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Game Designers' Workshop

20th Anniversary

GDW

1973 - 1993

70

GDW

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Lesson 1: Anatomy of the Card

Name of Card: Each card has a unique name which is used to identify it in gaming and collecting circles.

Illustration: High quality color art from over two dozen artists nationwide. Each artist's style broadens the set's diversity without destroying the overall unity of the series.

Card Type: Cards are grouped by color for easy identification during play.

Card Description: Provides special rules for each card, or adds descriptive elements to enhance game play.

Playing Cost: Describes the price of bringing this card into play.

Graphic Design: Great care has been taken in creating the visual effect of the cards. Each of the seven card types has a unique design, though they all share a similar three-dimensional appearance.

Power and Toughness: Only creature cards have these stats. The numbers describe the offensive and defensive strengths of the creatures.

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Challenge
Issue 70

all the credit

Game Designers' Workshop

20th Anniversary

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ABOUT THE COVER

June 22, 1993 marked the 20th anniversary for Game Designers' Workshop. See the Opinion page and A History of GDW on page 5 for the story of what was and what shall be as regards all things GDW.

opinion

"It Was Twenty Years Ago Today..."

Frank Chadwick
President/Co-Founder, Game Designers' Workshop

1993 witnesses two important anniversaries for GDW. This past June 22nd marked the 20th anniversary of the publication of our first game, **Drang Nach Osten**. Autumn marks the 15th anniversary of the publication of the original edition of **Traveller**.

Fifteen years ago, the world was a dramatically different place. Many of the things which were pure science fiction in the first edition have since become reality. Other things which seemed plausible future projections now seem somewhat more remote.

But a vastly more important change has been in our attitude toward science. Fifteen years ago, science offered the last best prospect for adventure, for the drama of exploration and discovery, left to us. Sadly, much of the popular fascination with the hard sciences, and the impact they can potentially have on our lives, has waned.

The best, and most disturbing, measure of this is provided by science education. At the high school and grade school level, hard sciences are taught less often, not more often. Hard science courses are a diminishing part of the typical liberal arts education. Most significantly, while science graduate programs in the United States turn out qualified scientists in undiminished numbers, each year the proportion of those graduates who are foreign nationals increases. The United States is currently training far fewer scientists than it will need in the early decades of the next century, and as we are unable to fill our labs with trained explorers, scientific initiative will shift to other countries, spearheaded by scientists trained in our own schools.

Why? Because American kids just aren't interested. They aren't interested because we, as a nation, have lost at least part of what was, as recently as 15 years ago, the *sine qua non* of the American nation, and to an extent the Western worldview (and to an extent the Western worldview)—an un-shakable belief in the future. **Traveller** embodied that belief, and **Traveller: The New Era**, in its own unique way, is an even firmer affirmation of it.

What **Traveller: The New Era**'s philosophy says is that no disaster, no reverse, do downward slide is irremediable. History is not pre-ordained; it is made by people who believe in their ability to change events, and who believe that what they do or refrain from doing is important, and makes a difference.

Whether GDW will survive for another 20 years will not depend on market trends, or consumer demographics, or luck; it will depend solely on what we here at GDW do to make it survive. The sort of world you will live in 20 years hence will depend largely on what you do to make it so.

My father, who passed away less than a decade ago, was born before the Wright brothers achieved powered flight. His lifetime spanned mankind's odyssey from Kittyhawk to the Lunar surface. Your lifetime will span an odyssey even more dramatic. As you are reading this, the people who will harness fusion power as a safe and economical energy source are already hard at work. The people who will successfully manipulate a subatomic particle to deliberately move it from point A to B faster than light could cross the intervening distance, have already been born. The people who will crack the riddle of the gravitational spectrum, and open the doorway to direct manipulation of it, have already been born.

Fifteen years ago, the promise of science was a future made qualitatively better, not by providing more material possessions, but by broadening the scope of human endeavor. It is still within our power as a people to realize that promise. It is still within your power to be part of that dream. It is never too late to take counsel in the advice given many years ago by Daniel Burnham, Chicago architect and visionary:

"Make no little plans; they have no magic to stir men's blood and probably will not be realized. Make big plans; aim high in hope and work, remembering that a noble, logical diagram once recorded will never die, but will be a living thing, asserting itself with ever-growing insistency."

