd known a family that ran a restaurant down on the strip. They claimed their people had come to Seattle before the Awakening from a place called Syria. I knew that was some place on the other side of the planet, and I knew Islam was widespread enough to make the ship's point of origin any place from Spain to Indonesia. Even with that wealth of information, however, I couldn't puzzle out what someone from so far away would want with Etienne La Plante.

Stealth crouched down behind me. "Heard the questions and answers. What do you think?"

I swallowed hard. "I think someone has gone to incredible expense to get something from La Plante. If we assume that something was Moira Alianha, we can explain the visitor's anger. La Plante probably would have apprised his client of the problem only shortly before the visit, so the fact that they are talking means La Plante must have offered something as a substitute."

"Acceptable." Stealth gritted his teeth. "Conclusion?"

I shook my head. "Finding out who the client is would probably be good. If La Plante has offered a substitute for Moira, it might be another individual, in which case I can see a rescue as being in order."

Stealth nodded and called one of the Redwings over. "Grimes, you and the boys will go in as planned. Start at the east end of the complex and work west, but stay away from the docks. Go for lots of pyrotechnics, and don't start blasting civilians."

Grimes looked a bit crestfallen at the last parameter of his mission, but he accepted it. Stealth turned back to Zig, Zag, and me as Grimes slunk away. "We'll go into the docks and recon the area. We'll see what we can see, and then, if needed, take some action when the party begins at our backs."

The Redwings took off and headed back away from the ocean. Stealth stalked forward and took point for our detachment. We crested the rise leading toward the Rock, giving me my first view of the resort. Even in the dark, the long building with five stepped levels did look interesting. I found it very easy to impose bright banners on the balconies and put bathers around the pool on my mental composite of the place. At the same time I deleted the barbed wire strung around the perimeter and the razor wire awnings above the balconies.

Off to my right, toward the ocean, I saw the massive clubhouse and marina area. From in between a couple of boathouses I caught a glimpse of the yacht riding the ocean's gentle swells. The ship's design and flying forecastle made me think of a shark cruising through shallow water—the yacht just had an air of menace about it.

The Old One's voice echoed up from deep inside. "There lairs a foe who could challenge even your Raven."

Great! Homicidal maniacs to the east of me and sociopathic grunges straight ahead, and now there's another player who could challenge Dr. Raven. I looked over at Stealth. "Anytime you want to tell me this is all a dream and wake me up, go ahead."

Stealth raised an eyebrow. "What?"

I shivered. "Nothing, just let's be careful. Something is not right about that ship or the person it brought with it."

Zig and Zag both did a quick double-check of their combat systems, but Stealth just took my warning in stride. "Let's find out if you're right." He set off down the slope at a quick pace, and his bobbing gait almost succeeded in making him look funny. I say "almost" because just as I thought of the phrase "bunny hop" to describe how he moved, stray light glinted from the sickle claws—ruining an accurate analogy.

I dashed after him, and the two razorboys followed quickly. Though we could not keep up with his pace, Stealth waited at important junctions until we caught up, then headed off to secure the next point along our path. Twice, when we arrived, we found dead guards with thin stilettos buried in their throats. Neither of them had managed to get off a shot, but with their silenced weapons it would have hardly mattered.

Stealth finally stopped behind the nearest of the two boathouses. The windows of the building were completely blocked with packing crates—telling me that La Plante used the boathouses for storage. Between the first building and the second I saw a scattering of other crates, or parts thereof, and got a clear view of the ship Zig had described earlier.

Stealth pulled me down and cupped his hands over my ear. "I mark seven crewmembers on the ship. Cross-correlation of their conversation pegs their language as Malay with a heavy Arabic influence. And you're right—there's something strange about that ship. It's all lit up, but I can't hear any engines."

I sniffed at the air. "No gas vapors." I turned to Zig. "Did they refuel?"

"Not so's I noticed, lad."

The intrusion of voices ended our whispered conversation.

Appearing on the sea side of our hiding place, Etienne La Plante strolled along with a man that Zig silently indicated owned the boat. From the top of his white-haired head to the tips of his black shoes—and for the length of the perfectly-tailored, black, double-breasted suit he wore—La Plante looked every inch an aristocrat from the days before the Awakening. Only the silver of his artificial right hand seemed out of place, but it didn't break the image—it just dented it a bit.

His stocky guest stood a bit below average height, but the Old One growled a warning that prevented me from dismissing the man outright. As I studied his olive-skinned, hawk-nosed profile I caught his brown-eyed gaze darting warily around. The man missed nothing and stroked his black moustache and goatee thoughtfully while La Plante babbled on endlessly. I saw no obvious signs of chroming, which meant the man had to be taken very seriously.

I always take magickers very seriously.

Following La Plante and his visitor at a discreet distance, the Chauffeur affected the air of a jilted lover or a young sibling aching for the adult privileges his older kin has been accorded in the family. I could read his concentration as he struggled to overhear any and all remarks that passed between his boss and the smaller man. The ship's lights glinted from the slender man's sunglasses as he turned and once again commanded the cadre of grunges and razorboys behind him to keep silent.

The subhuman grunges—low-life Orks out for a quick yen and some excitement—simpered and groveled when scolded, but the razorboys met the Chauffeur's looking-glass stare with glares of their own. The two gillettes in the middle were supporting a young woman who marched along as if drunk. Her head lolled to the side, and I saw a flash of red hair as she pulled free of one man and tried to escape the other. Her remaining captor just tightened his grip, and a grunge tackled her. She cried out in despair, but grunge laughter quickly swallowed the sound in huge hyena-gulps.

Suddenly the sound of an explosion behind us heralded the start of the Redwing assault. La Plante dropped to one knee and covered his face with his metal hand. The guest darted toward the gangplank of his ship while the crewmembers scrambled their way down belowdecks. The Chauffeur barked orders at his minions, and they instantly deployed themselves in defensive positions.

Abandoned by her captors, the girl got up and began to stumble away toward the second boathouse. The Chauffeur pointed at her, dispatched a razorboy after her and signaled him by drawing a finger across his own neck. Four-inch talons sprouted from the street samurai's fingertips as he got up to go after his prey.

If I'd stopped to calculate my odds of success, I'd have failed. "She's mine," I shouted as I vaulted the crate in front of me and set off. With my reflexes jazzed the world around me moved at an unbelievably torpid pace. As my feet hit the ground, I snapped a shot off that hit the gillette in the left shoulder, slowly spinning him to face us. Stealth's shot followed immediately and jackknifed the street samurai like a tanker truck on ice.

I was three steps into the open ground between the two boathouses, and only the closest of the grunges had seen me. As he turned and started to bring his Ingram up, everything above the bridge of his nose vanished, and his body toppled back as if its bones had become water. As if I needed confirmation of what had happened, the report of Stealth's Kalashnikov echoed back from the ship.

Zig and Zag added their firepower to Stealth's effort by the time I'd closed half the distance to the girl. La Plante had already spun and dived toward the edge of the jetty. Bullets savaged the wooden decking all around him, but the silver-handed man lived a charmed life and avoided Stealth's retribution. A slug from someone's rifle blasted the Chauffeur to the ground, but he kept moving and scurried to cover. I couldn't smell blood because of the cordite filling the air, but I figured him to be smart enough to be swathed in kevlar the same as me.

A gillette stood up right in front of me. I could see from the way he moved and reacted to me that he'd not seen me at all and had been angling a shot at one of my compatriots. I shoved the MP-9's snout into his stomach. Because of the speed I was running, he folded around it like a knight skewered on a lance, so I kept my finger off the trigger and sprinted the last three steps to the woman.

Stealth screamed something at me but I lost everything except his urgent tone amid the gun battle's thunder. I saw flickering movement and light over by the ship, but I was so intent on the woman that it didn't register fully. Even the acrid, oily scent didn't trigger any emergency alarms in me.

Travelling roughly Mach 2.086, the bullet smashed into me between the shoulder blades, just to the right of my spine. Even though the kevlar of the coat snared the bullet before it could penetrate my hide and the trauma padding absorbed some of the projectile's energy, it still hit with quite a punch. It lifted me from my feet like a leaf in a cyclone and tossed me forward. My left arm scooped the woman to my chest as my MP-9 went flying. A heartbeat later I twisted in the air so my back hit the boathouse and shielded her from the collision.

Suddenly a dragon's tongue of fire flickered out through the space we had occupied before the bullet gave my feet wings. Without thinking I drew the Beretta and pumped two rounds into the grunge wearing the flamethrower. The first bullet drilled an ugly hole in his right thigh, dropping him toward the ground. The second bullet took him high in the chest, and his dead body rolled to the foot of the gangplank.

Before the body expended all its momentum, La Plante's visitor appeared at the head of the gangplank and gestured toward the wharf area. In a flash of blinding gold-white fire, a monstrous figure appeared—a creature utterly out of proportion with all of us. With golden skin and eyes to match, the heavily muscled cat-thing laughed aloud in a hideous voice as a grunge whirled and emptied his Ingram into it. The bullets ricocheted off in a puff of gold dust, leaving faint freckles on the creature's chest.

In return for the decoration, the lion, wearing a woman's head, playfully swatted the grunge with its right paw. When the body hit the ground and stopped rolling, its chest sagged like a broken zeppelin. The torpedoes in La Plante's employ immediately threw their weapons down and lit out for the marina clubhouse and parts beyond. I would have joined them except the conjured beastie stood between me and that possibility.

Kid Stealth, firmly gripped in his own form of battle madness, leaped over the crates he'd been using for cover and attacked the lioness. His leap carried him 15 feet into the air and 20 forward, with sickle claws glittering like stars in the night sky. The Hachi in his left hand sprayed gunfire over the left side of the human profile, then his claws hit. The metal on metal scream ripped its way through the night, then died as a feline roar of pain accompanied the gold curlicues Stealth tore out of the monster's left shoulder.

The creature dropped away from Stealth and rolled quickly to its back. Stealth retracted his claws and jumped free to avoid being caught and crushed beneath it. In doing so, however, he hung motionless in the air just long enough for the cat's right paw to bat him out toward the bay. He arced over the yacht's prow, and I heard a splash, but could not see anything to determine if he lived or died.

The creature pulled itself into a sitting position. Its tail swished back and forth, knocking the dead grunge with the flamethrower into the water. Despite wearing a woman's face, it licked at the wounds in its shoulder like a cat and briefly stemmed the flow of molten golden rivulets running down its left foreleg. When I moved
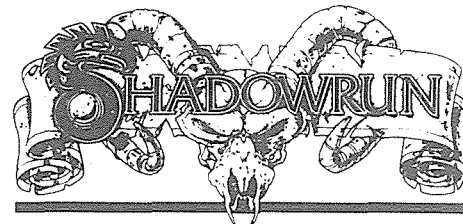
forward to put myself between it and the woman I'd rescued, its head came up, and it hissed at me in a nasty fashion that had the Old One urging me to give myself over to his control.

The sorcerer who had conjured up the creature looked down at me from the ship. "My sphinx seems to have cleared the battlefield of friend and foe alike, excepting yourself, of course." He squinted at me, then a most evil smile possessed his lips. "Is it possible you are the Wolfgang Kies mentioned as the person who took the Elf, Moira Alianha, from La Plante?"

I nodded and stood slowly without dropping my pistol. I waved both Zig and Zag back with my left hand—I knew with the sphinx between them and the sorcerer they couldn't get a shot off at him. I also knew that if the sphinx was powerful enough to kill Stealth, it would make catnip out of those two, so I didn't want them shooting it. I smiled as graciously as the Old One's nattering would allow. "You have me at a disadvantage."

The little man brought himself to attention and bowed his head. "I am Hasan al-Thani. I have been sent to obtain the woman La Plante had for us. While we had preferred the Elf, we will accept the flame-haired woman with emerald eyes."

Something about Hasan irritated me, much like the wet, sucking sound of a nasty chest wound. In midsentence his lips and words began to move out of synch, and I got the feeling that I was hearing the words more in my mind than I was with my ears. I shook my head to clear it, but between his monologue and the Old One's continued war chants, I found it impossible.

I stabbed my left hand into the air and shouted at both of them. "Hold it! Are you telling me that you want me to just hand this woman over to you so you can cart her off somewhere?"

Hasan smiled woodenly. "We do not see that you have any choice." He gestured toward the sphinx. "If you do not, we will kill you and take her anyway."

I brought the Viper around and pointed it at the unconscious girl. "So if I blow her away, you'll just leave?"

Hasan's eyes grew wide with shock, then narrowed to a more thoughtful size. "We do not believe you would do that. We call your bluff."

I dropped to one knee and triggered the remaining dozen bullets in the Viper. Spent shells rained over the wharf like cylindrical hailstones. Hasan ducked back by the sixth shot, but did not realize until later that he'd not been the target of my assault.

Stealth's shots, and those fired by the grunge, had only blown fragments of metal from the sphinx because they attacked this creature on only one level of its existence. They hit the shell it wore when summoned to the material plane. While they could damage it or even cripple it, they couldn't kill the creature itself. Even the rents Stealth had carved into it with his claws had started to heal over.

My silver bullets, I was pretty sure, could affect the monster on the metaphysical plane. Silver has magical properties that make it perfect for killing all sorts of summoned demons and things like werewolves. It's been considered sacred and necessary for countless rituals down through the ages. As the Viper's slide snapped back for the final time, I just knew I just had to be right.

I wasn't.

Sure, I'd done some damage. The sphinx had recoiled from my barrage and the silver bullets had indeed hurt it. I'd centered the shots on the face and the dozen silver projectiles had savaged the creature's nose by blowing its tip off. The sphinx's reaction was sluggish, and it appeared to lose its balance at one point, but it recovered before it could pitch over backward into the bay.

Hasan reappeared on the ship's bridge and glared at me. "You leave us no choice. Kill him."

As the sphinx got up on all four paws and stalked toward me, I realized where I'd probably gone wrong. Demons and werewolves might have had some natural aversion to silver—an allergy to it, if you like. The sphinx was not a demon or a werewolf—it was a summoned spirit—which meant I needed something else to kill it. Being plumb out of sphinx leukemia virus, and suddenly regretting the loss of the flamethrower to the bay, I tried to remember if I had life insurance and if whoever I'd named as beneficiary really deserved the money.

"No matter," I muttered to myself as I tossed the Viper aside and backed away slowly, "the Mr. Johnsons at Kyoto-Prudential will figure my tackling this to be suicide." To kill this thing would require attacks on both the material and metaphysical planes. I toyed with the idea of letting the Old One have his way with me, but I knew I'd end up like that grunge and Kid Stealth. It had to be something magical and physical, but with a creature this size, it also had to be big.

Really big.

In fact, it had to be as big as the black coyote that materialized out of the shadows above and around me. For a half-second I thought the Old One had managed to manifest itself outside my body, but his howl of outrage at being seen in the form of a coyote quickly disabused me of that notion. The canine beast sheltering me growled in a low voice, then lunged forward at the sphinx, its ebony teeth gleaming with the light of the fire the Redwings had started.

As the two titans nipped and swatted at each other, I dove over to where the woman lay. A second or two later Zig and Zag joined me. Zig grabbed my shoulder. "Raven's here—he got Stealth's message. He said to get her out as fast as possible. He says he can't be sure how long he can hold the Sphinx back!"

I lifted the girl into Zag's arms, then told Zig the ignition sequence for the Fenris. "Get her home or to a hospital. Go, go, the car is back at the Cannery."

Zig hesitated. "Raven said to get you out of here, too. He said there's something very wrong here."

"He's got that right. Go, I'll catch up with you later." I massaged my left leg for a second, and I saw them both shudder as they recalled the last time I'd sent them away.

The street samurai vanished into the shadows, and I turned back to find Raven. Up over on top of one of the crates near the first boathouse I spotted him. Wreathed in the golden nimbus of a defensive spell, he looked magnificent. Incredibly tall, even for an Elf, he looked very much like a human because of his powerful build. His coppery skin and high cheekbones bespoke the Amerindian heritage he was likewise heir to, and the sea breezes pushed his long black hair back from his well muscled shoulders. Fists thrust into the air so he could channel more energy into the coyote he had created, he looked every bit a god.

Opposite him, now standing on the yacht's bridge, a purple glow surrounded Hasan. Sweat beaded up on his forehead and pasted his black hair against his pate. He also held his fists aloft, but I noted a tremble in his limbs that I had not seen in Raven. Hasan, powerful though he might be, was not Raven's equal in skill or magical energy. The battle would not last long.

The sphinx jumped back on its hind feet and slashed with a paw at the shadow coyote. The golden claws sliced through the canine's snout like sunlight streaking through boarded-up windows, but the wounds sealed themselves quickly enough. The coyote responded by lunging in and catching the sphinx by the throat. The attack bowled the feline over, but it managed to twist free, leaving the coyote's black teeth stained with gold.

A new surge of magical energy swept forward from the ship, making my hands and feet tingle as if I'd stepped on a live wire. The sphinx's wounds healed over immediately, and then the creature became half again larger. I shot a glance at Hasan, but instead of seeing a man crippled by the effort, he looked as if he had been rejuvenated in the process. The purple glow now stained the ship's bridge and forecastle, and Hasan stood invincible within its cocoon.

Raven's limbs quaked with the strain of sustaining the coyote. The defensive spell around him shimmered, then died because of

the lack of energy to maintain it. Raven's lips peeled back from his white teeth in an angry snarl as he redoubled his effort. The tremors in his limbs ceased, but the pain on his face told me he would not be able to last for long.

I have to do something. I'd tossed down the Viper, so I looked for any weapon I could find to let me shoot Hasan. Strictly speaking, it was not good form to shoot a sorcerer battling another sorcerer, but I'd rather have Raven angry with me for a breach of honor than have to bury my friend. I spotted and scooped up my MP-9 and cocked it.

Recalling the special loads Stealth had made, I drew a bead on Hasan. *The silver should get the bullets through the spell, eventually, then the mercury loads will do him. Something for magic, and something for flesh.*

It hit me like a virus wasting a database. I shifted aim and squeezed the trigger. As soon as I burned that clip, I jammed another home and let it rip. *Something for magic and something for flesh, especially if it's gold flesh! Poor pussycat.*

The mercury loads in the silver bullets bonded instantly with the gold of the Sphinx's flesh. The silver bullets themselves did their stuff on the ethereal portion of the creature. The result manifested itself in a bizarre display of feline leprosy. Silvery gobbets of demon-cat splashed to the wharf. The beast whirled to snarl at me, and I let a burst go that ate away half its lower jaw.

The coyote hit it hard on the left flank. The sphinx twisted back, but its hind right leg gave along a line I'd scored with several shots, crashing the beast down on the docks. I directed a stream of fire at its spine, burrowing in just at the base of its neck, while the coyote distracted it with lunges and feints. Once my fire severed its spine, the creature lay still for a moment, then evaporated into a mist.

I ran over to Raven as the coyote likewise disintegrated. Raven had slumped to his knees on the crate and held himself up from total collapse on his hands. His chest heaved, and the black curtain of his hair hid his face from me. Sweat glistened on his arms and shoulders, and I saw droplets stain the wooden crate.

I reached over and squeezed his left shoulder in congratulations. "We got him, Doc. We got his demon."

Raven shook his head and looked down at me. "He's not defeated yet." He pointed back at the yacht, purple highlights being etched onto his face by the glow still surrounding Hasan. "He's getting an energy boost from the ship. It's an allied spirit of incredible power, and it's using him as a conduit. Whatever summoned it must have been unbelievable."

The same voice I'd heard Hasan use before now burst into my brain without using the sham of having the man's lips move. "It is true, Richard Raven, what summoned me was beyond your mortal ken. You have interfered with the mission my master has sent me on, and now you must pay! But first, you will see this one of your friends die because I relish the pain it will cause you!"

I felt magical force begin to gather around me, then tighten like a chain wrapped around my chest. It crushed in from all sides, and I wanted to scream, but I could get no air from my lungs. I wanted to beg Raven to destroy the ship, but I realized that was impossible. *How do you kill a 60-foot-long allied spirit?*

The burning agony drove me to my knees. The Old One howled in pain and fought to win my release, but even it was helpless against the power that held and crushed me. Sparks began to float before my eyes, then great shimmering balls of light sizzled across my field of vision.

I knew the end had come.

I felt certain the explosion I heard was my heart bursting, and the sudden cessation of pain only meant I'd died. I could smell death in the air, and I recall having been disappointed that it did not smell differently when it came for me. I waited for the blackness to steal my sight, but it did not. In fact, the light grew brighter, and I laughed that death was not so dark and grim after all.

Then I realized I'd heard myself laugh.

That meant I wasn't dead.

I scrambled to my feet just in time to have a second, larger explosion blast me back into the boathouse wall. Whereas the first explosion had only torn a small hole at the base of the ship's superstructure, the greater blast punched fire out through all the portholes below the main deck and pulsed a flaming corona out over the deck itself. Then the whole superstructure lurched to port and dropped down a deck level. The ship listed to port and started to take on great floods of water.

High on the superstructure the purple glow imploded. A column of fire whirled up into the air, and Hasan combusted instantaneously. I saw his skeleton outlined in black against the golden fire, then it too vanished.

The ship screamed, then sank from sight in a steaming caldron of bubbles.

By the time Doc Raven helped me to my feet and we both picked our way through flaming debris to the edge of the wharf, Stealth had managed to awkwardly haul himself up out of the water. His left arm hung limply from his shoulder and showed where most of the working parts had been crushed when the Sphinx had batted him out of the air. Water poured from the open compartments in which he carried plastic explosives, and his talons gouged their way into the decking to steady him.
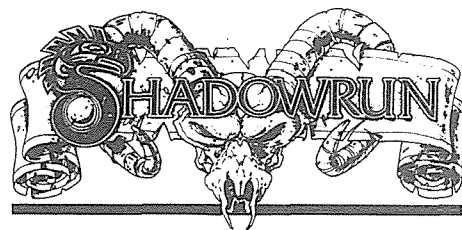
Raven and I exchanged warm smiles, while Stealth turned and nodded grimly at the burning allied spirit. "Underwater I could see no props or jet nozzles—the ship had no natural way to move. I figured that made it very special; therefore, I resolved to destroy it. Then a grunge corpse strapped to a flamethrower drifted down from the surface, so I improvised a bomb. Not much can stand up to napalm and semitek."

His mention of the flamethrower brought my earlier encounter with it back to mind in full sizzling detail. I shifted my shoulders around to ease the soreness in my back. "By the way, that was pretty tricky shooting you did when that grunge popped up with the torch gun."

Stealth nodded solemnly. "He was half hidden, so I couldn't go for a headshot. A body shot would have ruptured the tank, and that would have roasted you alive." He shuddered and glanced at his tattered left arm. "Burning to death is not something I'd wish on anyone."
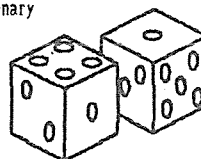
I turned to Raven. "You should have seen it. He nailed me in the back and knocked me forward into the woman I was trying to save. That blasted us out of the way of the flamethrower." I looked back at Stealth. "It's a good thing you remembered I was wearing kevlar."

The look of surprise on his face took a second or two to die. I felt a chill pass between us, but it drained away as Kid Stealth punched me lightly in the shoulder and gave me a genuine smile. "Yeah, I'm glad I remembered, too." Ω

The Quick and the Undead

Playing a Vampire PC

Lester W. Smith

ampires in *Shadowrun* are relegated to the roles of NPCs—for a number of good reasons. On the one hand, it is difficult for other archetypes to compete on an equal basis with a creature which can assume mist form and slip through the thinnest crevice and whose regenerative powers heal wounds virtually as quickly as they are received. On the other hand, it is tough for a vampire PC to interact reasonably with other PCs, whom it cannot help but view as potential meals, and who view it with fear, loathing, and hatred. But the quick and deadly vampire, with its legendary cunning and suavity, fits the *Shadowrun* ambiance so well that it almost begs to be played as a PC. The purpose of this article, then, is to provide rules and guidelines for running a Vampire archetype.

In some places, this article summarizes rules from the *Shadowrun* rulebook or refers players and referees to specific pages of that book. In others, it interprets the official *Shadowrun* rules, fleshing them out with added detail. But in no way does it contradict the official rules; it is compatible with all *Shadowrun* material published thus far.

Perhaps the best way to comprehend the material in this article is to first look over the Vampire archetype sheet, then read the material below.

SPECIAL POWERS

Enhanced Senses: A vampire has superior abilities of hearing and smell. Exact effects are left to the referee to decide, but it is suggested that a vampire PC be treated as having the equivalent of canine hearing and smell.

Essence Drain: Some might consider this more of a curse than a blessing, but with this power, vampire characters can increase their Essence by drinking blood from other humanoids. See page 176 of the *Shadowrun* rules' "Critters" section for details.

Immunity to Age: A vampire character simply never ages, and consequently never becomes enfeebled by age.

Immunity to Pathogens: When resisting infections or diseases, a vampire PC gets a

number of automatic successes equal to two times its current Essence rating.

Immunity to Poisons: When resisting the effects of poisons, a vampire PC gets a number of automatic successes equal to two times its current Essence rating.

Infection: A vampire can infect other humanoids with vampirism. See page 177 of the "Critters" section for details.

Mist Form: A vampire PC can control its molecular cohesion to change to and from a mist. This change takes one action. In this form, the vampire can pass through any space that a bacterium or virus could fit through. As well, a vampire in mist form gains Immunity to Normal Weapons (see page 176 of the "Critters" section for details), including those to which it is normally vulnerable (see Vulnerability, below). Magic and sunlight will affect a misted vampire normally, however, the latter returning it to corporeal form instantaneously. Also, a vampire that becomes unconscious in mist form automatically reverts to its normal form.

Vampires in mist form are denser than air, which means they will tend to settle to the ground (or floor, or whatever). They can, however, flow upward along any solid surface as long as contact with that surface is maintained. Referees are encouraged to make their own rulings about unusual circumstances such as climbing in heavy winds, moving in vehicles that are accelerating at high-G, and the like.

Regeneration: A vampire is incredibly difficult to kill. If such a being takes a Deadly wound or reaches Unconscious on the Physical side of the Condition Monitor, roll 1D6, and the creature dies on a roll of 1 (1 or 2 if the damage is from fire, explosives, or other things that affect a major portion of the body). All other damage disappears at the end of each combat turn.

Thermographic Vision: Vampires are able to see in the infrared spectrum as well as dwarves and trolls do.

WEAKNESSES

Allergy (Sunlight, Severe): For PC vampires, the PC allergy rules apply more reasonably than those for critter allergies. The PC takes a Light wound when first exposed to sunlight, with an additional Light wound every three minutes (Body=3) thereafter. Also, these wounds are not subject to the effects of regeneration until contact with sunlight is terminated. It is suggested that the referee treat these wounds as regenerating at the same rate at which they were incurred, although the *Shadowrun* rules are not specific in this regard.

For example, a vampire PC becomes unconscious after 27 minutes of exposure to sunlight, rolling for a 1 in 6 chance of death at that time and every three minutes thereafter. The PC would require 30 minutes out of the sunlight to regenerate these wounds completely.

Induced Dormancy (Lack of Air): The

Shadowrun rules do not explain this weakness (as far as I can tell). I suggest that whenever a vampire PC is deprived of air it suffer one point of stun damage every three minutes, in much the same way as it suffers wounds upon exposure to sunlight. Once the vampire reaches unconsciousness, it takes no further stun. But it cannot recover until exposed to air once again, at which time it recovers immediately.

Essence Loss: Vampires have no Essence of their own; they must take it from other creatures (see Essence Drain above), and they lose one point of that borrowed Essence each month. At Essence 0, a vampire can live for three days (one per point of Body) before dying permanently. The maximum Essence a vampire can attain is 12. Note that a vampire's Strength attribute varies with its Essence rating. A vampire's Strength is equal to its "birth" Strength (which is the same as the original human it was) plus its Essence.

Vulnerability (Wood): When used against vampires, wooden weapons are treated as having a wound category one step higher than normal. Simple contact with wood affects vampires as a Nuisance Allergy (it just annoys them). Note that wounds incurred by wooden weapons are subject to Regeneration (see above) in the same way as other wounds.

Other Weaknesses: First, a vampire simply cannot digest normal food and drink, only blood. Ingesting anything but blood causes nausea and vomiting within minutes. It is suggested that the referee have a vampire character who has ingested normal food or drink make a Body Attribute check, Arduous level, every minute to avoid vomiting. One success means it holds the stuff down; two or more successes means it is able to hide its discomfort as well. These rules can also be applied to abnormal food or drink (kerosene and styrofoam packing, for example).

Second, vampires are denser than humans and have a harder time staying afloat in liquids. (Even when in mist form, a vampire is heavier than water.) To reflect this, vampire characters should add 3 to their Target Numbers for Swimming checks. Note that failure results in loss of air, which begins to induce Dormancy.

REFEREEING A VAMPIRE

Vampires in *Shadowrun* are powerful creatures with superhuman abilities. Fortunately for purposes of play, they also have very serious weaknesses. One way of keeping a vampire PC in check—of balancing it somewhat with other PCs—is to play up those weaknesses. The primary weakness is a vampire's need for secrecy. Face it, as powerful as vampires are, humans simply have to destroy them whenever possible to keep from being reduced to a servitor race for vampire masters. Thus, a vampire PC will seek to disguise its true nature to pass itself off as something other than what it truly is.

Your job as referee is to make that task difficult by realistically taking advantage of the

creature's weaknesses. This doesn't mean that you should go out of your way to hassle the player, but you should do such things as:

● Give other party members an occasional roll to notice that their friend never eats or drinks in their presence.

● Leave the burden of avoiding daylight meetings completely to the vampire player.

● If other party members see the vampire PC assume mist form or heal itself of wounds, give them an occasional chance to recognize these things as vampiric powers rather than spell effects, to represent the fact that the PCs might stumble across information somewhere that would make them suspicious.

On the other hand, just because your players know the *Shadowrun* rules backward and forward and can spot a vampire a mile away, don't let their characters act on that knowledge until they somehow make the discovery themselves. Of course, in any roleplaying campaign, it is always a good idea for referees to include powers and effects not in the official rules, in order to keep the players guessing and make the game world seem bigger than the rulebook and full of mystery. If you are in the habit of doing this, a vampire PC will have a somewhat easier time convincing the other PCs that he is some sort of specialized magician. And maybe, if the vampire PC works with them long enough and is compelling enough, by the time the other PCs discover the vampire's secret, they will have become such friends that they won't destroy it out of hand.

PLAYING A VAMPIRE

Your character has a great deal of power, but it is so outnumbered by living—as opposed to undead—beings that it remains very vulnerable to destruction. And if those beings discover your character's true nature, they will have little choice but to destroy you. To allow a vampire to exist is to risk vampires taking over the entire world. As well, there is little love lost between individual vampires, as they tend to be solitary creatures who perceive others of their kind as competitors for food and threats to their own secret existence.

Because your character is a player character, rather than a *monstrous opponent to* PCs, it is assumed that he retains enough humanity to want to live like a human as much as possible. Shadowrunning allows such a creature a chance to use his special abilities in ways that will provide the money necessary to keep up the pretense. If he is careful enough and loyal enough to the other PCs, he might eventually be able to let them in on his awful secret.

Until that time, however, he must be extremely careful to convince them that he is something other than a vampire. There are *two major problems involved with this,* however. The first is the vampire's allergy to sunlight. That would be easy enough to explain away if he were truly metahuman,

PUNK VAMPIRE ARCHETYPE

"So you don't see any chrome on me. Don't let that fool you, chummer. There are augmentations, and then there are augmentations. I can do the job, whatever it is, better than you'd expect. But just don't watch over my shoulder; I don't appreciate scrutiny. When people get too nosy, bad things start to happen to them.

"You won't get a better price. So why not give me a shot? I'll deliver."

Commentary: Just weeks ago, this character was a normal citizen (well, at least as normal as they come in 21st-century Seattle). Then she met up with one of the undead, and after draining her of Essence, that old vampire left her to rise to unlife herself—it may have been a sudden streak of mercy, or maybe it was cruelty. Now, the new vampire must learn to survive on the streets.

But being so recently alive, this vampire seeks to retain some semblance of normalcy, to maintain contact with humans as something other than a predator. Her newly acquired powers can help in this respect, but one wrong move will reveal her nature to the living, calling their wrath down upon her. It is a dangerous game she plays, but at least it makes her feel alive.

Attributes:
  Body: 3
  Quickness: 12
  Strength: 3+Essence
  Charisma: 4
  Intelligence: 3
  Willpower: 3
  Essence: Variable
  Magic: 6
  Reaction: 5
Skills:
  Etiquette (Street): 4
  Conjuring: 1
  Magical Theory: 3
  Sorcery: 3
  Stealth: 5
  Unarmed Combat: 4
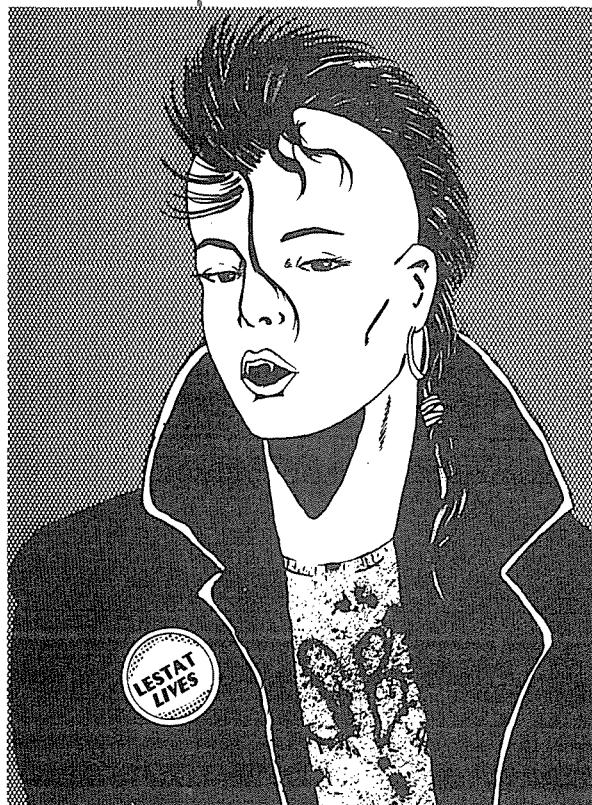**Cyberware:**
  None
Contacts:
  None
Gear:
  Knife
  Ordinary Clothing
  Plastic Restraints
Spells:
  Invisibility: 5

A vampire player character has a number of special powers and weaknesses.

Powers: Enhanced Senses (Hearing and Smell), Essence Drain, Immunity to Age, Immunity (Pathogens, Poisons, and Infection), Regeneration, Thermographic Vision.

Weaknesses: Allergy (Sunlight; Severe), Induced Dormancy (Lack of Air), Essence Loss, Vulnerability (Wood), Inability to Digest Food and Drink, +3 to Target Numbers for Swimming.
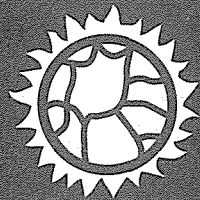
but in all ways he appears to be human. It is up to the player to come up with some sort of story to account for his allergy or to disguise it, but that is part of the fun to playing a vampire. The second major problem is explaining away the vampire's special powers. Most likely, he will claim to be some sort of specialist mage or shaman, but the story must be convincing.