A History of GDW

For the hard-core roleplaying or game simulation fanatic, Game Designers' (that's *s-apostrophe*) Workshop has been synonymous with quality for 20 years. Well-known trademarks such as **Twilight: 2000, Traveller, Harpoon, Command Decision,** and the **First Battle** series are some of the most respected and popular games in their respective fields.

Little did four Illinois State University students know during the early '70s that their passion for simulation wargames would someday translate into an internationally successful company. Their enthusiasm led to a university-funded project that allowed them to create specific games that professors could use in a classroom setting as an alternative education tool. That experience led to the creation of GDW on June 22, 1973.

First headquartered in Marc Miller and Frank Chadwick's apartment, the company had humble beginnings, but by 1975, the company had moved into its present location in downtown Normal, Illinois, and has never looked back.

The original four founders still live in Bloomington/Normal and direct the operations of the company. Paul Banner sits on the board. Loren Wiseman is a game designer on staff. Marc Miller is Director of Licensing and active in computer game design activities. Frank Chadwick is corporate President and still the company's main designer. What began as a longshot dream has published more than 300 titles; produced two acknowledged master game designers from its staff; published the internationally acclaimed **Desert Shield Fact Book,** which climbed to No. 1 on *The New York Times* best-seller list; and currently ships new games to distributors and players all over the nation and the world. GDW publishes 20 or more new titles a year, as well as licensed editions in German, French, Italian, Finnish, Hebrew, Swedish, Spanish, Portuguese, and Japanese to fulfill demands in the international gaming market.
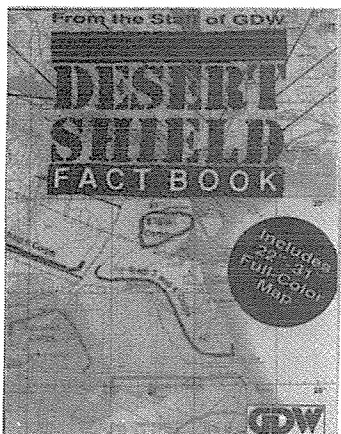
GDW's latest roleplaying venture has been very successful, with **Traveller: The New Era** heading up the "House System" group of roleplaying games. Sharing the same game system are **Twilight: 2000** (currently in version 2.2), **Dark Conspiracy** (with an improved and updated edition due out this winter), and **Cadillacs and Dinosaurs,** based on the award-winning comic book series by Mark Schultz and published by Kitchen Sink Press. A new edition of **C&D** will also appear this winter, updated to be compatible with the CBS Saturday morning cartoon show that debuts this fall. Each of these genres incorporates a base gaming system, thus each are compatible with each other. All supplemental material for each of the separate genres are compatible as well.

In addition to the House System family of games, GDW was also proud to be selected as the publisher of Gary Gygax's new **Dangerous Journeys** multigenre roleplaying game system, especially as the first game in the series, the **Mythus** fantasy roleplaying game, marked Gary's re-entry to the fantasy game arena.

Challenge magazine has become a core magazine in the industry. **Challenge,** which began life as **Journal of the Traveller's Aid Society,** changed its format from a house organ to covering the entire science-fiction gaming industry in November 1988.

GDW also has an unchallenged reputation as a respected wargames and miniatures rules publisher. **Harpoon, Command Decision,** and **Johnny Reb** have long dominated their periods in the military miniature rules market.

GDW games are known for their historical accuracy as well as clear, concise, and fun-to-play rules. **Drang Nach Osten** started GDW's long-standing dedication to producing the finest wargames on the market. GDW is the company that brought the industry the original **Europa** series, the **Assault** series, the **Third World War** series, and now the **First Battle** series, for which the hit **Blood and Thunder** is the latest release.

WHAT'S IN GDW'S FUTURE?