A third, less serious, problem involved in disguising the vampire's nature is his need for blood to keep up his Essence, and his inability to keep other food or drink down. Hunting for blood can be worked out sepa-

rately with the referee, rather than including it in the normal events of an evening's play, and the player may be able to pass off his refusal to eat or drink as some sort of a vow not to do so in public.
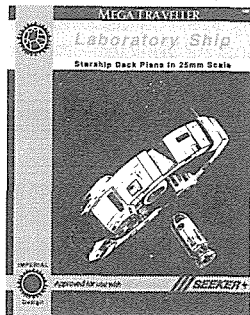
As a final note, remember that like a man-eating tiger, the vampire is both the hunter and the hunted. Even if the other PCs come to recognize him for what he is and still remain friends, the rest of the world will always be his enemy. If shadowrunners live on the edge, then, vampire shadowrunners live on the veriest, thinnest edge of that edge. There is simply no room for a misstep. Ω
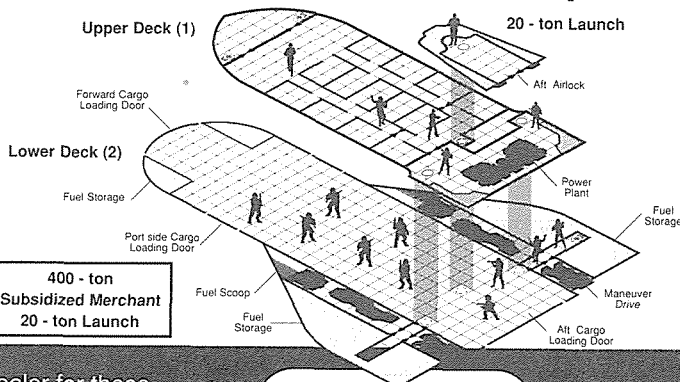
Lester W. Smith

The House on the Hill

his adventure encounter is intended as a subplot or interlude in a longer adventure. Or it can serve as an introductory adventure for players new to *Torg*. Note that while the adventure has been set in Western Australia, as referee you can change this to a more suitable location, if you like. The adventure consists of only one act, broken down into five scenes.

Plot: The PCs make an emergency landing near a tiny village in the Australian outback. They suffer a very cold reception but eventually learn that the villagers have a good reason for their suspiciousness. Something has been preying upon the children in the village, with several disappearances over the past few weeks. When the PCs probe deeper, they discover a young vampire who has left the Gaunt Man's realm, seeking a private hunting ground, so to speak. In the battle that ensues, the PCs gain some familiarity with *Torg* vampires, finding that they are somewhat different from Core Earth legends.

SCENE ONE

The PCs are on their way by air to a secret gathering of stormknights at a ranch 100 miles south of Broome, Western Australia, near the edge of the Great Sandy Desert. The purpose of the meeting is to discuss the problem of dealing with the well meaning but terribly misguided Victorians. Late in the afternoon on the day of the flight, about two-thirds of the way to their destination, the PCs develop engine trouble. Their aircraft begins to lose power and altitude. Every time they try to nose up and climb, the engine sputters, dangerously near to cutting out altogether, only to resume operation when they nose down. Eventually, the engine gives a flash of fire and a loud bang, then goes dead. At the same time, the fuel gauge registers that the fuel level is dropping rapidly. They have no choice but to land.

Fortunately for the PCs, a level stretch of ground lies about five miles southeast of a small village. From the air, the village appears to have about 50 homes, many of them trailers, clustered around a main street with a few business buildings. A Difficult Perception roll will reveal the remains of a ranch, including an old farmhouse almost buried in brush, another two miles northwest of the village. The ranch appears to be abandoned. As the PCs pass over the village, a half-dozen adults stand in the middle of the main street, peering upward at the plane.

After landing, the PCs discover—on an Average roll against Air Vehicles—the remains of a bird in the plane's air intake. Further examination reveals that a clump of feathers entered the carburetor, became soaked with fuel, and eventually exploded, breaking a hinge pin on a mixture valve. The fuel line was blown loose and is pouring a steady stream of fuel out onto the ground. The fuel leak can be halted easily. But it will take about four hours at a machine shop, and a Difficult roll versus Air Vehicles, to fix the carburetor and get the plane ready for takeoff once again.

SCENE TWO

When the PCs go to Pikersville, as the village is called (a walk of approximately two hours), they find the villagers to be secretive and unfriendly. Pikersville has always been very isolated, and with the strange events throughout the world, the villagers have grown almost paranoid in their suspiciousness toward outsiders. Because stormknights tend to be unusual (my own PCs include, among others, a woman in medieval plate mail and a fellow with a jet pack, for example), the villagers are doubly suspicious.

Eventually, however, the PCs meet Greasy Ben, the village drunk, who for a bit of money is willing to talk with them. Ben tells them individuals have been disappearing from the village recently, mostly children. Many people have blamed it on a ferocious pack of dingos roaming the area, but a few of the children disappeared from their own homes. The villagers are almost crazy with fear.

Ben mentions that he has seen lights up at the old Saxton place, the deserted ranch up on the hill about two miles out of town, and he thinks some lunatic has moved in there and is abducting the children.

SCENE THREE

The PCs go to check out the old Saxton place. On the way, they are attacked by dingos, one to four (1D20÷5) per party member. Each dingo has the following stats:

DEX	14	MIN	6
STR	10	CHA	4
TOU	9	SPI	4
PER	13		

Possibility Potential
None
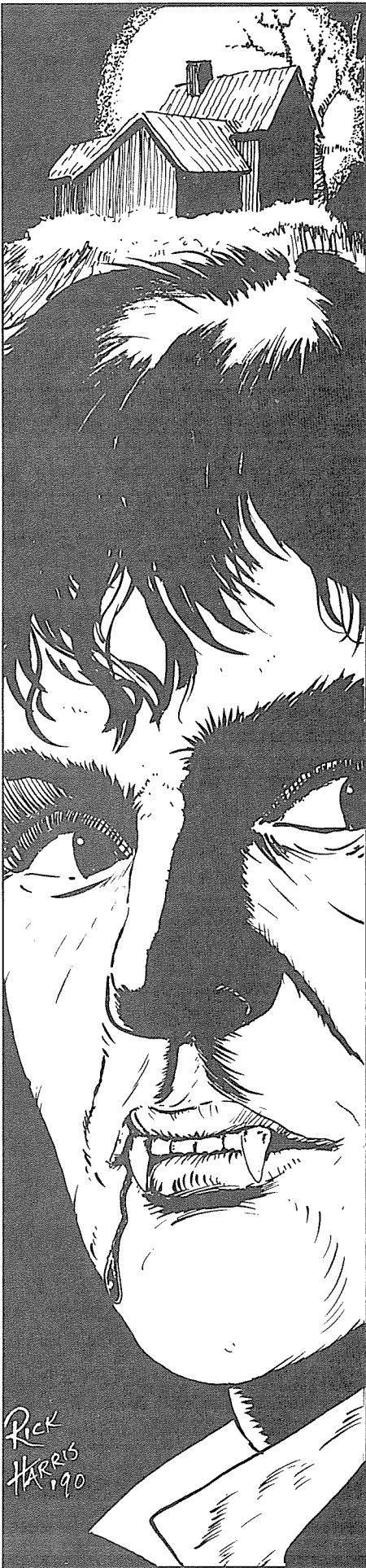
Natural Tools
Bite—damage value 9
Claws—damage value 6

Skills
Running	13
Stealth	14
Tracking	11
Intimidation	10
Trick	9
Test	8
Willpower	8
Taunt	(8)

SCENE FOUR

After dealing with the dingos, the PCs finally reach the old ranch, where they spot a rundown old shack almost buried in brush and dead trees. Apparently, the grounds were once irrigated to maintain a garden and hedges. But the plant life has long since withered and died from lack of water, leaving a treacherous tangle of branches and thorns. Holed up in the shack is a young vampire. Stats for the vampire are as given on page 19 of the *Torg Worldbook*, with the exceptions that this one has no Alteration Magic skill but does have Fire Combat 1.

If the PCs arrive at night, the vampire will be active and will seek to attack them separately or in pairs, rather than all at once. After taking 10 points of shock, he will retreat to the shack, where he has a rifle (a Sharps 1855) and a dozen Molotov cocktails (treat as hand grenades with the following burst radii: Short 0-2, Medium 4, Long 8).

If the PCs arrive during the day, they'll find the vampire inside the shack, sleeping with his rifle.

(Remember, if the PCs are defeating the vampire too easily, you can up his Possibilities and/or some of his skills to make the battle more of a challenge. You might also bring some more dingos into the fight, rationalizing that the vampire has some sort of animal control power.)

SCENE FIVE

After defeating the vampire, if the PCs take some sort of proof of his existence back to Pikersville, the villagers will aid them on their way, allowing them the use of a machine shop to repair their plane's carburetor and giving them food and drink for the remainder of the trip. Just how enthusiastic the villagers are in their change of attitude is left to the referee, based upon how heroic the PCs acted. Ω

Beings and Mythos:
The Space-Eaters
Frederick Paul Kiesche III

t first I didn't see anything but the tall trees, all white and glistening with the fog, and above them a thick, white mist that hid the stars. And then something long and white ran quickly down the trunk of one of the trees.... It ran so quickly down the tree that I couldn't see it clearly. And it was so thin anyway that there wasn't much to see. But it was like an arm. Whoever heard of an arm as tall as a tree? I don't know what made me compare it to an arm, because it was really nothing but a thin line, a string.... But it gave me the impression that it was looking for something that it had dropped. For a minute the hand seemed to spread out over the road, and then it left the tree and came toward the wagon. It was like a huge white hand walking on its fingers with a terribly long arm fastened to it that went up and up until it touched the fog, or perhaps until it touched the stars...."

The fog was like a living thing. Its long fingers reached up and slapped us relentlessly on the face. It curled about our bodies and ascended in great, grayish spirals from the tops of our heads. It retreated before us, and as suddenly closed in and enveloped us.... It was the shape that towered above the trees, the vas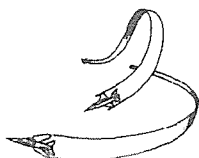t formless shape that moved slowly to and fro across the sky.... "If we see it clearly we are lost!..." "Pray that it remains without form!"

From "The Space-Eaters" by Frank Belknap Long

The Space-Eaters are a race from another dimension, only rarely connected with ours. They are an immensely cunning and evil race, filled with a vast and relentless hunger for the minds and souls of other beings. When an intelligence other than their own travels through the dimensions and contacts them by accident (nobody wants to contact the Space-Eaters on purpose!), they attempt to follow that intelligence back to its home dimension. There they feed on that dimension's life forms until the Space-Eaters are full (usually when all the life in that dimension is consumed) or until they are driven away.

When encountered, whether in another dimension or in a character's home dimension, a droning sound will be heard by the character (actually, it will be heard telepathically, but until a character is able to deduce this, every impression should be given that the droning is heard with the ears). A character who is first encountering the Space-Eaters (or is encountering them at one of the "binding times") may attempt to escape contact by winning a POW vs. POW struggle on the Resistance Table. These attempts should be made by the Keeper without the knowledge of the player character, as in this example:

Keeper: *"You hear a droning sound, as if a vast hive of bees were approaching you."*
Player: *"Where is it coming from? I search the area around the house."*
Keeper: *(Rolls POW vs. POW; the Investigator is free.)* *"The sound vanishes when you attempt to locate it."*
Player: *(Not knowing how lucky he is.)* *"Darn!"*

A successful match for the PC means that the Space-Eater has lost contact with the character. If the creature wins the match, it will be able to find the character no matter where he goes—across time and space to the character's home dimension or physically in whatever dimension he and the creature happen to be in. 1D6 Space-Eaters will be able to bind themselves to one character (or NPC) at a time, following that person to his own dimension and manifesting themselves within 2D6 miles of the character in a

randomly determined direction. (Roll 1D8. *1:* N *2:* NW *3:* W *4:* SW *5:* S *6:* SE *7:* E *8:* NE.) After a first encounter with a Space-Eater in the physical sense, the drone is recognized as what it is—the hunting/tracking call of a Space-Eater!

LIFE CYCLE

A Space-Eater cycles through three forms, called (because of their rough resemblance to these familiar earthly things) the fog form, the hand form, and the brain form. Unless the Space-Eater is successfully attacked by physical or magical means (see below), a creature of this race will arrive in a new dimension in its fog form and start to change on the following schedule:

Hours 1-3: Space-Eater in fog form.
Hours 4-6: Space-Eater in hand form.
Hours 7-9: Space-Eater in brain form.

It is suggested that the Keeper make a sliding scale to help him keep track of what form the Space-Eater in question is in. This could be done simply by making a line with 24 divisions (to represent the hours of a day) and another line with nine divisions (broken up into three sections, to represent each subcycle of the overall life cycle). These two lines are made so that you can move them around (i.e., make one on one piece of paper and another on a second piece of paper), so that the smaller nine-hour cycle can be moved around on the 24-hour cycle.

At the end of the ninth hour (unless the Space-Eater has been successfully attacked, see below), the cycle will start over again with the fog form and work its way around again. This will continue until one or another of two goals is reached: the complete destruction of all life in the dimension the Space-Eaters are in or a successful attempt at driving away the Space-Eaters.

During all stages of the cycle, the Space-Eater will attract an unnatural amount of moisture to its body. The closer you get to the creature, the thicker the fog will be (in the case of the fog form, this would be the center of the fog bank, as the creature is then so diffuse that you can actually walk into the body).

FOG FORM

The Space-Eater has no solid physical appearance; it is unorganized, and its molecular "structure" exists in a highly incoherent fashion. The only way to determine where the creature is would be to walk through the fog that is attracted to it. The Space-Eater will be at the center of the fog bank (the place where the fog is thickest).

Attacks against the Space-Eater in the fog form and against a character by a fog Space-Eater are outlined below.

CHARACTERISTICS

STR	1D6+2
CON	4D6+4
SIZ	8D6+8 (varies—gas form)
INT	3D6+3
POW	3D6+3
DEX	1D6+1
MOVE	4

Weapon	Attack	Damage
Smother*	20%	Paralyze
Bind**	POW vs. POW	No damage, but if successful, the Space-Eater is now able to track the character.

*The fog will attempt to condense around a character (unless it is

wounded, see below) and cut off his breathing. This will paralyze the character for 2D6 minutes and temporarily drain 1D6 from the character's CON. Essentially, this slows a victim down to make it easier to catch later.

**A fuller explanation of binding is provided under Binding and Space-Eaters.

Armor: Because of the highly unorganized and incoherent nature of the Space-Eater while in this form, knives, spears, bullets, etc. have no effect on it. Explosions will have only one-quarter of their full effect on the creature (for a fuller explanation, see below). Primal Signs will have full effect. (Primal Signs are discussed under Attacking Space-Eaters, below.)

SAN: Seeing a Space-Eater in fog form will cost the viewer no SAN, primarily because there is nothing for the viewer to focus on and lose SAN over!

HAND FORM

The Space-Eater is becoming physically coherent and organized when it obtains this form. It resembles a long, thin, white arm or rope, ending in a "hand" of many fingers or tentacles. The exact size and thickness of the arm and fingers will be hard to determine—because the creature still attracts a lot of moisture (and is still wrapped in fog) and because the shape and thickness, as well as the total number, of the "fingers" constantly change. They become thicker and thinner, grow and decrease in number, etc.

At this stage, the creature spends much of its time in trees or other thick vegetation. A favorite hunting trick is to remain in a tree (or similar organic structure) until a victim walks underneath it, then jump down. A Keeper could make good use of this habit, especially with the proper (ahem) atmospheric use of the thick fog.

CHARACTERISTICS

STR	3D6+3
CON	4D6+4
SIZ	4D6+4
INT	3D6+3
POW	3D6+3
DEX	2D6+2
MOVE	6 crawling/8 leaping

Weapon	Attack	Damage
Sting*	Automatic	1D3 of STR and POW
Bind**	POW vs. POW	No damage, used to "track" victims
Whip***	40%	1D6 CON

*With this attack, the Space-Eater drills into the forehead of a bound victim, making a hole in the forehead and going all the way through the brain (without coming out of the other side). This attack will happen painlessly and instantaneously, like a hot knife going through butter. Note that although the attack is automatically successful, *it can only be used against victims that are bound to that particular creature* (that is, those on whom it has executed a successful bind attack). If a character is not bound to that particular Space-Eater, this mode of attack cannot be used.

Bound characters are still allowed an attempt to break away from a bound state at the beginning of the Space-Eater's sting. A dodge must be made by the character (using a DEX roll). If successful, the creature then physically misses the victim, and the victim must win a successful POW vs. POW struggle to escape his bound state. The Space-Eater will continue to strike until the character fails his DEX roll or escapes the bound state.

When a character finally fails at a dodge attempt, the Space-Eater begins to penetrate his skull. At this point the character can make a last-ditch POW vs. POW attempt on the Resistance Table to escape his bound state. If the Space-Eater's victim fails in his POW vs. POW attempt, the victim will not lose blood, but will lose 1D3 points of STR and POW. The Space-Eater will gain these points of POW and STR, but only on a

temporary basis. When its form shifts again, the gain will be lost, and the creature will only have whatever STR and POW it would normally have for its form. In addition to the loss of STR and POW, within a period of 3D6 minutes, the character's brain will begin to feel "cold"—a burning cold that will cause him to shake and shudder constantly. This shaking and shuddering will be so bad at times that the character will have to roll against his DEX to keep from falling down (Keeper's discretion).

If the victim is able to break his binding at the start of the penetration, the Space-Eater will let him go. The referee should roll for STR and POW loss (1D3 points each), but the victim will be able to regain back some but not necessarily all of the lost characteristics within 10 minutes. (Roll 1D6. *1-2:* 1 point *3-4:* 2 points *5-6:* 3 points. Roll for POW and STR separately.) Whatever is not regained is permanently lost. The brain chill described above does not occur.

**A fuller explanation of binding is provided under Binding and Space-Eaters.

***The whip attack occurs when the Space-Eater uses its body to physically strike an intended victim. This attack can be used against bound or unbound victims: It is used to keep the victim within easy reach of the creature by paralyzing him until the Space-Eater changes form again. The whip attack is similar to the fog form smother attack in that it temporarily drains 1D6 points of CON when it paralyzes the victim for 2D6 minutes.

Armor: The Space-Eater still has no armor, but it is not yet coherent and organized enough (the shifting of size and density, as well as the variable number of fingers is an indication of this) for attacks to have full effect. Knives, spears, bullets, etc. will have one-quarter of their full effect, and explosions will have one-half of their full effect (see below). Primal Signs will have their full effect. (Primal Signs are discussed under Attacking Space-Eaters, below.)

SAN: Seeing a Space-Eater in the hand form will cause the PC to lose 1D10 points of SAN, unless he is able to make his SAN roll, whereupon the character will lose only one point of SAN.

BRAIN FORM

The Space-Eater obtains its most coherent and dense shape during this stage of its life cycle. It resembles a brain, with a tail made up of the nerves of the spinal cord. The brain is approximately one foot in size, and the tail is about six feet in length. The brain moves by edging on a trail of slime extruded by a supple forefoot, much in the same manner that a snail moves along the ground. The brain also has the ability to leap while attacking, as well as being able to crawl up walls or trees, or hang from branches, ceilings, etc., by means of suction. The Keeper should delight in describing this form of the Space-Eater to his players: its slimy form, the shiny trail it leaves, the sucking sound it makes when it moves, the pulsating "veins" on the exterior.

Once a Space-Eater has attacked a victim and killed him, it will remain by the body until it changes back into the fog form, making no attempts at movement unless it has to defend itself or desires to paralyze another potential victim if that victim approaches closely.

CHARACTERISTICS

STR	4D6+4
CON	4D6+4
SIZ	2D6+6
INT	3D6+3
POW	3D6+3
DEX	3D6+3
MOVE	8 crawling/10 leaping

Weapon	Attack	Damage
Drain*	Automatic	Full drain of STR, POW and SAN, as well as consumption of all nervous tissue in skull and spinal column (see below).
Bind**	POW vs. POW	No damage, used to "track" victims.
Whip***	50%	Paralyzes

*This attack can only be used against victims that are bound to a particular Space-Eater. If another victim is approached, even if it is bound to another creature, it cannot be attacked in this fashion. Victims who are drained must have been successfully stung.

A character that is bound will feel the cold in his brain and the droning grow in intensity. If a controlled character is attacked by a brain form Space-Eater, the Space-Eater will leap from the ground and wrap its tail around the neck of the character. The character may throw it off in a STR vs. STR struggle, but *only* if he also is able to make his DEX roll (the "cold" will make his shaking increase, so movement will be more difficult). If the Space-Eater manages to hold on, it will insert its tail into the hole made previously and drain the characteristics of STR, POW and SAN. It will then cut a circular section out of the top of the skull, remove that section, and eat the brains and spinal tissue of the victim.

If the bound character is able to throw the Space-Eater to the ground, he will have a chance to attack it physically or engage it in another POW vs. POW struggle in an attempt to shake the binding.

**A fuller explanation of binding is provided below.

***The whip attack can be used against bound or unbound victims. In this attack, the brain leaps and uses its tail to lash around the victim's throat in a paralyzing attack. This will cause the character to lose 1D6 points of CON and to be paralyzed for 2D6 minutes. This attack is similar to the whip attack of the hand form and the smother attack of the fog form.

Armor: The Space-Eater is at its highest stage of coherency and organization during this form. Bullets, knives, etc., will have one-half of their normal effect, and explosions of any kind will have their full effect. Primal Signs will have their full effect. (Primal Signs are discussed under Attacking Space-Eaters, below.)

SAN: SAN loss at this stage is greatest. A character who sees a Space-Eater in the brain form will lose 1D20 points of SAN if he fails a SAN roll. Even if a character is able to make a successful SAN roll, the character will lose 1D6 points of SAN. If a bound character is successfully drained, he is killed, and all SAN is lost (of course).

BINDING AND SPACE-EATERS

Binding is what sets the Space-Eaters apart from other creatures in the Cthulhu Mythos. It is similar in operation to the binding used by the Cthonians or the hunting ability of the Hounds of Tindalos; however, it does not cost a Space-Eater any POW to bind itself to a character, and the character can still move (the binding acts more like a tracking device than anything else).

There are several times during its life cycle that a Space-Eater can attempt to bind itself to a victim, and several times that a bound victim can attempt to break free. Note that if a Space-Eater is sent back to a fog form, this counts as one of the times that a bound victim can attempt to break free. Space-Eaters can bind any victim in any part of the world. They will usually only bind victims within reach (because of their slow form of travelling) for ease of feeding. A Space-Eater may bind up to 1D100 victims during each binding time, and more than one Space-Eater can attempt to bind to a single victim (although the Keeper should be merciful in this respect). However, of course, each victim can make an attempt to escape at each stage mentioned below. And, of course, the Space-Eater can only physically attack one victim at a time.

To break free, in all cases, the victim must successfully do battle with the Space-Eater in a POW vs. POW struggle on the Resistance Table. Note that at certain times, a victim may have lost POW, and the Space-Eater may have gained POW during the time a character was bound, so the odds can gradually stack up in favor of the Space-Eater!

The first stage at which a Space-Eater can attempt to bind a victim and that a victim can attempt to break free is when a Space-Eater is initially contacted—either in the creature's home dimension (prior to an attempt on the part of the Space-Eater to track the visitor back to his dimension) or in the victim's home dimension. This first stage is also considered to exist (for purposes of breaking free) when a Space-Eater is reduced to its fog form as a result of an attack.

The second time a victim may attempt to break free is when the Space-Eater shifts from fog form to hand form. This is also the second time the creature may attempt to bind new victims.

The third attempt at freedom comes when a Space-Eater tries to attack a bound victim and drill a hole in the victim's forehead. This must be coupled with a DEX roll in which the victim successfully dodges the hand on its first (and subsequent) passes, until the Space-Eater either successfully attacks or the victim is able to break away. The creature is unable to bind new victims in hand form after 15 minutes to half an hour past the time in which it changed from fog form.

Midnight	Noon	
1 a.m.	1 p.m.	1.00 Hours Fog
2 a.m.	2 p.m.	2.00 Hours Fog
3 a.m.	3 p.m.	3.00 Hours Fog
4 a.m.	4 p.m.	4.00 Hours Hand
5 a.m.	5 p.m.	5.00 Hours Hand
6 a.m.	6 p.m.	6.00 Hours Hand
7 a.m.	7 p.m.	7.00 Hours Brain
8 a.m.	8 p.m.	8.00 Hours Brain
9 a.m.	9 p.m.	9.00 Hours Brain
10 a.m.	10 p.m.	
11 a.m.	11 p.m.	

Sliding Scale

This sliding scale is designed to help you keep track of the life cycle of the Space-Eater. Photocopy the page, then cut out the two 12-hour scales and tape them end to end (so that 11 a.m. meets with noon). Also cut out the smaller nine-hour life cycle scale. Next, determine when the Space-Eaters arrive, and match that time with Hour 1.00 Fog on the Life Cycle scale. At the end of the ninth hour, the cycle will start over again with the fog form. This will continue until all life in that dimension is destroyed or the Space-Eaters are successfully driven away.

The fourth time a victim may attempt to break free is when the Space-Eater shifts from hand form to brain form. Note that at this point, a bound victim has lost some POW and the creature has gained some POW. The struggle takes place during the transition from one form to another, when the creature still has its temporary gain. This is also a time when the creature may attempt to bind a new victim.

The fifth time a victim may attempt to break free is when the Space-Eater is attacking him in the brain form. The process is similar to the one outlined above—a dodge must be made using the DEX roll. The creature will then physically miss the victim, and the victim must win a successful POW vs. POW struggle. If the victim is not successful in his POW struggle, the creature can make another leap, the victim make another dodge, etc., until the combat is resolved one way or another. The Space-Eater is unable to make an attempt at binding new victims after 15 minutes to half an hour past the time in which it changed from hand form.

At each point where a character can make a POW vs. POW struggle, the Keeper must do it for him unless the character fully understands what is going on. The Keeper should be fair when doing this for the character, and allow the character every chance to break loose from the creature. After all, the object of the game is to scare people and make them sweat, not to kill them all off without any chance of surviving!

ATTACKING SPACE-EATERS

A variety of methods can be used to attack Space-Eaters.

Physical Attacks in Fog Form. The Space-Eater starts out highly unorganized and incoherent in nature in fog form. Physical attacks will have the following effectiveness: All knives, bullets, etc. (penetrating attacks) have no effectiveness against the Space-Eater. All explosions have one-quarter effect.

Physical Attacks in Hand Form. In the hand form, the Space-Eater increases in organization and molecular coherency. Physical attacks with knives, spears, bullets, etc., have one-quarter of their normal effect; all explosions have one-half of their normal effect.

Physical Attacks in Brain Form. When a Space-Eater has transformed into the brain form, it has reached the highest amount of coherency and molecular density. All bullets, knives, etc., will have one-half of their normal effect, and all explosions will have their full effect.

Interrupting the Life Cycle. If a physical attack is carried out which reduces a Space-Eater's hit points to zero, the creature will *not* be killed, nor will it be sent back to its home dimension. Its life cycle will instead be interrupted. No matter what form it is in, the creature will be changed back into the fog form. It will remain that way for the rest of the current cycle (i.e., if it is in the second hour of the hand form, it will remain in fog form for the next four hours— during which it would have normally transformed into the brain form), plus the full range of the next cycle (another nine hours), making, in this example, a full 13 hours in the fog form. When recovering from a physical attack, a Space-Eater will be unable to move, bind, or use the smother attack to defend itself. A bound character may make an attempt to free himself by use of a POW vs. POW struggle on the resistance table. If successful, the victim will have all the creature's recovery period to make an escape or to find some way of driving the Space-Eater back to its own dimension.

Magical Attacks. When attacking Space-Eaters by magical means, all magical attacks will have their normal effect, except that whenever the word "kill" is used in the magical damage descriptions or when the effect of death would occur, substitute the effect of having the Space-Eater return to its home dimension or being disrupted to the fog form as mentioned above under Interrupting the Life Cycle. The fate of the creature is determined by using a percentile die: On a roll of 1-75, it is disrupted; on a roll of 76-100,

the creature must return to the dimension of the Space-Eaters. If this attack is taking place in the home dimension of the Space-Eaters, then the Space-Eater is rendered essentially harmless, and the character will be permitted to leave without being tracked (unless another Space-Eater is tracking him!).

Primal Sign: The only way to drive a Space-Eater back to its home dimension, using "magical" means that will not cost a character points of SAN or POW is to use what is known as a Primal Sign. If the character is searching for clues and makes a successful Idea or Cthulhu Mythos roll, he will realize that he must make an impression of a primal religious sign: a Star of David, a Christian Cross, an Egyptian Ankh, a Pentagram, an Elder Sign, or some other form. The character must make some sort of somatic, physical, or visual representation of the sign. The effectiveness of the different methods of sign making are indicated as follows:

Physical Sign: The character uses a cross, ankh, etc., in physical form (i.e., the character takes a cross from around his neck and holds it in front of him). This has a 20% chance of working.

Motion Sign: The character makes the sign somatically (with hand motions). For example, a character crosses himself. This has a 20% chance of working.

Motion Sign with Artificial Light: Making the hand motion with a flashlight or another artificial light source. This has a 30% chance of working. In addition, being near an artificial light source alone with the first two methods mentioned adds 05% chance of the sign driving the Space-Eaters back to their home dimension.

Motion Sign with Flame: This can be any kind of flame—match, burning newspaper, lantern, bonfire, torch—as long as a character can outline the sign with flame. This has a 70% chance of working. "Outline" means that a character would take a torch and make the sign of the cross, for example.

Physical Sign with Flame: Taking a Primal Sign and setting it on fire. For example, a church catches on fire and the cross burns. This has an 80% chance of working.

Making a Primal Sign several times (crossing oneself several times in rapid succession) will add +01% to the chance of success. (As an example, our character is using flame. That will give him a base chance of 70% of driving away the Space-Eater. He waves the flame in the shape of a cross four times. This gives him a +04% bonus—a total of a 74% chance of the sign working.)

The Keeper should realize that physically confronting a Space-Eater—especially one in the hand or brain form that is attempting to choke a character or drill a hole in his brain—may excite a character so that panic and desperation set in. If the *player* is acting in such a fashion (showing signs of fear), make the *character* attempting to form a Primal Sign roll his DEX or under. An unsuccessful roll means that, in his panic, the character has fumbled (dropped the torch, for example). A really good roll means that the character was able to master his panic and face the Space-Eater with a steely glint in his eye, driving the creature back to where it belongs!

If a PC succeeds in driving away a Space-Eater in this fashion, a primal, psychic scream is heard, and the Space-Eater is returned to its home dimension to lick its wounds and plot revenge. The PC should receive a 1D20 boost to his SAN (provided he feels that Space-Eater problem has been resolved—meaning that no more are in evidence). His character has helped save the universe and may have learned not to poke around in obscure dimensions without a road map! Ω

The creatures in this article are taken from "The Space-Eaters" by Frank Belknap Long (as collected in Tales of the Cthulhu Mythos, edited by August Derleth, and published by Arkham House and Ballantine Books). The Space-Eaters are a Lesser Independent Race.

For an adventure involving the Space-Eaters, don't miss "The Horror out of Partridgeville" in this issue!

*I*n September 1920, a casual acquaintance of the investigators (Dr. Henry Armitage, chief librarian of Miskatonic University) receives a bizarre letter from a writer friend. A few days later, the friend is found dead—apparently of murder, but a murder of very strange form and circumstance. Dr. Armitage thinks—on the basis of that letter—that supernatural forces are at work, forces that caused the death of his friend!

KEEPER'S INFORMATION
The writer, Harold Langley (a noted author of occult fiction for popular magazines and local newspapers) was killed while experimenting with the occult. He accidently contacted the Space-Eaters, an obscure independent race of beings in the Cthulhu Mythos. Three of the Space-Eaters broke free from their dimension, killing Langley, and are now wandering the area, looking for more food.

The adventure takes place at or near Miskatonic University, but Keepers may alter the location and time. The Keeper should show the PCs a newspaper article outlining the facts in Langley's death. That night, while gathered in the Student-Faculty Club (if the investigators are connected with Miskatonic University) or a local social club, they will be approached by Dr. Henry Armitage, who will ask for their help.

Langley's was killed the night before the characters learn of the murder. Determine the exact time of the death and start the "clock" on the cycle of the Space-Eater's form-changing life cycle. Emphasize to the PCs that a heavy fog has covered the area since the death (it will remain throughout the adventure, starting in the morning of the first day). For a more detailed explanation of the fog, see Fog below.

CLUES
Certain clues will give the players insight into the mystery before they encounter the Space-Eaters. The first clue should be the article in the *Arkham Advertiser*, the local newspaper. From there the players should encounter the fog, then meet with Dr. Armitage and read the letter he carries.

An article appearing in the Arkham Advertiser *on September 23, 1920:*

Writer Murdered in His Home
Harold Langley, a local occult writer, was killed in a bizarre murder last night in his home. Langley was 42.

Police state that the investigation is proceeding "smoothly," but they have no leads at this point. Two Miskatonic University professors are reported to have found the body when keeping an appointment with Langley.

Langley wrote occult fiction for popular magazines and local newspapers. Some of his more famous stories are "The House of the Worm," "Shadows of Yog-Sothoth," and the infamous "The Defilers," which set a record last year when it was published by this periodical and caused 110 letters of indignation to be written by local readers.

Details of the murder are being held pending notification of family. No relatives are presently known, so police are making official inquiries.

The investigators will be approached by Henry Armitage (M.A., Miskatonic, Ph.D., Princeton, Litt.D., Johns Hopkins) of the Miskatonic University Library. Armitage was a friend of Langley's and assisted him in his research on the occult (the Miskatonic University collection of occult books is known around the world).

Armitage received a letter from Langley shortly before the murder. On the basis of the letter, several conversations with Langley, and Langley's strange behavior before his death, Armitage thinks the murder was not committed by humans, but by something from the Cthulhu Mythos. He shows the investigators the letter, and asks for their help:

Excerpts from the Letter
It is the shadowy terrors that lurk behind and above them that are mysterious and awful....

Our little brains—what can they know of vampire-like entities which may lurk in dimensions higher than our own, or beyond the universe of stars? I think sometimes they lodge in our heads, and our brains feel them, but when they stretch out tentacles to probe and explore us, we go screaming mad....

Coldly malign intelligence from beyond the stars—suppose there were a greater horror? Suppose evil things from some other universe should decide to invade this one? Suppose we couldn't see them? Suppose we couldn't feel them? Suppose they were of a color unknown on Earth, or rather, of an appearance that was without color?

They would not exist for us? They would exist for us if they could give us pain. Suppose it was not the pain of heat or cold or any of the pains we know, but a new pain? Suppose they touched something besides our nerves—reached into our brains in a new and terrible way? You cannot oppose what you cannot see or feel....

Suppose they should eat their way to us through space!"

Langley's Behavior
Armitage will state that Langley always struck him as an odd chap and that he was always talking of places other than our own time and space. Langley believed it was possible to travel to other dimensions or other times by freeing one's mind/spirit/essence from the body and allowing it to roam through time and space. Langley spent a lot of time in the Miskatonic University Library and studied the many occult books that are found there—including a rare edition of *The Necronomicon*. A few days before Armitage got the letter, Langley claimed that he was on the verge of a big breakthrough in dimensional travel. Then Armitage heard nothing, got the letter, and again heard nothing—Langley ceased his usual daily visits to the library and did not call or write. Then Armitage heard of the murder.