Lots of wargame and roleplaying releases through '93 and '94, with the main emphasis being on **Traveller: The New Era** (over half of our output for the next 18 months!), plus some exciting new directions for the other games in the House System, a new genre for **Dangerous Journeys**—the **Unhallowed** horror roleplaying game, and some book and licensing projects we can't talk about yet, but which you'll really love.
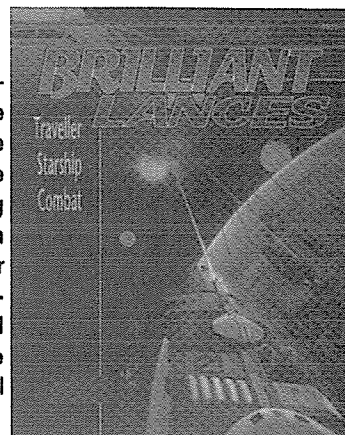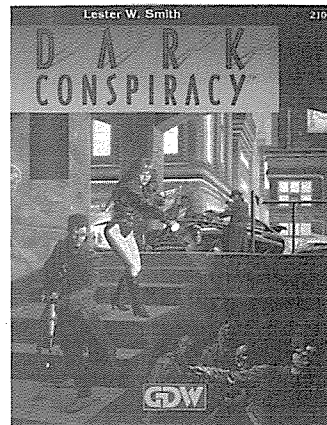
RUNNERS

American executives exploit the bloody conflict between Belize and Guatemala, running explosives to guerrillas in exchange for drugs.

By Roman J. Andron
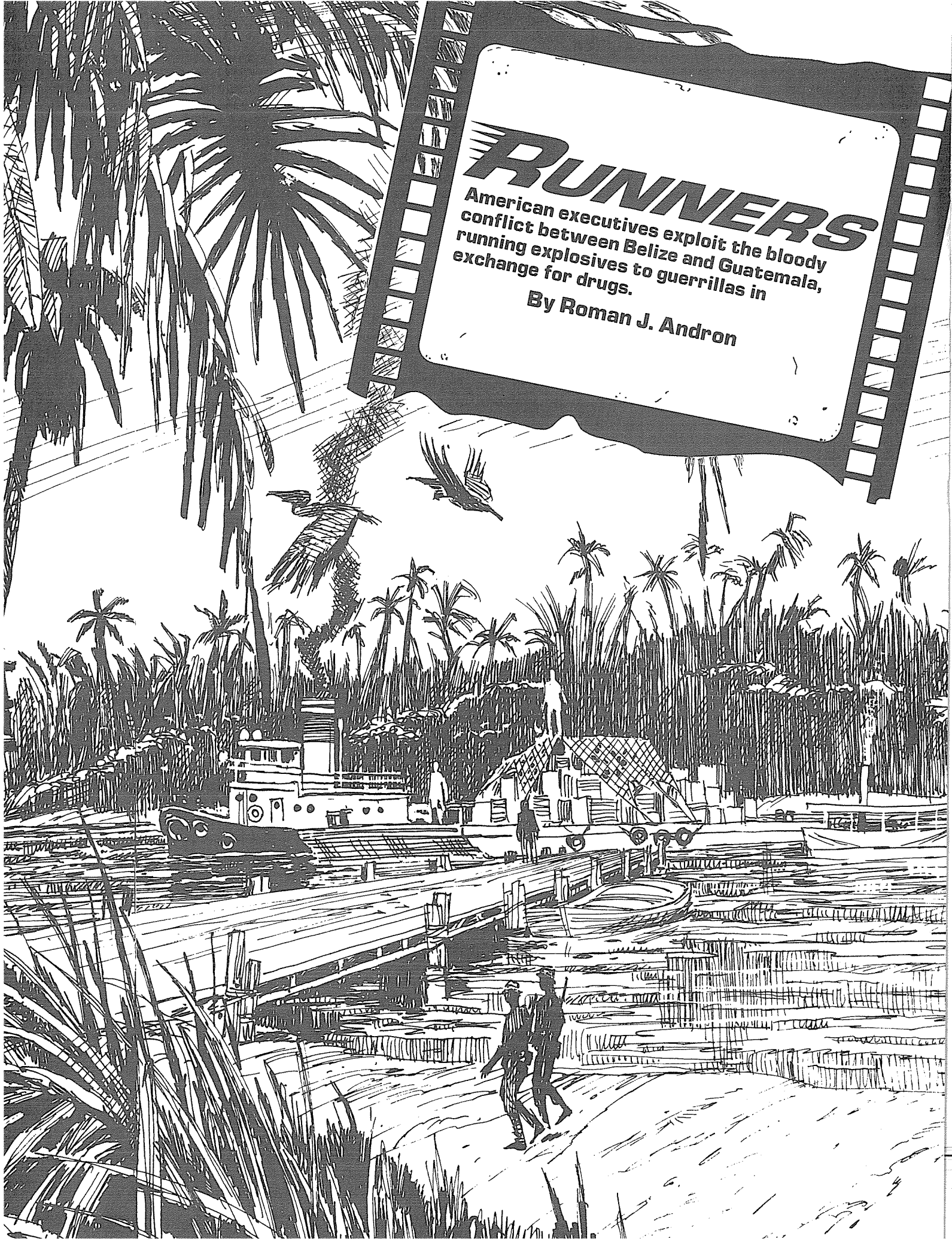
he discovery of petroleum deposits in Belizan territory has inflamed hostilities between Belize and Guatemala into a bloody war, igniting a series of subsequent offensives and lulls in the 18 months since the initial Guatemalan invasion. The conflict between these two nations has provided a pair of American executives with an opportunity to exploit the bloodshed and emerge with a small profit by running explosives to Guatemalan guerrillas in exchange for drugs. Players are approached by a major American chemical company to try to retrieve a shipment of explosives two of their employees diverted to a Central American war zone.