FOG
By now the investigators should be ready to venture outside. The Keeper should keep careful track of where the Space-Eaters are and their current form—this will help to determine what "random" events and clues the investigators will find in order to help them to unravel the mystery. As the Keeper tracks the creatures' movements, and as the investigators move through the countryside, the Keeper should indirectly indicate their current location through talking about the thickness of the fog (i.e., it gets thicker as the investigators move toward the Space-Eaters and thinner as they move away from them).

ARKHAM ADVERTISER
At the office of the *Arkham Advertiser*, the investigators may learn the following for each successful Fast Talk or Oratory roll: A reporter will say, Langley was killed in "a horrible fashion—his head," then the reporter will shut up and refuse to talk any further. If the PC is successful with another roll, he will learn that "it looked like he was shot in the head, but it was peculiar—everything was gone." What "everything" is the reporter will refuse to disclose. On further successes, the reporter will reveal that the police are unofficially "very puzzled" by the murder. He will also reveal the names of the two professors who found Langley's body: Melvin Giles of the Department of Anthropology and Welles Kedding of the Department of Economics. Both were close friends of Langley and visited on a regular basis for tea and conversation.

MELVIN GILES' HOUSE
If the investigators visit Giles' house, they will find a very shaken person. Giles will not be able to reveal much more than the reporter

at the *Arkham Advertiser* did—other than that he and Kedding went for their usual Sunday night visit and found the house apparently empty. They noticed that things seemed disturbed and that the house was full of fog. Thinking that Langley had gone for a walk and left a window open somewhere (allowing the fog to enter), they looked around downstairs, checking all the windows, then went upstairs. There they found the body. After revealing this, Giles will shut up and refuse to talk any further.

WELLES KEDDING'S HOUSE

If the investigators check Kedding's house, they will get even less information than from Giles. Kedding will refuse to talk to the investigators unless they have brought Armitage along. He will then talk to Armitage in a secretive fashion. If questioned later, Armitage will reveal only that Kedding thought the police were on the wrong track and that perhaps "there was something to Langley's stories of 'vast and unknown powerful forces in the universe.'"

SHERIFF

At the county sheriff's office (in Arkham, in the County Complex, along with the coroner, the courthouse, etc.), no information will be available—the police are very curt and abrupt. They will resist all attempts at Legal, Fast Talk, Oratory, Bribery, etc. They will say the investigation is "proceeding" and that details will be released to the public if necessary. If the investigators persist in questioning the police, they will be threatened with arrest for interfering with police business. If the investigators persist further, the police will arrest them, and they will spend a night or three in jail (someone, perhaps Armitage, will eventually get them out if the police don't just release them—having "learned their lesson"—by then).

CORONER

At the county coroner's office (located at the County Complex), players will only be admitted on a successful roll of Oratory, Law, or Bribe. Fast Talk attempts will only result in having the doors shut in their faces, and further attempts at the former skills will become

more difficult (impose an appropriate modifier). If the investigators reveal that they are friends of Langley (a slight lie if Armitage is not there), the coroner will grudgingly show them the body.

Langley is pale and waxen. There is a small hole in the upper left portion of his forehead, like a bullet hole, but no blood is present. The hole is utterly smooth—no jagged skin or bone—as if whatever made the hole was so powerful and fast that it cut through skin and bone before it had a chance to splinter the bone or tear the skin. The skull cap is missing from the top of the head, and the brain is gone. Upon questioning, the coroner will reveal the following:

● The "bullet hole" was made approximately three hours before the skull was removed.

● There is no exit path for the hole, unless one counts the removal of the skullcap. However, that can't contain the exit path because of the nature of the wound and the angle of the hole, which would indicate an exit somewhere at the base of the skull.

● The skullcap was removed in much the same fashion as the hole was created—no tearing of the skin and no splintering of the bone are evident (the skullcap was found near the body). Although some blood was spilt, the amount that one would normally expect from such a massive wound was not present.

● Not only is all of the brain missing, but a good portion of the nerves that go through the spinal column are missing as well.

● Langley lived for about three hours between the "bullet hole" wound and when his brain was removed!

NEIGHBORS AND RANDOM CLUES

At any of the houses in the neighborhood, either in Partridgeville, Mulligan's Wood, or the surrounding area, NPCs will talk (on a roll of Oratory, Fast Talk, Law, or Bribery) about the fog, the death, Langley, etc.—in general.

The Keeper should be keeping track of the Space-Eaters (and their life cycle). At the proper time, he should attempt to ensnare the investigators or NPCs with them in the psychic trap of the Space-Eaters' binding attempts. Therefore, it is possible for investigators or NPCs to have encountered the Space-Eaters in a variety of ways at this point.

If the investigators encounter the creatures, the Keeper should determine actions and results as explained below. If only NPCs have been "approached" and bound/attacked, the investigators will have to search and question before they start learning strange things. Neighbors and NPCs will reveal that they have seen strange shapes. Some people will appear shaken and refuse to talk, and some may even have the "bullet hole" marking.

Finally, if the Space-Eaters' life cycle brings about a murder, the investigators may discover (or hear of) another body—with the same grisly characteristics as Langley's!

MULLIGAN'S WOOD

In Mulligan's Wood, the fog will be especially thick (at least one Space-Eater should stay in the wood). The Keeper should use all his storytelling skill in building an eerie atmosphere and may even wish to use extra props (eerie music, incense, candles, wind chimes, "dry ice" and water to make fog, etc.) to help to sustain the spell. The investigators should encounter the Space-Eaters here first if possible—the trees (draped with moss and dripping with condensation), sick and dead plants, and ever-present fog should make it an ideal place for an encounter.

As the investigators make their way through the wood, they will also discover more clues. Dead animals and possibly one or more dead tramps are present, all with mutilations similar to Langley's—even squirrels with tiny little "bullet holes," and the missing brains and skull-caps! But be sure not to overdo the number of bodies strewn about. Follow the life cycle of the Space-Eaters exactly. It is permissible to have some dead animals and NPCs—if the Keeper wants more dramatic clues, then he can allow a few of the attacked NPCs to escape the grasp of the Space-Eaters. There should never be more bodies than the number of Space-Eaters (in this case, three) plus the number of "life cycles" that have passed could account for.
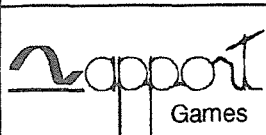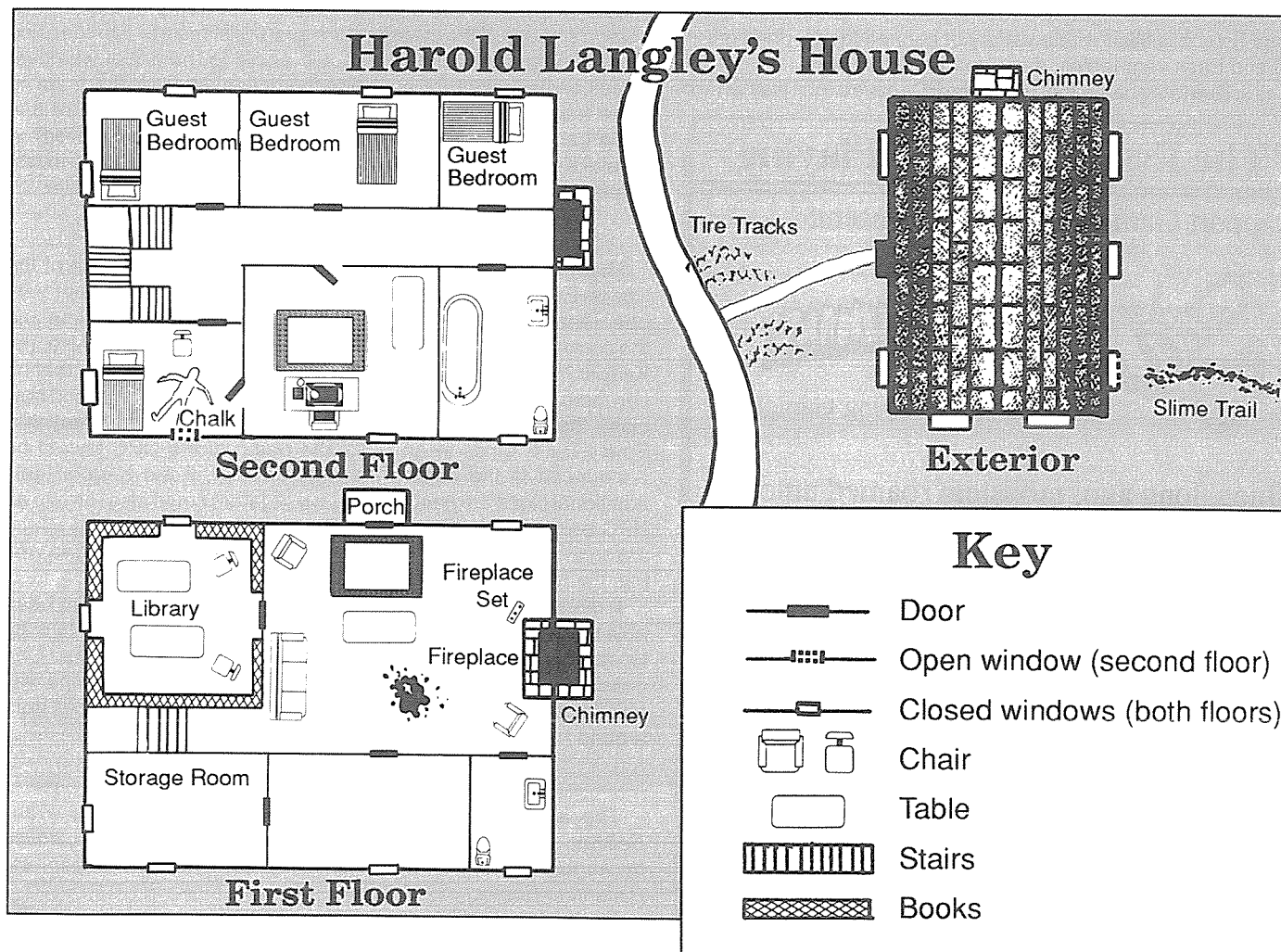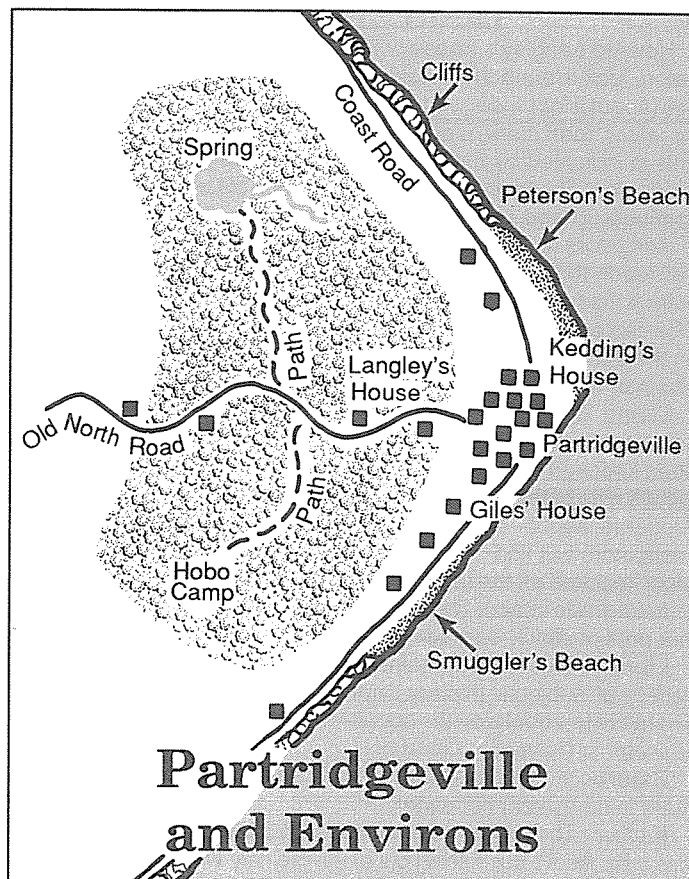
Massachusetts Bay Area
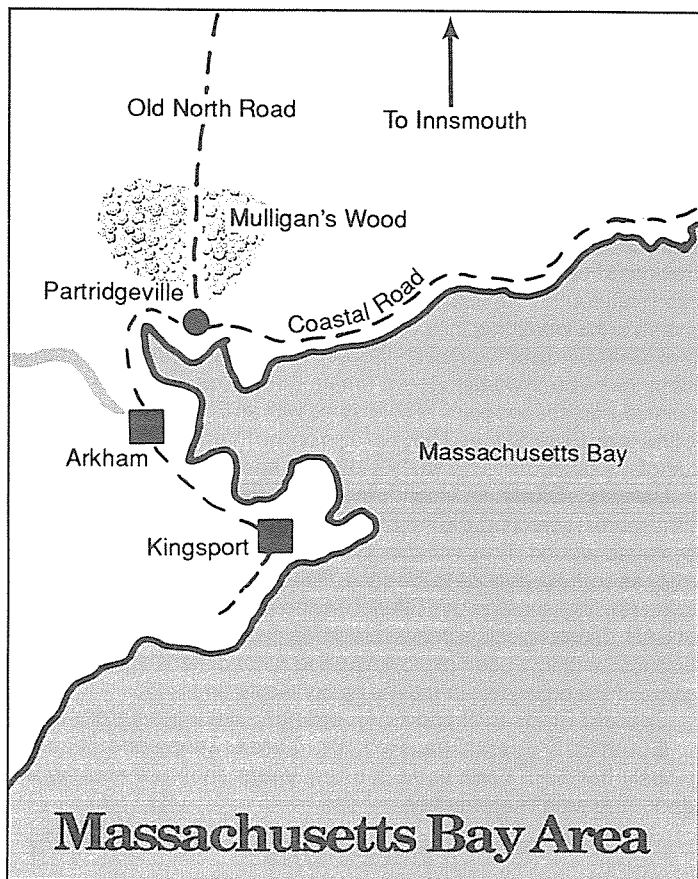
Old North Road

To Innsmouth

Mulligan's Wood

Partridgeville

Coastal Road

Arkham

Massachusetts Bay

Kingsport

Partridgeville and Environs

Cliffs

Coast Road

Spring

Peterson's Beach

Path

Langley's House

Kedding's House

Old North Road

Partridgeville

Path

Giles' House

Hobo Camp

Smuggler's Beach

Harold Langley's House

Chimney

Guest Bedroom

Guest Bedroom

Guest Bedroom

Tire Tracks

Chalk

Second Floor

Slime Trail

Exterior

Porch

Library

Fireplace Set

Fireplace

Chimney

Storage Room

First Floor

Key

Door	
Open window (second floor)	
Closed windows (both floors)	
Chair	
Table	
Stairs	
Books	

LANGLEY'S HOUSE

Howard Langley's house will be in disarray. First, if the investigators look around the outside of the house, they will find a slime trail (about a foot wide, with indications of a smaller "tail" mark inside the wider "foot" mark) leading from the woods to the Langley house (this is indicated by the direction the grass is pushed, leaves are piled, etc.). The trail will proceed to the side of Langley's house and continue up and through the open window of the bedroom (the investigators need not be told that this is the bedroom, only that the trail leads through an open window—if they eventually enter and search the house, they will be able to deduce this themselves). The PCs can enter the house without any problems, as there is no lock on the door. The house is full of fog. On the ground floor, they may discover the following:

Living Room: The living room contains a fireplace, table, and some random furniture. A chair to the right side of the fireplace has been knocked on its side, facing right; the fireplace set located on the left side of the fireplace has been knocked over (to the left) and scattered about—if the contents are examined carefully, the investigators will find that the poker is missing. Finally, a lamp has been knocked off the table in the middle of the room (another lamp remains there intact). The fallen lamp is lying on the floor, shattered, in a pool of slowly spreading oil.

Library: This room contains approximately 800 books on a wide variety of subjects (history, anthropology, science, fiction, etc.). There are few books on the occult—Langley preferred to work at the Miskatonic University Library.

Bathroom: This is a normal bathroom, except for the fact that there is no (gasp!) hot water.

Kitchen: The kitchen looks normal. It is a little messy (after all, Langley was a bachelor), but nothing out of the ordinary will be apparent.

Storage Room: Access to the storage room is through the kitchen. The room is situated under the stairs which lead up to the second floor. It is filled with a variety of canned foods, dried meat, dried and fresh vegetables, dried and fresh fruit, etc.

Stairs: Due to the heavy fog, unless the PCs have a light, they will find it difficult to go up to the second floor without tripping on the stairs. (Call for DEX rolls, and see if the investigators drop anything if they fail.) Oil lamps can be found in the living room, library, and kitchen.

Second Floor: Looking down the hall, the PCs will notice that all the doors, except for the one leading to the study, are closed. The door leading to the room with the open window will be immediately to their right when the PCs reach the top of the stairs.

Langley's Bedroom: Upon opening the room, the investigators can see a bed, wardrobe, dresser, and chair. The window is open, and a slime trail leads from the window to the middle of the room. A few drops of blood are scattered on the floor near the chalk outline of a body. If the PCs examine the wardrobe, they will find nothing but clothing. In the dresser, the PCs will find a box containing $50, several cufflinks and rings, and two items of some importance—an ornate gold cross and a green, five-pointed, star-shaped piece of soapstone with an Elder Sign engraved on it (this is an Elder Stone). They will also notice that the door leading from Langley's bedroom to his study is partially open.

Langley's Study: This room is messy, mostly due to a lack of cleaning. If the room is searched, the investigators will find many books and papers scattered around. They will also find a pile of papers on Langley's desk that has some relevance to the case. Reading these papers will add 8% to the reading Investigator's Cthulhu Mythos skill and will cost 1D4 points of SAN. Those investigators who read the papers will find that the notes discuss Langley's attempts to travel into other dimensions, as well as some of the outlandish creatures he contacted on his trips.

Second Floor Bathroom: An ordinary looking bathroom.

Guest Bedrooms One, Two, and Three: These bedrooms obviously have not been used in many years; they are shut up and dark, and smell very musty.

ATMOSPHERE

While the investigators are in the Langley house, the referee should emphasize the eerie atmosphere of being in a murdered person's house. If the investigators spot the slime trail while looking around outside, the thought should occur to them that whatever killed Langley might still be inside the house! After all, there are no slime trails moving *away* from the house (the Space-Eater that killed Langley returned to fog form before the police arrived). A careful Keeper could really raise the blood pressures of the investigators as they *creep* from room to room looking for the killer.

EVENTS

Much of this adventure is linked to the unique life cycle of the Space-Eaters, so the adventure has deliberately been kept very open-ended. The Keeper will have to keep track of game time and the corresponding subcycle that the Space-Eaters are in. Also, the Keeper must keep tabs on where the Space-Eaters are so that he can indicate to the PCs how thick the fog is at the moment (and how close the players are to actually finding the Space-Eaters). If a Space-Eater binds to an NPC, the death of the NPC should be announced in the papers the next day. Or, if the Keeper feels additional clues are needed, the investigators could also run into an NPC being attacked, one who is experiencing the buzzing sound associated with the Space-Eaters' binding ability, or even one who has the "bullet hole" marking.

If more and more time passes and the PCs have not yet been able to solve the mystery behind the deaths, the Keeper may want to intervene more strongly and drop a few blatant clues. One possibility is to have an NPC relate to the investigators how he was able to drive off the "monster" when he "pulled the holy cross from around (his) breast and drove it away!" Ω

The adventure is inspired by "The Space-Eaters" by Frank Belknap Long, as collected in Tales of the Cthulhu Mythos, *edited by August Derleth, and published by both Arkham House and Ballantine Books.*

For background information for use with this scenario, see "The Space-Eaters" in this issue.

It Came from Beyond the Stars

Lester W. Smith

T he following scenario is intended as an introductory adventure for use with *It Came From The Late, Late, Late Show* (also called *ICFTLLLS* or *Late Show*). The scenario's difficulty is appropriate for beginning characters, and the film length is short enough for a new Director to explain the basics of the game to novice players, for those players to roll up Actors, and for the adventure to be run all in one evening.

For those people who might not own a copy of *Late Show*, with minimal trouble the adventure can be adapted to other role-playing systems. A short overview of *Late Show* is provided below to aid in this adaptation.

SYSTEM HIGHLIGHTS

It Came From The Late, Late, Late Show is a rather unusual roleplaying game in which players take on the roles of Actors who are themselves playing roles in a B-movie. In many ways, playing a *Late Show* adventure is much like playing in any other roleplaying game. That is, player characters wander about solving mysteries, engaging in combat, and interacting with nonplayer characters (it's as if you're acting from a script that hasn't yet been fully written). But the B-movie format adds on some things that other roleplaying games do not.

For one thing, if PCs die in a *Late Show* adventure, it is their movie characters who pass on, not the Actors themselves. This means that the Actors will still be available for later films (although it would be difficult for them to play in a sequel to the film they died in). Rather than suffer an actual loss of life, Actors lose out on opportunities for Fame, the most important attribute in the game. To help ensure their survival, however, *Late Show* characters have stunt doubles who can step in and take their places during combat, just before an adversary strikes. Stunt doubles have the same number of Survival Points (*Late Show* hit points) as the Actors they replace, and once those points have been used up, the doubles are unavailable until the next movie. As well, once Actors themselves start taking damage, makeup is available periodically to restore a few lost Survival Points.

FAME

Fame is a very important Actor characteristic in *Late Show*. In general, the higher your PC's Fame, the better your PC is treated. In fact, the higher his Fame, the better his wardrobe and the more equipment the props department is willing to let him sneak onto the set. This last is important because while the referee might not have planned for a character to have a compass—for example—in his pocket, the referee may be averse to wasting time and film by

stopping, taking the item away, and reshooting the scene, unless it is absolutely necessary.

Late Show also has rules for the PCs to sacrifice Fame points to cause a break in the film, allowing them a chance to avoid a particularly nasty situation as long as they begin the next scene with a plausible, though perhaps fantastic, excuse for their escape. As well, there are Fame-related rules for walking off the set and holding out for more favorable working conditions. ("I refuse to be killed so ignominiously. If I have to be stepped on by the giant lizard, I at least want to give a dying soliloquy.") While the first two uses of Fame mentioned above are difficult to simulate without the actual *Late Show* rules, most roleplaying games have some sort of PC characteristic that can be rolled against during contract renegotiation.

REFEREES

For referees—Directors, in *Late Show* parlance—*Late Show* offers some unusual benefits. If a Director decides a combat sequence is not working out well, for example, that sequence can be reshot to make it more exciting. Let us suppose, for instance, that the players are rolling really well and their Actors are beating your giant blood-sucking octopus black and blue, but the octopus isn't landing a blow on the Actors in return. No problem. Suddenly the Director shouts, "Cut! You call this a fight scene? This is terrible! Get some makeup out here and fix this monster. OK, let's try this scene again, without the weapons. Oh, and let's open with Daphne being grabbed by the beastie, so she won't be able to attack it. Places, everyone. Ready, roll 'em." The monster gets some Survival Points restored, and the PCs begin the fight from scratch (literally, in this case, as they are now bare-handed) and minus one party member. Of course, if the fight had been going *against* the PCs from the start, the Director might still have called for a retake, giving the PCs better weapons and maybe declaring that one of them begins the scene with an automatic hit on the monster.

Another benefit of *Late Show* is that it gives a perfectly reasonable excuse for a group to play a Wild West adventure one week, a horror scenario the next, a science-fiction adventure the following week, and so on. Because the players are using the same characters throughout, there is no lost sense of continuity, and it has been my experience that players get just as involved in a "film" adventure as they do in a "real" one. In some ways, they seem to appreciate a film adventure even better, partly because while they play the same Actor from film to film, they might be called upon to play different roles each time, and roleplaying B-movie Actors encourages players to ham it up.

ACTORS

Late Show Actors gain experience and improve in their skills, as in any other roleplaying game. In actuality, though, they are improving in their abilities to look and sound convincing in those skills (which, when you think about it, is much the same as what roleplayers themselves do). Of course, if a particular skill doesn't fit well in a particular adventure, the Director can declare by fiat that it will not be allowed.

RULES

Rules for skill use and combat in *Late Show* are extremely simple. This is one of the reasons the following adventure can be easily adapted to other game systems: There just aren't that many statistics to adapt.

In fact, one good way of using *Late Show* is as a movie roleplaying sourcebook for some other system, assuming the other system is generic enough to allow for films concerning different genres and time periods.

BASIC INFORMATION

This adventure is designed in the spirit of B-grade science-fiction films of the late 1960s and early 1970s. After your players as-

semble, explain that this rather short space adventure film is being created on a very low budget, and they will have to work with you to bring the most out of a limited amount of money. Because of this, costumes are cheap, and they will have only two sets to work with. The first is a small office, and the second, an outdoor lot. (Full descriptions of the sets are given with the appropriate scenes. It is suggested that details of those descriptions be given to the players only when each scene is reached.)

After explaining this much to the players, you can assign roles to their Actors.

FILM ROLES

It Came from Beyond the Stars is intended to be run with three to five players. If you are running it with a group of five, assign Actors to each of the roles listed below. Emma von Brauner, Bobby Mitchell, and Jack Warner must be played as PCs; others can be NPCs.

Dr. von Brauner: (A part for an Actor in his late forties to early seventies. Von Brauner's wardrobe consists of extremely thick bifocals, and a long, white lab coat over dark slacks and wing-tip shoes. The pockets of the coat are full of pens, pencils, rulers, slide rules, wire, and vacuum tubes.)

NASA laughed at you when you told them your study of ancient texts revealed that the newly discovered Bartleby's Comet was actually a spaceship launched millennia ago from the lost continent of Atlantis. So you decided to build your own rocket craft and fly to the comet to retrieve proof that would clear your name. Returning home from your painful meeting with NASA, you cashed in your life savings and immediately began construction of *Emma's Triumph*, as you've dubbed the rocket, in your own back yard.

You are a serious scientist, with a thick (ham it up) eastern European accent. Now that *Emma's Triumph* is almost ready to fly, you are not at all abashed to let the world know of your self-established mission to Bartleby's Comet.

Emma von Brauner: (A part for an actress in her mid twenties, or one who can pose as being that age. Emma is tall and very pretty, with a luxurious figure, but she hides her attractiveness behind reading glasses, a bun hairdo, and a baggy lab coat.)

You are a very attractive young woman, but most men you meet seem threatened by your height and your considerable intelligence. To avoid facing those facts, you have poured yourself into your father's work. But now a young newspaper reporter has entered your life. He came to interview your father about the rocket ship, and you find that he is too blindly optimistic about everything in general to ever notice how stupid you make him look by comparison. What's more, he seems to like you, too.

Note: By the end of the film, you *must* fall in love with Bobby Mitchell, the young reporter. Audiences expect it.

Bobby Mitchell: (A part for an Actor in his early twenties, or one who can pose as being that age. Bobby is an incessantly cheerful young fellow wearing penny loafers, tan corduroy slacks, and a blue letter sweater from his old college.)

Gee willikers, isn't life grand! Here you are just graduated from Parker City College, and already you've got a job on the *Parker City Gazette*. What's more, the chief has just sent you on your first assignment—to interview some old professor who's building a rocket ship at home. And he's even put you in charge of a photographer. Does it get any better than this?

Yes, it does. By golly, the old man with the rocket ship has a beautiful young daughter, and she seems to like you. She is kind of brainy, but heck, you don't mind. After all, you're an up-and-coming, hotshot reporter with the world by the tail.

Note: By the end of the film, you *must* fall in love with Emma von Brauner. Audiences eat that sort of thing up.

Jack Warner: (A part for an Actor in his mid thirties to late forties, or one who can pose as that age. Warner is a morose, worldly wise fellow dressed in a cheap suit and a fedora with a "Press" badge in the band. He carries a Brownie camera with an immense flash assembly slung around his neck.)

Jeez, the old man is really miffed at you this time. It isn't your fault you had a hangover the day the governor called a press conference and confessed to mass murdering a bus load of nuns. So you forgot to put film in the camera; anyone could've made that mistake. But now the chief has sent you off with a cub reporter on some fool's mission, and what's worse, he put the cub in charge.

Oh well, you figure the chief will calm down within a day or two. If not, you'll just have to talk with his wife. After all, isn't that what sisters are for?

Mortimer Aikens: (A part for an Actor near forty, or one who can pose as that age. Aikens is a soft-spoken man dressed in gray coveralls and paint-splattered work boots.)

You've been Dr. von Brauner's chief assistant for five years now—five years that have allowed you to remain close to his daughter Emma, the woman of your dreams. You are certain that she would accept your proposal—after all, she smiles at you every morning when you say "hello" (even though she smiles at everyone else as well, you're certain she does so only out of politeness to them). But you want to make something of yourself before you ask her to marry you, something she can be proud of. Unfortunately, you haven't yet figured out what that something should be.

Now this idiot reporter has shown up and started making a pitch for Emma, and you are speechless with rage. Can't she see what a fool he is? Maybe you'll have to warn him away, somehow.

Note: At some point during the course of this film, you *must* betray Bobby Mitchell, the cub reporter. For dramatic purposes, it should be during the middle to end of the film. But you must not make it obvious to Emma that you intend him harm. An example of an appropriate betrayal would be if Mitchell fell into quicksand and you handed him a branch but "accidently" let it slip when he pulled on it.

Mike Adams: (An Extra (NPC) who works as another assistant to Dr. von Brauner. Adams is a smooth-featured, bland sort of fellow in his early thirties.)

Butch Wayne: (Another Extra working as an assistant to Dr. von Brauner. Again, the bland sort who works well as stage dressing, without drawing attention away from the Actors. One point the Director should realize from the start, however, is that Wayne is under the hypnotic control of the movie's villain.)

THE VILLAIN

Dr. von Brauner is correct in his theory that Bartleby's Comet is actually a spacecraft launched millennia ago from the ancient lost continent of Atlantis. Little does the doctor (or any of the other cast members, for that matter) know, however, that the craft serves as a celestial prison cell for an evil, disembodied, psionic brain. Unable to destroy the brain, the ancient Atlanteans built a temple upon the comet, locked the brain inside, and launched it into the depths of interstellar space, where the brain could do no more harm.

But the brain has been collecting space junk for the past several thousand years and has finally assembled enough to construct a rocket engine, with which it has returned to the solar system to have vengeance upon humans. Unfortunately, the engine burned out just before the brain could make its last course correction. Now, instead of heading directly for Earth, the comet will pass closely by that planet before going on to plunge into the sun. The millennia of hard work with no human thought for sustenance have weakened the brain to the extent that such a fate would now destroy it. Discovering telepathically that Dr. von Brauner intended a trip to the comet, the brain has taken over the mind of von Brauner's weakest willed assistant, Butch Wayne, to ensure that the launch will take place at the optimum time.

Stats for the brain are as given on page 39 of *Late Show*, but you may wish to drop the damage it does down to 25 or 30 points, rather than 50. (If you are using some other system, just make sure the brain has telekinetic powers and telepathic control, and that it can give your PCs a decent fight.)

LATE, LATE, LATE SHOW

SCENES

In places, particular Actors should be instructed to deliver particular lines—this is part of the nature of movie roleplaying. But Actors should be encouraged to ad lib from these basic lines as well.

It is suggested that the referee read through all the scenes before play. And feel free to modify events as you see fit, especially once things are well underway. Remember, the ostensible purpose of the scenario is to create an entertaining film.

Scene I

Location: Just outside the door to the editor's office of the *Parker City Gazette*. Bobby Mitchell, cub reporter, has just exited the office when he meets Jack Warner, photographer, outside and explains the assignment given them by the *Gazette*'s editor.

Script: The Director should warn the Actor playing Mitchell not to have the door open very far when the camera starts rolling because the interior of the office is actually the set for the control room of von Brauner's rocket. Also, it should be explained to the Mitchell and Warner Actors that their dialogue is intended to set the scene for the audience, revealing basic information upon which the rest of the plot will be built. Don't be afraid to make them shoot the scene over a few times until you are satisfied that goal has been met.

In actuality, the main purpose of this scene is to provide the Director with a chance to demonstrate what roleplaying an Actor who is roleplaying a movie character is all about. The Mitchell and Warner Actors will serve as guinea pigs for the other cast members to watch. As the Director chides them to keep the door closed and to think about the audience, the dual nature of the game will begin to set in. Besides, the bit about the door is good for the session's first laughs.

Scene II

Location: Interior of the rocket ship's control room. This room has been paneled in tin sheeting, with small circular holes left over the windows to represent portholes. It contains three silver-painted, plywood control panels, with old dials, switches, and levers interspersed with Christmas-tree lights across the tops and fronts. A half-dozen bar stools have been fitted with automobile seat belts to serve as futuristic-looking acceleration couches.

Script: Inside the control room, Dr. von Brauner, his daughter Emma, Mortimer Aikens, and the doctor's other two assistants are running through a series of last-minute tests to ensure that the ship is ready to fly. Mitchell and Warner enter (past the camera, which is set in the doorway to ensure the *Parker City Gazette* stencil on the door doesn't show) and introduce themselves. Dr. von Brauner—or Emma, if no one is playing the doctor—explains the Atlantis theory to the newspapermen. Mitchell ogles Emma. Aikens stares murderously at Mitchell. Warner snaps pictures of everything (the Director should warn him to keep the flash away from the movie camera). And the assistants work blithely away in the background. Everyone should be encouraged to ham it up.

Suddenly, all of this activity is interrupted by a thunderous roar,

and the rocket begins to take off! No one seems to know why it has happened (while everyone was busy talking, Butch Wayne pushed the launch button, but this should be kept secret from the Actors). Everyone rushes for acceleration couches, of which there are two too few, so someone will be forced to endure the ride on the hard floor. After a few minutes, though, the rocket reaches space, the engine cuts out automatically, and the people on the floor discover that they have survived with minor bruises.

Next, the Director should run three special effects. The first is zero-G. For this effect, one of the Actors should ask another for some object, such as a pencil, and the Director should float it through the air while the Actors fake surprise for the camera. Of course, the Actors themselves remain firmly rooted to the floor, as do the stools, control panels, and anything else that is lying around loose. After all, this *is* a very low budget movie.

The second special effect is an asteroid storm. One of the characters at a control panel should suddenly look up and say, "Brace yourselves, everybody; we're about to enter an asteroid field!" While the Actors all act frightened, people hidden behind the tin panelling begin banging on it with hammers, causing an awful racket and leaving big dents in the metal. After a few moments, however, the asteroid field is passed, and the banging stops.

The third, and final, special effect concerns life support. Several of the Actors should begin to nod off, while another tries unsuccessfully to light a pipe or cigarette. Suddenly the Actor with the malfunctioning lighter leaps up and cries, "The air is going bad!" at which point one of the others (someone who has worked on the rocket) answers, "The life support must be malfunctioning!" Immediately thereafter, a red light begins flashing and a siren goes off, while everyone rushes about grabbing tools and attempting to solve the problem. Of course, they succeed without any casualties.

A short time later, the doctor announces, "We're approaching Bartleby's Comet. Everyone brace yourself for landing." The cameraman shimmies the camera to simulate the firing of the rocket engine once again, and when he stops, Aikens and the other two assistants get out space suits (simulated by silverized ski outfits with welding helmets), while everyone else crowds around the portholes for a view of the comet's surface. To the group's amazement, grass and trees wave in a gentle breeze outside.

"Of course," the professor exclaims, smacking his forehead with one palm, "As the comet approaches the sun, gasses boil off to create its tail, and obviously they've also formed a breathable atmosphere."