This adventure is designed for a fireteam or squad of player characters with a wide body of skills ranging from Demolitions to Electronics. Possession of the **Merc: 2000 Gazetteer,** while not required for play, is recommended.

MISSION BRIEFING

Characters are contacted by Thorson Consultants, a private security/investigations firm which acts as a broker for merc activities in the United States. At a subsequent meeting, "Gunny" Thorson introduces the characters to Sarah Wilkes and Wilma Forsythe, two mid-level executives from a major American chemical company (a level III patron).

Wilkes briefly explains the crisis. Auditors discovered that five tons of nitrates and dynamite, as well as 300 pounds of C-4, were diverted from a subsidiary's warehouse in Toronto to a freighter headed for Central America. An internal investigation revealed that two mid-level employees, Jason Frapelli and Rochelle Stagmont, were responsible for the diversion, and these employees cannot be located.

Forsythe states that the company has information that the explosives will be delivered to the Guerrilla Army of the Poor in Guatemala via Belize. Thorson Consultants wants to hire a small team to destroy the explosives, preferably after delivery, and to bring the errant employees back to the country to stand trial. The company wants to avoid any bad publicity, and Forsythe insists that characters performing the mission remain as clandestine as possible.

Thorson provides the characters with photographs of the two employees and gives a brief background on each (see below). He also gives them the expected docking time of the S.S. Newbrook, a container vessel, in Belize City. He expects that Frapelli and Stagmont will be there to meet the ship, before proceeding on to the exchange point. Finally, he gives them a poor photograph of Commandante Rico Allegras of the Guatemalan insurgent Guerrilla Army of the Poor, which Thorson's sources suggest is the intended purchaser. The guerrilla army has focused its activities around Guatemala City and Puerto Barrios.

The characters will have full planning responsibility for the mission. The company will only provide a budget for supplies and pay salaries upon completion. Referees should keep the budget quite low, on the range of US $10,000 for equipment and transport and the base rate for team members. If desired, a Thorson Consultants surveillance specialist and/or area expert can accompany the team to help smooth over investigations.

REFEREE'S PREPARATIONS

The information presented here provides a very sparse framework, but this mission could develop into a full chronicle with a number of smaller episodes and complications. In any event, referees can adapt the mission data to their players' styles and preferences as well as filling in details.

A good place to start preparation is area knowledge. The **Merc: 2000 Gazetteer** contains a profile of the Guatemala-

Belize conflict, including organization tables and a map showing deployment of forces. An encyclopedia will also provide data on the nations, their histories and climates. The *Encyclopedia Britannica* is recommended for Guatemala, as it has a good article and an excellent map of Guatemala showing both departments and many small towns. *Fodor's Central America* is a travel guide which will supply some useful local color as well as more maps. Those who have access to Defense Mapping Agency TPC-series maps of the area should make use of them. This small amount of research and preparation will make the adventure go smoother.