"It's just as well," Emma adds. "We didn't have enough space suits for everyone on board."

The group heads for the air lock (walking toward the camera, which begins a fade to black).

Scene III

Location: The surface of the comet. This scene is shot in the outdoor lot using a cheap red filter on the camera to create an otherworldly look. The Actors and Extras are gathered at the base of the rocket, of which the audience can see only a step ladder to the left and a single giant tailfin (silver-painted canvas stretched over a two-by-four framework) across the background to center and right. (In fact, other than a tiny model for moving shots, the ladder and fin are all of the rocket that actually exists on this set.) Also, during this scene, the Actors should be encouraged to exaggerate their motions to indicate the comet's low gravity.

Script: While the Actors stand about and try to portray excitement, the camera pans around, then closes up on whoever is standing nearest the tail fin. A sheet metal screw falls from above, bouncing off this Actor's head, followed by another, then another, and so on, until the Actor looks upward. Suddenly, that Actor realizes that the fin is coming unscrewed

from the rocket, with only one screw remaining. The group has only seconds in which to run away before the last screw comes out, causing the fin to fall toward the Actors, while the rocket, without its support, crashes sideways to the ground! (If no one is playing the doctor, this is an excellent point at which to get rid of him. Have him run to the rocket, apparently in an attempt to hold it up with his bare hands, only to be crushed beneath it when it falls.)

This disassembly should prove to be something of a mystery to the group. Investigation will reveal that the screws are not stripped but instead were somehow unscrewed (telekinetically, by the disembodied brain, although the Actors have no way of knowing this yet). Examination of the rocket will reveal that it is still spaceworthy, if only some way could be devised to get it off the ground. At this point, someone in the group notices that the rocket has fallen to point directly toward a gently sloped hill, which means that it might be possible to launch it horizontally, using the hill to arc it skyward. For this plan to succeed, however, skis must be constructed on the nose of the ship, using the lost fin for material. If none of the Actors suggest this plan, the Director can have an Extra do so. Remember, because the fin and ladder are all that exist of the rocket on this set, all of this examination actually takes place off camera, with the involved Actors coming back to the ladder to explain things to the rest of the group.

Before the construction can be finished, however, night falls, and it is time for the camp fire scene.

Scene IV

Location: Night scene (dark lens filter) of Actors around a campfire.

Script: This is a good opportunity for Emma and Bobby to snuggle while one of the other Actors sings some cheesy love song. While the song progresses, players are encouraged to wander off for snacks, etc., which is exactly what an audience would do at this point. After the song is over, everyone settles down to sleep, and the camera fades to black.

Scene V

Location: Same as Scenes III and IV.

Script: Dawn breaks (don't forget to remove the dark lens filter) on the party clustered around the burned-out fire. Suddenly, someone notices that hull panels have been removed from one side of the ship, and the engine is missing. Immediately thereafter, someone else notices that Butch Wayne is gone, and Mike Adams is dead, although there is not a mark on him. It is obvious that Wayne could not have carried the whole rocket engine off by himself, and there wasn't time for him to have disassembled it into conveniently sized parts. (Only the Director knows that the giant, disembodied brain has telekinetically stolen the engine, sucked the mental energy completely out of Adams—leaving him brain dead—and telepathically commanded Wayne to come reassemble the engine at the brain's hiding place.) The Actors have little choice but to explore the comet, looking for their engine. There are three laser pistols for them to take along.

If they are trying to act "appropriately stupid," as *Late Show* puts it, the Actors will likely split up and search separately. The Director should switch the camera from one Actor to the next, going around the table, using this time for rolls against twisted ankles, falls into pools of bubbling liquid or quicksand, and the like. This is an excellent opportunity to do away with any Extras, allowing the Director to concentrate upon the Actors through the rest of the film.

Eventually, someone should make a successful Search (or equivalent talent) roll. That Actor spots an ancient Atlantean temple on a mountain top (it is, of course, a painted backdrop, and looks something like an Aztec temple, but surmounted with a pointed minaret). That person may then gather the rest of the group back

together for an assault on the temple. If not, the Director can get everyone else pointed in the right direction by telling them they see their rocket's radio assembly flying by high overhead, and when they follow it, it leads them to the temple. In either case, the entire party should reach the temple at the same time.

Scene VI

Location: Interior of the converted office, once again. This time representing the interior of the Atlantean temple (the control panels and bar stools have been removed). Inside the room, Butch Wayne is wiring a paper mache engine assembly to one wall when the Actors enter. (He is completely under the mental control of the disembodied brain, which means he acts like a zombie.)

Script: Undoubtedly, the Actors will rush to halt Wayne's work. But a force field stops them about a yard away, and a disembodied voice suddenly echoes around the room—the voice of the giant, disembodied, psionic brain monster from ancient Atlantis. "You fools," the voice says, "You have fallen into my trap." The brain explains how unbeatable it was in ancient Atlantis, how the ancient Atlanteans finally imprisoned it on this comet and sent it into the darkness between the stars, how it collected junk to build a rocket engine and head back for the solar system, how the engine burned out before the last course adjustment toward Earth could be made, how the comet is now headed for the sun, how the brain devoured Adams' mind to gain the necessary power for telekinetically stealing the Actors' rocket engine to turn the comet back toward Earth, and how the brain will devour all thought on Earth thus gaining its revenge on humans. Of course, the brain adds, the Actors will be the first to succumb to its mental hunger.

Then the brain floats into room, from behind the camera. It is the size of a go-cart, with pulsing veins in various locations and buggy eyes protruding from its front. The Actors should make a Terror roll (or your system's equivalent), then combat begins. The brain tosses things at the Actors telekinetically or tries to take over the mind of a terrified Actor to make that Actor fight against the others. During the combat, the brain drops its control of Wayne as well as the force field protecting him. The Director can use Wayne to help the brain, if desired, or have him cower next to the rocket engine.

Eventually, the Actors should defeat the brain (it has been weakened from centuries of starving in space), with at least Emma and Bobby surviving. Tearful overacting is encouraged if any of the Actors have died, with the camera fading to black.

Scene VII

Location: Camera opens on a view of a rocket model, with skis attached to the nose, then switches to the interior of the rocket's control room, with surviving Actors belting into the bar stools (which have been returned, along with the control panels).

Script: Emma should tell Bobby that everything is ready for takeoff, explaining for the audience's benefit that the engine fitted back into the rocket very nicely and that the nose skis will give the exact trajectory necessary to return to Earth. Emma and Bobby mug it up for the camera, then the rocket model is shown against a backdrop of stars, with a paper plate painted like the Earth hanging dead ahead. Ω

If you are interested in Late Show *and cannot obtain a copy through your local game store, you can write to Stellar Games at PO Box 156, Swanton, OH 43558.*

Imperial Research Station 13

Lester W. Smith

"Lift-off in 25 seconds! Get your behinds on board and seal that hatch!"

"I'll take that aisle seat, if you please."

"Where do we stow our baggage?"

"Where's the head?"

"Where did you collect this mob?"

"Just can the wisecracks and pay attention to that starboard repulsorlift. It's been running kinda spotty."

"I've got a bad feeling about this trip."

"Yeah? Well maybe you'd rather wait around for the Imperials to land?"

"Point taken. I'll pay attention to the starboard repulsorlift."

"All right, everyone, this is your captain speaking. You'd best buckle in tight—it looks like we're in for a very bumpy ride."

"I mperial Research Station 13" is a special Halloween adventure for the *Star Wars* roleplaying game, recommended as a diversion from (not a part of) your normal campaign. Players take on the roles of refugees thrown together on a private vessel fleeing an Imperial invasion of the Tegrat system—the PCs' only relation is that they all ended up on the same ship. Part of the fun and mystery of this adventure is involved in the PCs getting to know one another on their voyage.

PLAYERS' INTRODUCTION

Over the past several months, the Empire has been steadily increasing its presence in your section of the galaxy, sweeping from system to system in a concerted attempt to root out pockets of Rebel activity. As this wave of Imperial attention rolls along, another wave precedes it, a wave consisting not only of fleeing Rebels, but also of displaced citizenry. Some of these citizens are underworld figures who have decided things are becoming too hot to remain profitable. But many are honest business people whose lives have been disrupted by Imperial seizure of property and goods, or whose clienteles have moved on to other worlds, ahead of the influx of Imperial troops.

For whatever reason, you have found yourself part of that wave of displaced people. Most recently, you have been on the planet Tegrat, seeking transportation to some other portion of the galaxy. Just hours ago, you finally clinched a deal with a cargo carrier headed for Tatooine, a planet he

characterized as an immigrant's paradise. The ship is scheduled to lift off just after noon.

But now news reports reveal that Imperial vessels have entered the system. People are streaming toward the spaceport, as ship after ship lifts off ahead of schedule. You join the throng racing for the spaceport, determined not to miss your ride off-planet.

REFEREE'S INFORMATION

This adventure is intentionally deadly, which means it is unlikely that any of the PCs involved will survive, a fact which could sour things if you use the normal PCs the players have become attached to. As well, some of the mystery and fear to be experienced in the adventure relies upon the PCs not knowing one another. So have your players choose new PCs for this adventure. Also, take each player aside for a few minutes, to ask each to explain how he perceives his new character. As no one will know what you have said to the other players in private, the players will have no way of knowing if they can fully trust one another or if you have placed a wolf among the sheep.

The PCs' transport is a stock light freighter which requires a crew of two, but these two characters should not know each other any better than the other characters do. There are two ways to ensure this. One is to explain that the captain has recently lost a copilot and has just hired on someone new. Alternatively, the regular copilot might have failed to show up for takeoff, leaving one of the passengers to fill in. (Of course, the captain fully intends to return for the original copilot once the Imperials have moved on, most likely in a few weeks.)

Synopsis: With the Imperials invading the planet Tegrat, refugees begin racing off-planet. In one tiny cargo vessel, the *Sidewinder*, a motley assortment of previously unacquainted creatures (the PCs) find themselves thrown together in their attempt to escape. The *Sidewinder* lifts off on the heels of a multitude of other ships evacuating the planet, only to encounter a wave of TIE fighters, which makes its jump to hyperspace more troublesome.

After making the jump, the PCs spend a few days in hyperspace getting to know one another, but this is interrupted when the hyperdrive cutout suddenly operates, dropping them into realspace right next to an Imperial escort frigate that has been con-

verted to an immense laboratory facility. The PCs' vessel is drawn in by tractor beams, but it is not boarded.

Unknown to the PCs, the laboratory ship has served as the site of experiments to tap into the dark side of the Force, experiments that created a partly sapient, fog-like entity that feeds upon the life force of other sapient creatures. All that remains of the original crew is one desiccated human whose dead body has been possessed by the dark side creature. Using knowledge contained in that body's dead brain, the creature has reprogrammed the ship's R2 and 3PO droids, making of them an army of warrior slaves. But even with the aid of these droids, the creature is unable to fly the frigate because the last of the crewmembers disabled its drives before they died. The creature needs the PCs' ship in order to escape to populated planets before it grows so weak that it can no longer maintain its existence. It hopes to lure the PCs deep into the frigate, then take over the *Sidewinder* before they can prevent its escape. Rather than make an armed boarding attack on the PCs' vessel, then, the creature and its army of droids lie in wait for the PCs to come to them.

On board the *Sidewinder*, the PCs have a limited food supply. As well, they discover that they cannot repair their vessel while the tractor beams remain on it. So they have no choice but to enter the frigate, expecting to find Imperial troops. Instead, they encounter armed resistance from the reprogrammed droids. Eventually, they discover the desiccated "human" leading the droids, and when they shoot him, the dark side creature streams out, takes over one of the PCs, and races back toward the *Sidewinder*, where it locks itself in with a couple of droids and begins repairs.

If the PCs are not careful, the creature will escape in their ship to bring horror to the population of planet after planet. The only way to destroy it is to starve it, which entails stranding it. Because the creature can take possession of whoever it wishes, the PCs can only accomplish this by destroying their own vessel and stranding themselves.

EPISODE ONE

The PCs assemble at the *Sidewinder*, a stock light freighter on which they have booked passage. The crewmembers (whether PCs or NPCs) work feverishly to get everyone aboard and everything dogged down before takeoff. Then, with a curt notification to the control tower, which in the general confusion doesn't even reply, the *Sidewinder* roars off planet and races for a hyperspace jump point, on its way to Tatooine.

But several waves of TIE fighters precede the Imperial capital ships approaching Tegrat, and they stand between the multitudinous refugee vessels and their jump points. 1D6÷2 TIE

fighters focus their attention on the *Sidewinder*, and a short battle is fought while the freighter does its final calculations for the jump. When the crewmembers decide it is time to initiate the jump to hyperspace, the referee should make their Astrogation roll in secret (to set things up for episode three).

EPISODE TWO

After this fast-paced introduction to the adventure, the PCs are given some time to get to know one another somewhat the first few days of hyperspace travel. The referee should encourage them to size one another up, perhaps developing budding friendships because of the danger they have faced together, perhaps remaining suspicious of one another, as they see fit.

One external factor that might affect their interaction is that if the ship was hit more than once during its escape from the Tegrat system, the referee should inform the players that the heating system is malfunctioning somewhat, leaving the interior very cold. The only heavy articles of clothing on the vessel are two atmosphere suits for the crew; everyone else will have to make do by wrapping up in extra blankets.

The referee should allow this PC interaction to go on for as long as people are having fun with it. When things begin to lag, however, begin the next episode.

EPISODE THREE

On the fourth day of travel, the hyperdrive cutout activates, damaging the engines in the process. Outside, the PCs spot the mass that apparently caused the cutout, an Imperial escort frigate (see page 31 of the *Star Wars Sourcebook* for escort frigate stats). The frigate has been modified somewhat, with extra lab facilities built out along its sides, and it is labeled simply "13."

Although the vessel appears to be deserted (most of its running lights are off, and it radiates very little heat from the power plants), it locks onto the *Sidewinder* with its twin tractor beams and begins drawing the freighter in, firing one turbolaser to further disable the ship if necessary (in which case it hits with remarkable precision). Eventually, the *Sidewinder* is docked to the side of the frigate, but no one attempts to board the freighter.

The PCs now have a couple of problems to solve. Their hyperdrive engines are damaged (and possibly their sublight engines, if the referee deemed that necessary to disable the freighter). When the PCs attempt to conduct repairs, they learn that the tractor beams are creating a flux in the drive systems, which makes diagnostics impossible. In other words, to repair their ship, they will first have to shut down the tractor beams. As well, their food and water are in limited supply, which means that they cannot simply wait here indefinitely, even if they were of

a mind to. (It is likely that the PCs expect more Imperial ships to show up before long. After all, who would leave an Imperial escort frigate just floating, abandoned, in space?) The upshot, then, is that the PCs will have to enter the Imperial ship and shut down the tractor beams.

EPISODE FOUR

An escort frigate is a huge vessel, and this one has been added to extensively. It is not likely that anyone not stationed on such a vessel would have an accurate knowledge of its layout. In other words, there is no map for this part of the adventure. The referee need only describe to the players that their characters are traversing a maze of corridors. To find their way about on the vessel, the PCs will have to consult a wall terminal for a ship's directory, call up the location of the tractor beam generators, then note the corridors and turbolifts to use to get there.

As the PCs are making their way through the ship, they find themselves sniped at by droids—R2 and 3PO units that have been reprogrammed for combat. The R2 units have a Blaster skill of 3D and are carrying blaster pistols; the 3PO units have a Blaster skill of 2D+1 and are carrying blaster rifles. There are virtually unlimited numbers of each type, but they only attack in ones and twos, their purpose being not so much to kill the PCs as to decoy them deep into the frigate. Note that although the droids are armed and dangerous, the referee can also play up the black humor in their attacks. That is, as the PCs return fire on these droids, they turn and flee, R2 units whistling and twirping madly as they trundle around corners or down side passages, and 3PO units crying out such things as "Oh my stars and garters!"—in very proper English—as they run away.

Eventually, after chasing these mechanical snipers for some time, the PCs come to a lab room holding six droids and a tall, emaciated human. (The referee should have this encounter take place when the players begin to weary of being sniped at.) The human takes cover while the PCs battle the droids. Then, after all the droids are destroyed, he stands up to run away. If the PCs shoot him, he falls over on the first hit. As he falls, he strikes his head, which breaks apart in a shower of dry, crusty fragments. If they do not shoot him, but capture him instead, he falls over when first touched, with the same results.

EPISODE FIVE

As the PCs look on, horrified, a black mist rises from the body, a mist that consists of part of the very essence of the dark side of the Force (see the referee's synopsis for details). If anyone has remained on the

Sidewinder, the mist rushes back toward that vessel, intending to enter and possess the body. If, instead, all of the PCs have boarded the frigate, the mist will enter and possess the PC closest to the freighter, who will then run back to the ship. In either case, the referee should run this as a chase scene, with armed droids attempting to block the PCs from reaching the cargo ship before the mist does.

Once a possessed character reaches the *Sidewinder*, he will lock the other PCs out, then make a call to droids in the tractor beam control rooms, ordering them to shut the beams down. Next, the possessed PC will launch off from the frigate, using sublight drives if they are operational, or simply drifting free if they are not. After that, the PC spends whatever time is necessary to repair the freighter's hyperspace engines, planning to escape to some populated region of the galaxy. The PCs' best means of preventing this is to use the frigate's weapons to destroy the *Sidewinder* before it can escape, thereby stranding the creature, as well as themselves. If stranded, the creature will eventually starve to death. Unfortunately, this will only happen after it has first consumed the life force of each of the PCs stranded with it (each character it drains will give it about one month of continued existence). By stranding the creature, then, the PCs will have given their own lives in order to save millions elsewhere—a heroic, if horrific, sacrifice.

Special Note: Only PCs with the Force skill "Control" have any hope of avoiding possession by the dark side creature. The difficulty number for this attempt is 20, or 15 for characters with the specific Control power "Force of Will," as described in the *Star Wars Rules Companion*, page 65.

Optional Alternate Ending: Obviously, the outcome described above is a far cry from the normal space operatic tenor encouraged in the *Star Wars* roleplaying game. Instead of leaving the PCs to this dark fate, you can have a Rebel ship with a strongly Force-oriented NPC arrive before the dark side creature takes its second victim. After destroying the creature's physical manifestation, that NPC could then explain to the PCs that he sensed the disturbance in the Force and came to investigate. Their heroic self-sacrifice would thus be rewarded in a way more fitting with the nature of the *Star Wars* milieu. Of course, then you have to award skill points. Ω

CHALLENGE Reviews

Ravenloft

TSR, Inc. $18.00.
Design: Bruce Nesmith with Andria Hayday
Boxed set. Includes one 144-page rulebook; four large, color maps; 24 color, cardstock sheets of tables and locations; and one transparent map overlay.
Requires AD&D rules (second edition preferred).

The *Ravenloft* boxed set is a horror roleplaying setting with two major distinctions that set it apart from other horror roleplaying games. The first is that *Ravenloft* is intended for use with *AD&D*, allowing gamers familiar with those rules to adapt their fantasy roleplaying to horror. Thus, traditional horror creatures such as vampires and zombies are once again able to instill feelings of terror in *AD&D* characters, effects that tend to be ignored by the fantasy rules. *Ravenloft*'s second major distinction is that it sets out to convey a Gothic horror setting, reaching back to Mary Shelley, Bram Stoker, and E. A. Poe for its roots, rather than concerning itself with the modern or Lovecraftian horror of most horror roleplaying games. That Gothic horror setting is conveyed well in *Ravenloft*. There are rules for Gypsies, fortunetelling, and curses—all essential elements of Gothic horror—as well as for werebeasts, vampires, and the effects of fear and horror. Also, there is ample aid to referees—from rules for adapting characters to this horror setting to advice for making the most of the Gothic mood.

All of this is fit into a logical background that *Ravenloft* calls the "Demiplane of Dread." That background is described in sufficient detail, with a multitude of locations and denizens, to support a long-standing campaign. And the color art on the box cover and 24 cardstock sheets, as well as the black-and-white art of the book, convey the atmosphere necessary for such a campaign. It is difficult to think of anything to complain about concerning *Ravenloft*. About the only criticism is that because it is intended as an alternate world for *AD&D*, it retains elements of fantasy that are not normal for Gothic horror. But those elements are there to allow fantasy characters to wander into the realm of *Ravenloft*, not to insist that all campaigns use them. It would seem easy enough to tone down the fantasy elements and emphasize those of Gothic horror. In conclusion, then, the *Ravenloft*

boxed set makes an excellent addition to *AD&D*, as well as providing a viable alternative to other horror roleplaying games.

At Your Door

Chaosium, Inc. $17.95.
Design: L. N. Isynwill, Herbert Hike, Mark Morrison, Barbara Manui, Chris Adams, Scott D. Aniolowski, Lee Gibbons, and Earl Geier.
178-page book.
Requires *Call of Cthulhu Now* rules

At Your Door is a collection of modern-day adventures for use with *Cthulhu Now*. The adventures can be run either individually, ignoring the interconnections among them, or collectively in one long, interwoven campaign. The adventures are imaginative, with lots of detail to involve players deeply in the course of events. Illustrations provided throughout are intended not merely for referee use, but as play aids as well. *At Your Door* includes also just under three dozen player handouts, which are reproduced in a convenient appendix at the end. While the campaign is truly horrific, and player character losses are likely to be high, a rationale allows new PCs to benefit from the discoveries of their unfortunate predecessors.

The adventures in the campaign need not be run in a linear progression. In fact, the players may begin one adventure, find clues that lead them into another, return to an earlier adventure for a short while, and so on. This allows players to feel that their choices are open-ended, while still providing all the information a referee needs to deal with their actions, assuming the referee has become familiar with the book.

At Your Door's one problem worth noting is that the authors often use inappropriately inflated language, thereby obscuring their meaning. A professor of mine once suggested that in order to avoid the appearance of snobbery, we should be very picky about our own usage of language but very forgiving of others. Unfortunately, there are times when inappropriate language usage interferes with clear communication, and I think *At Your Door* suffers from that problem. At the risk of seeming snobbish, then, let me cite a pair of examples. In "A Little Secret for the Keeper," at the bottom of page 13, the authors summarize a fictitious document titled "Ending History." In their summary, is the following text: "Left to its predilections, humanity will unfortunately recapitulate its arrogant and disastrous growth again and again." Note that this text is not a quote from the fictitious document, but merely a summation of the fictitious author's intent. As summation, it is ponderous. But the real

problem is with the use of the word "recapitulate." A person can recapitulate an argument, restating it in brief to emphasize the main points. An individual can recapitulate the history of his or her race, acting out in one life a summation of the race's experiences. But a race cannot recapitulate its own history; it must "repeat" it. In the quotation above, "repeat" is exactly correct, while "recapitulate" must be stretched out of shape to fit. One can only assume that it is evidence of pretentious language usage, especially considering that two paragraphs earlier the authors make the mistake of using "whoever"—a subject pronoun—instead of "whomever"—an object pronoun.

Granted, these two examples may seem niggling. But the problem is that sections of the text are so full of such things, including long, convoluted sentences tacked together by unnecessary semicolons, that the reader can hardly help thinking the authors are working to impress rather than communicate. Or that they are swept away by their own language use. (An intentional sentence fragment, as is this one.) But enough of this. Do I recommend *At Your Door*? Absolutely. It is very imaginative and is generally designed to make refereeing as easy as possible. It ought to be a lot of fun to play. Just be prepared to wade through some obtuse passages.

Waaargh the Orks!

Games Workshop. $24.95 (U.S.).
Design: **Nigel Stillman and Bryan Ansell.**
Stories: **William King**
Two-hole-punched, unbound game book in cardboard sleeve. 104 pages.
For gamemasters and players.
May 1990.

Waaargh the Orks! is Games Workshop's sourcebook concerning the background and culture of the Orkoid space races in the universe of *Warhammer 40,000 Rogue Trader*.

Waaargh the Orks! is a compendium of whimsically presented information on Orkoids, covering subjects from biology to space travel. Some of the articles have already been published in *White Dwarf* magazine.

The format is both interesting and entertaining. Facts about the Orks and their smaller subject kindred (Gretchin and Snotlings) are presented in an easily digested style, lavishly illustrated by Games Workshop's stable of artists. Stories of Ork fiction interrupt the factual writing at irregu-

lar but frequent intervals. Both stories and information are often amusing in their portrayal of Ork life.

'Ere yoo stoopid reviewin' git! Shaddup an' tell 'em what's in da book, den!

Waaargh the Orks! starts like one of the old Traveller alien modules, explaining Orkoid physiology, including a plausible explanation for why they've got green skin (symbiotic algae in their skin layers, which also makes them tougher). From there it diverges to cover the origin of the Orks, created as a slave race by a super-intelligent race of smaller Orkoids. This lost race, the Brainboyz, gained their intellect from a mind-enhancing fungus. Naturally, the Orks started eating it, gained a momentary boost, and rebelled. Unfortunately for future prospects of smart Orks, they forgot to continue cultivation of the fungus—when it died out, so did the Ork race's chances of acquiring a high IQ. The Brainboyz, deprived of the symbiotic fungus, degenerated to Snotlings, arguably the least intelligent Orkoids in existence.

Ork society and social order is simple: Orks live in gangs composed of members of different clans. These clans coexist in peace (more or less), working together as a wargang when they go to war. Ork social order divides gang members into a minimal pecking order, with Da Boss at the top, Nobz (elite, experienced warriors) next, and Boyz (regular Orks) as a numerous "middle class." Gretchin and Snotlings make up a lower class of servitors. Specialist castes, such as the torturer/physician Painboyz, the Snotling-seller Runtherdz, the captive psychic Weirdboyz and the technician Mekaniaks rank differently, occupying a place somewhere between Boyz and Nobz.

White Dwarf articles on the clans and their symbols are included for use in figure painting, along with new material on back-banners and Ork glyph-script, which passes for their written language (a language easy enough for a race of near-illiterates to read).

Watch it! I can't read what yer sez dere, but I knows a sneer when I 'ears one. Keep to da book.

Ork customs and manners (the former beastly and the latter nonexistent) can be gleaned from the stories and text. Orks live simple lives of thoughtless loafing alternating with mindless violence, unfettered by concepts such as law, social responsibility, and "keeping up with the Joneses." They are a race without *angst*, a condition which renders them inviolate by the soul-eating warp creatures that curse the *Warhammer 40,000* universe. To an Ork, existence is its own explanation. They can't understand the idea of asking, "Why do I exist? What am I here for?"—a common concept shared by other races. If an Ork can't shoot it or eat it, he ignores it.

Since Orks use technology roughly similar to most of the other races in *Warhammer 40,000,* technology is not detailed. Relations with other races are given minor treatment, as appropriate—Orks don't care much for other races, so they don't think much about them. And in truth, other races try not to think much about Orks, if they can—unless the cry of "Waaa-Ork!" rises again.

Dat's it! Enuf ov dis stoopid 'uman stuff about kustoms an' all dat. Tell 'em about Waaa-Ork!

Infrequently, an Ork Mekaniak undergoes a revelation which triggers a desire to build—to construct an image of the Ork gods, Gork and Mork. This image is always a monster warmachine, an embodiment of the gods' qualities of cheerful, mindless violence. Orks call them Gargants. The machines are also the Orks' answer to the human and Eldar Titans—in the story about a Waaa-Ork, the mek who starts it all is inspired by the sight of one of these eight-story warmecha.

Sometimes, the Waaa-Ork spirit spreads, a pseudo-psionic event that infects Ork-kind across the stars. Clans stop fighting. Everyone feels good and exhilarated for no reason. Gargant-building projects spring up without intent, and the Orks ready for war. Though it can take several centuries to build to a climax, a Waaa-Ork always ends in the Orks spilling out across the galaxy to blast, burn, destroy and conquer in a racial lemming-stampede of violence.

Awright, awright! Enuf ov dis gibberin'; I'm gettin' bored sittin' 'ere wiv noffin' ter do. Wrap it up an' letz go get some grub. I fancy a nice, juicy squig onna stick about now.

EVALUATION

Waaargh the Orks! paints a lovely picture of an unlovely race. It's a great pity there's no *Warhammer 40,000 Rogue Trader* roleplaying game—Orks make perfect player characters. They don't like rules; they love heavy armament; they like doing what they want to do when they want to do it; and they don't take cheek from anyone. In their own way, they are happy, well adjusted homicidal goons, interested in a good time and lots of gunplay. As it stands, commanding an Ork force in *Warhammer 40,000* wargaming has one unique advantage: Stupid tactical errors can be passed off as "faithful roleplaying." Not that Orks are always stupid. Often they're just as canny as anyone else, and are quite heavily armed. And there are usually *lots* of them. For those people interested in roleplaying *Warhammer 40,000's* space Orks or those wanting background data on Orks or on the universe in general, *Waaargh the Orks!* is very helpful and quite amusing.

Yer. Disun's got nary a rule innit. If yer wants da rulez, yer gotz ter get dat stuty magazine. Dat's where da rulez iz.

Waaargh the Orks! contains not one rule for *Warhammer 40,000 Rogue Trader.* Rules for Ork army lists, vehicles and specialist castes are only printed in issues of *White Dwarf.* So far, five separate articles about Ork organization and gear have been published that are not repeated in *Waaargh the Orks!* These articles concern data for warmachines, the army list, and the rules for Weirdboy psionics. Only the last two are in issues new enough to be found easily—fortunately, they are the most important. The army list is necessary (and formidable—Orks have a hero/champion percentage of up to 37%, contrasted with the normal average of 15-20%), and the Weirdboy powers article is important if you're going to use Ork psykers. Their articles are in print in *White Dwarf* 123 and 124, respectively. Complete rules for Orks in *Warhammer 40,000* are being gathered for *Waaargh the Orks! II,* the companion volume to be released in the future.

Waaargh the Orks! would have been a much better supplement if the Games Workshop folks had taken a little more time on it, doubled the size of the book to include all of the rules, added more illustrations, hardbound it, and raised the price $10, making it the size, price and content of a regular book. As it stands, *Waaargh the Orks!* is too much money for too little product.

If you're looking for source material, or are just interested in a very expensive reading book, check out *Waaargh the Orks!* If you're looking for Ork rules, get issues 123 and 124 of *White Dwarf* and wait for *Waaargh the Orks! II*—and hope the rules won't change too much in the meantime. Ω

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TRAVELLER/MegaTraveller pen pals. We also offer a library service for **Traveller/MegaTraveller** hard-to-get items. For more information, you can contact Keith Collins, the **Traveller** Library (UK), 10 Lancaster Ave., Dawley, Telford, Shropshire, TF4 3RH, ENGLAND. (44)

FANZINES

THE ADJUTANT, the Imperium's only newszine published for army, marine, and mercenary characters. $1.50 for a sample isse $9 for a six-issue, one-year subscription. Write to *The Adjutant,* c/o M.S. Graphics, 121 N. First St., Salinas, CA 93906-3225. (46)

ABA PROCEEDINGS. Exclusively **MegaTraveller** fanzine covering Vland Domain and all areas coreward and spinward. Each issue includes 1 or more starships of TL14– (no TL 15). Issues 1 to 8 total 53 pages. This is a HIWG fanzine.Send $1 for current eight-page issue to Clayton R. Bush, PO Box 85, Crowley, CO 81033. Send SASE for list of available HIWG documents. Starship spreadships available in WK1 format on 5¼" disks. (46)

Challenge 46

Rate each article from 0 to 5. 0 means you did not read the article. 1 indicates great dissatisfaction, and 5 indicates great satisfaction. 2, 3, and 4 are shades in between. To use a separate sheet, list each article number, then your rating. Send responses to: **Challenge** Feedback, PO Box 1646, Bloomington, IL 61702-1646 USA.

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- □□□□□□ 2. Just Like Magic (MegaTraveller)
- □□□□□□ 3. H.P.P.E. (MegaTraveller)
- □□□□□□ 4. Fated Voyage (MegaTraveller)
- □□□□□□ 5. The Tree of Souls (Space: 1889)
- □□□□□□ 6. Contagion (2300 AD)
- □□□□□□ 7. Dead Time (Cyberpunk)
- □□□□□□ 8. Quicksilver Sayonara (Shadowrun)
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FREE Drawing!

Send us your feedback, and you will automatically be entered in our drawing for a FREE copy of **Red Empire**, the new card game of Soviet political intrigue. Build your power and purge the opposition. But watch out—if events go too far wrong, everyone loses!

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*Congratulations to Brent Williams of Northville, MI, who won a copy of **Red Empire** for sending in his feedback on issue 44.*

Next Issue

Challenge 47 will be mailed to subscribers November 1 and released in December.

TWILIGHT: 2000

"Escape from Kosovo" by Adam Geibel, plus "Used Car Lot" (new equipment for spicing up any **Twilight: 2000** campaign).

MEGATRAVELLER

It seems like an easy (if somewhat illegal) way to pay off our debts—or is it? Find out in "A Baker's Dozen," a Hinterworlds adventure. Also "Knights of the Blue Feather," "Two Small Steps," and more!

2300 AD

New programs for **2300 AD** cyberjockeys, plus "The Wired Society," information technology and its impact in **2300 AD**.

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AND MORE!

Plus *Shadowrun, Torg, Battletech, Renegade Legion, Star Trek, Star Wars, Cyberpunk, GURPS,* and much more.

In My Opinion

Marc W. Miller

Consider the distinction between terror and horror.

Terror is an extreme form of fear. Terrorists create fear though random killings and bombings. Street gangs systematically attack anyone who opposes them. Brutal governments subjugate populations through deliberate campaigns of fear or terror. *Horror* is an extreme form of revulsion. It goes beyond terror because it touches our inner feelings.

There are fine lines between these two ideas. Terrorists dare not step over the line into horror or they will alienate everyone, even their own constituency. On the other hand, horror stories and horror comics (not of terror stories and terror comics) appeal to us on some inner level.

The point has been made that terror is newly learned by each generation: What terrified people once upon a time eventually loses its power to create extreme fear.

Horror, on the other hand, keeps returning to the same symbols and myths: vampires, ghosts, zombies, werewolves. Even modern horror movies reach back to the familiar poltergeists or dream ghosts of yesteryear.

This issue of **Challenge** is created to reach beyond terror and show horror in a science-fiction setting.

And if you liked this horror issue of **Challenge**, you will almost certainly like our new roleplaying game coming in February: **Dark Conspiracy**. Write for our free four-page brochure on the game, its background, and its basic theme. It'll make your skin bristle!
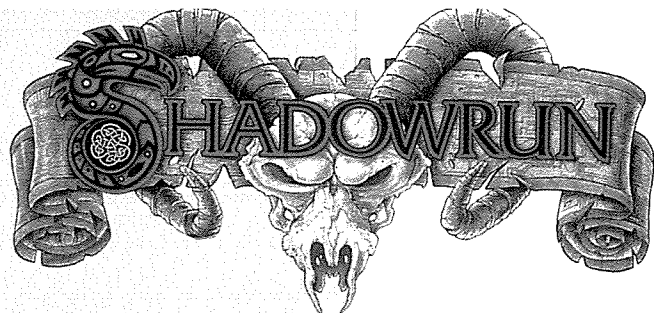
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DNA/DOA

From Dave Arneson,
co-creator of
Dungeons & Dragons

t began as a simple datasteal, but somewhere it went wrong, and now

you've lost the goods, lost your contacts, and your only chance for survival

s to get out of Seattle—fast. There's just one problem: the only way out

eads through the heart of the deadly Ork underworld, a dark labyrinth

eneath the city where your first wrong move may be your last.