The second major area of preparation is to modify the plot. A suggested plot is given later, but referees may put in subtle modifications to complicate matters. For example, rather than off-loading at Belize City, the freighter may meet with a barge near the Turneffe Islands and off-load at sea. Of course, players should be given clues that this is taking place, like having Frapelli and Stagmont discuss it within earshot or charter a motorboat and ask about the Turneffes.

Finally, several rivers could be used to transport the explosives, and referees will have to decide which they want.

PLANNING

If the characters accept the mission, they must begin on an operational plan and get down to Belize City within four days if they want to meet the *Newbrook*. Considerations break down into four stages:

Weapon Requirements and Acquisition: Will the team members use their own weapons, or will they arrange for weapons in Belize or en route? What happens if the weapons don't arrive?

Exiting the Country and Transport to Belize or Guatemala: How will characters get to the area of operations without attracting attention? The obvious answer is air travel, but can the team charter a plane in the United States and avoid customs in Belize or Guatemala?

Investigation: The team will have to locate Frapelli, Stagmont, and the *Newbrook* in Belize in order to gather intelligence and better prepare for the next stage.

Operations: How will the team members track the explosives once they are in-country? How will they accomplish the mission objectives of destroying the explosives and "extraditing" Frapelli and Stagmont? And, finally, how will they exfiltrate Guatemalan or Belizan territory?

Players should be allowed to discuss an operations plan and contingencies for as long as they like. After all, if things go wrong, it will be their own fault. Gunny Thorson will help out with as much area knowledge as he has, but he is unable to provide any more data on Frapelli, Stagmont or the company.

SITREP: BELIZE/GUATEMALA

The current war between Guatemala and Belize has its roots in the colonial era of the 19th century when Britain declared Belize a British colony in 1862. The region had been settled by the British since 1638 and had resisted several Spanish attempts to exert dominion. In 1859, conservative president Rafael Carrera signed a treaty with Great Britain defining the status and borders of British Honduras. Although the treaty survived a liberal coup by Miguel Granados and Justo Barrios (a.k.a. "the Reformer"), its interpretation remained a point of contention between Guatemala and British Honduras until 1991, when Guatemala surrendered its territorial claims to Belize.

The year 1991 also brought the election of Jorge Elias, who instituted a strong anti-corruption and pro-human rights campaign. Elias' ineffective campaign lasted until late 1993, when

a failed assassination attempt lodged shrapnel near his heart and forced his resignation.

Since Elias' resignation, the military declared a state of martial law, and General Serrano Barrilas assumed power. Almost immediately, death-squad activities increased. Barrilas revoked any peace agreements the previous administration negotiated with the leftist guerrillas. He also began agitating for the annexation of Belize, agitation which increased following the discovery of substantial oil deposits in Belizan territory.

Barrilas' actions finally came to a head in late 1998, when the Guatemalan Army tried to invade Belize. The Belizan and British garrisons were able to react quickly with some advance intelligence and stall the offensive.

Op-Int: *Presently, both nations are engaging in low-intensity operations intended to attrit their opponents. Both sides have been hiring mercenaries as cadres, and Belize has even formed a mercenary air-mobile group of roughly battalion strength and kitted with advanced weapons paid for by the corporate shareholders of Petro-Belize S.A., the Belizan national oil company which is jointly owned by the Belizan government and some major world oil companies.*

OPFOR

The following data is public knowledge for a person who knows where to look. It may be provided by Thorson, or characters may have to do some research through newspapers. Characters who have spent time in the area will be able to press local intelligence officers for this data.

Guatemalan Forces: Guatemalan forces in the region consist of several infantry brigades of three battalions each, all clustered around the Guatemala-Belize border. One infantry brigade is stationed in the coastal towns of Puerto Barrios, Livingston and San Juan, performing rear-area security and counterinsurgency patrols. Two other full brigades are sta-

tioned around El Encanto and Sayaxche, also performing counterinsurgency missions. A fourth brigade forms the frontlines in Punta Gorda (Belize), with one infantry company stationed near the Mexican-Guatemalan-Belizan border, another in Melchor de Mencos, a third in Poptun, and the balance of the brigade in Flores. An armored company is stationed roughly 30 kilometers SSW of Middlesex (Belize). Two special forces battalions are operating somewhere in Belize and the Guatemalan departments of Peten and Izabal, but their present location is unknown.

As an added note, the Guatemalan military is suspected to be supplying personnel to government death squads. In game terms, the death squads are six- to 10-member teams armed with military weapons and often in civilian clothing. These teams are commonly composed of Ladino officers (see below) or possibly some highly motivated enlisted men.

DIT: The Guatemalan Secret Police is primarily an urban internal security force. It is not normally attached to the military, but operates independently. There is no love lost between the DIT, which is predominantly Ladino (Mestizo and Creole), and the army, whose ranks are dominated by Indians. Ladinos occupy elite positions in Guatemalan society, and there is a strong racial bias against the local Indian population, which is reflected in DIT attitudes. For our purposes, the DIT has the role of guarding against treason, and members may be encountered on military bases as liaisons to ensure proper procedures are followed. DIT paramilitary squads will also perform raids on any urban bases used by the players, and they will act as prison guards and death squad members. They are armed and trained to the same standards as the military, but are much more self-serving and corrupt.

Guerrilla Army of the Poor: The Guerrilla Army is a terrorist group operating in Guatemala and is the recipient of the smuggled explosives. A breakaway faction of the Guate-

Allegras Exchange Point
Suggested Layout

River　　　Stream

Command tent

Field kitchen

Barracks (tents)

Old hut

Barge

Explosives storage

Dock

River tug

Woods

Machinegun/guard posts

10 meters
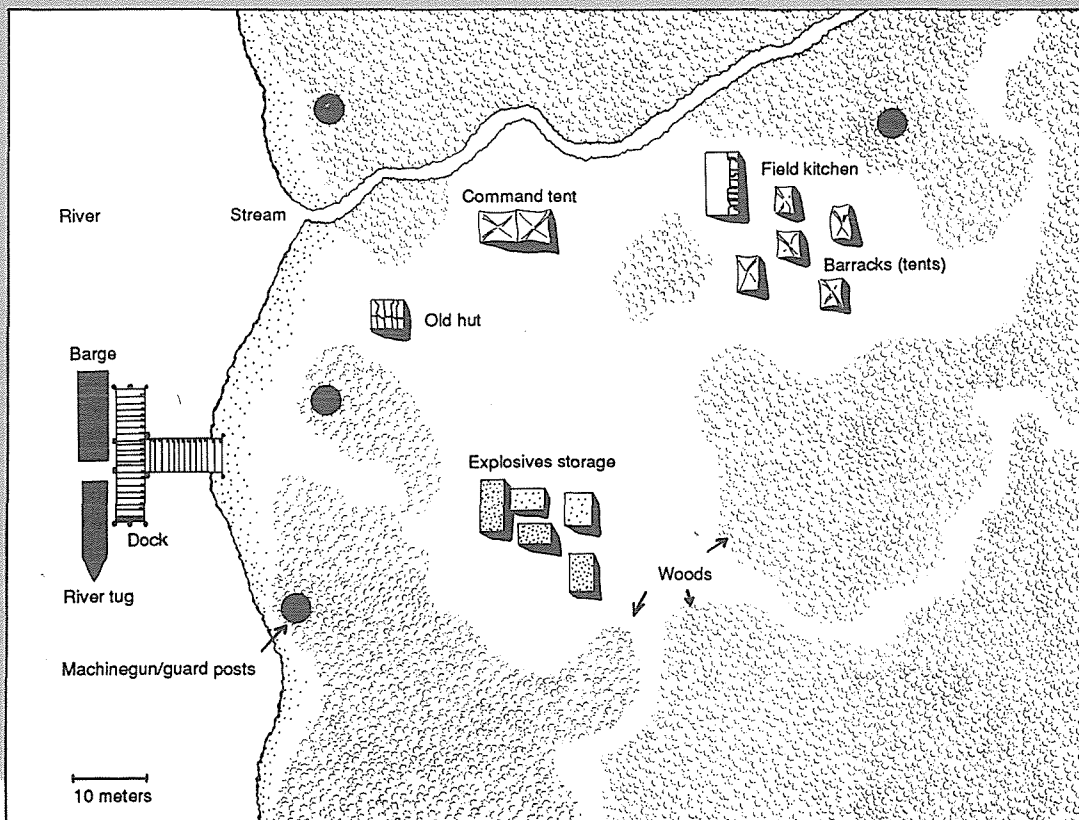
Suggested Organization and Equipment

Guerrilla Army
10 squads
    8 assault rifles
    2 SAWs
    Includes two RPG-7V or RPG-16 gunners
    Each squad while on duty operates two MG/guardposts
1 battery
    2 M-37 82mm mortars
    Includes six gunners armed with assault rifles or SMGs
50-60 noncombatants

Runners
Frapelli
    P-85 9mm plus M-870 12-gauge pump
Stagmont
    P-85 9mm

Riverboat Crew
    5 G-3 assault rifles
    2 M-870 12-gauge pump
    2 noncombatants

malan National Revolutionary Union (GNRU), the Guerrilla Army kept forces in the field during 1991-1992 negotiations with the Elias government and was one of the first groups to mobilize following the former president's attempted assassination. Like many of the other groups, the Guerrilla Army is based in Peten and the Mexican Yucatan, where it obtains funds from heroin plantations. The Guerrilla Army troop commanded by Allegras has 100 men in 10-man squads armed with Soviet assault rifles and SAWs. Allegras also has a battery of two M-37 82mm mortars which travel near the rear of his column.

Belizan Forces: Opposing the Guatemalan invasion are roughly two local infantry brigades based at Belmopan and Belize City, a British infantry regiment stationed at Staph Creek and a mercenary air-mobile battalion at Belize City. There are also numerous small merc units, drug smugglers and general-purpose criminals operating in the backcountry of Belize.

British Intelligence: Although unlikely to get involved, British intelligence services may take measures to ensure that the Guerrilla Army does receive the explosives in order to harm the Guatemalan war effort. They are unlikely to commit more than a single MI-6 or SIS agent to coordinate local police efforts to hamper the characters while in Belize.

MAJOR NPCs

Jason Frapelli (Experienced NPC): Frapelli is a very greedy young man who has decided to better himself by entering the world of arms smuggling. He is the picture of the young professional, both handsome and intelligent. He also wanted to get a piece of the lucrative drug trade, so he and Stagmont brokered this deal on one of their vacations in Mexico. Jason likes the idea of breaking rules, but does not have the ruthlessness required to ensure his survival in the business, meaning he will not betray or expect betrayal from his partners. He normally carries a 9mm P-85 and adds a folding-stock Remington 870 pump shotgun for special occasions. He is a good shot with both.

Rochelle Stagmont (Experienced NPC): Stagmont is the perfect contemporary young professional. Blonde, attractive and with a total disregard for rules, Stagmont will do what it takes to achieve her own selfish goals. Although she is Frapelli's partner in both criminal and neo-relationship terms, she will not hesitate to testify against him to protect herself, claiming she was a dupe. Stagmont is a good shot with the 9mm P-85 she carries, but has no experience with other firearms.

Rico Allegras (Veteran NPC): Allegras is a regional commandante of a Guerrilla Army troop and is looking forward to continuing to corrupt *Norteamericanos* and continuing his revolution. Allegras is a devious man who has spent much of his life fighting in Peten and Izabal, and has frequently bested Guatemalan regulars. While not highly ideological, he does believe in the Guerrilla Army cause. Allegras plans to approach the transaction with Frapelli and Stagmont warily, but honestly, as he wishes to cultivate them as a new source of four old Soviet F1 fragmentation grenades.

"Gunny" Thorson (Elite NPC): Thorson is a crusty old war horse and veteran of MACV-SOG, Grenada, Panama and Desert Storm who has gone semi-independent. He has founded Thorson Consultants, a private security firm which works as a broker for talented mercenaries, notably veterans of the USMC, Rangers and SOCOM. He will work to get his friends jobs with major corporations and other governments, although rumors suggest his company is actually an Intelligence Support Activity (ISA) operation. The ISA is an elite, covert, military intelligence service operated by the US Army to provide intelligence from conflict zones which other agencies are unable or unwilling to provide.

SUGGESTED PLOT

What follows is a suggested plot, highlighting areas of importance for the proper play of the adventure.

Following the briefing, the team plans the insertion into Belize. The characters can land in Belize City on-board a cargo plane and smuggle in their equipment. They will be accompanied by Scott Larson, a surveillance expert and part-time gunrunner from Thorson. Once at the Belize airport, the characters find themselves facing Belizan customs agent, who search their aircraft and impound their firearms. The characters then hustle off to Belize City to set up an operations base and to locate new firearms and their targets.

Since the *Newbrook* is not due in Belize for the next three days, characters split into two teams. The first searches the hotels and resorts for Frapelli and Stagmont, while Larson takes the others to some of his acquaintances to purchase weapons. It takes several stops, but characters are able to purchase assault rifles and even grenade and rocket launchers at a reasonable markup.

The second team finds the two "runners" at a harborfront hotel. Larson then rents a number of hotel rooms in adjacent hotels and sets up a series of directional and room mics to monitor the two runners' conversations. He also gives the PCs an electronic tracking unit and teaches them how to use it. It takes the better part of a day of surveillance, including a hasty scramble to escape when Belizan police raid the team's room on an "anonymous tip," but the team learns how the exchange will take place. Frapelli and Stagmont will arrange for the loading of the containers of explosives onto a barge, which will be towed to Puerto Barrios and then up the Dulce and El Golfete rivers to a contact with Allegras. In return, the runners expect to receive some 700 kilos of heroin.

The PC team again splits into two, this time leaving Larson with a two-person security element and allowing the strike team to travel behind Guatemalan lines to the exchange point.

It takes three days for the strike team to reach the exchange point, and they have to avoid Guatemalan regulars and Guerrilla Army sweeps all the way. By the end of the second day, they start receiving updates from Larson's team via secure satellite downlink that the barge is loaded and moving. The strike team bivouacs in a hide after reaching the exchange point and avoids contact with the Guerrilla Army patrols.

By the fifth day, the barge arrives, and the Guerrilla Army starts off-loading the explosives. The strike team videotapes the entire procedure as evidence for the chemical company and, after a final call to Larson's team in Puerto Barrios, moves in for the strike.

A demolitions expert silently infiltrates the explosives storage area and rigs the entire five-plus tons of material to explode after an hour's delay. Then, the remainder of the strike team silently eliminates Allegras and captures Frapelli and Stagmont, but not before Stagmont can alert the Guerrilla Army.

The team engages in a fighting retreat and evasion from the exchange site while it races for its pickup zone, where Larson's team waits with a UH-1 helicopter temporarily borrowed from the Guatemalan Army. While in the air, the team turns the videocamera toward the exchange zone to see a five-ton explosion devastate a substantial area of forest.

Filling in the Details: Obviously, the above plot is very sketchy, and the referee should try to add whatever details are required to personalize the adventure. Possibly the exchange zone is in Belize itself, along the Belize River. Or the exchange takes place beyond the Guatemalan garrison at Melchor de Mencos, or along the Folmul River. The team may elect to follow the barge by stealing along the riverside and continue to watch the drama of Frapelli and Stagmont forcing a river smuggler onward. There is also the potential of a river fight with Belizan or Guatemalan patrol boats.

Key areas of the adventure include entering Belize, investigation, operations in Belize, crossing the Guatemalan border, getting to the exchange zone, operations at the exchange zone, and extradition and exfiltration. By focusing details on these key areas, the referee can prepare a flexible adventure plot.

ALTERNATIVES AND VARIANTS

A number of ways have been suggested to make the mission more challenging, but none are as intriguing as making the players' team a decoy unit for another, more professional unit also secretly recruited by the chemical company. The company has leaked the nominal mission of the players' team to the Guerrilla Army and the DIT in hopes that the ensuing commotion will allow the second team to operate undetected. Characters will naturally be actively hunted even before they cross the Guatemalan border and may be ambushed in Belize by either side. Or characters may find themselves being called upon to support the main team which they never knew existed.

Another way to alter the scenario is to let characters play on the Guatemalan side and be assigned to stop a shipment of explosives to the Guerrilla Army which is being escorted by "corporate" mercenaries or even Belizan forces. They would have a full squad of Guatemalan regulars under their command to support the operation. Naturally, the characters will run head-on into the corporate team. In fact, if the group is large enough and patient enough, it can be divided into two sides—Guatemalan mercs and the company decoy team.

The company team is made up of five ex-Special Forces and Ranger personnel from the United States, Britain and Canada. These mercs are all highly experienced (Elite) and well-equipped with assault rifles and SAWs. Referees should play these characters as the professionals they are. Ω
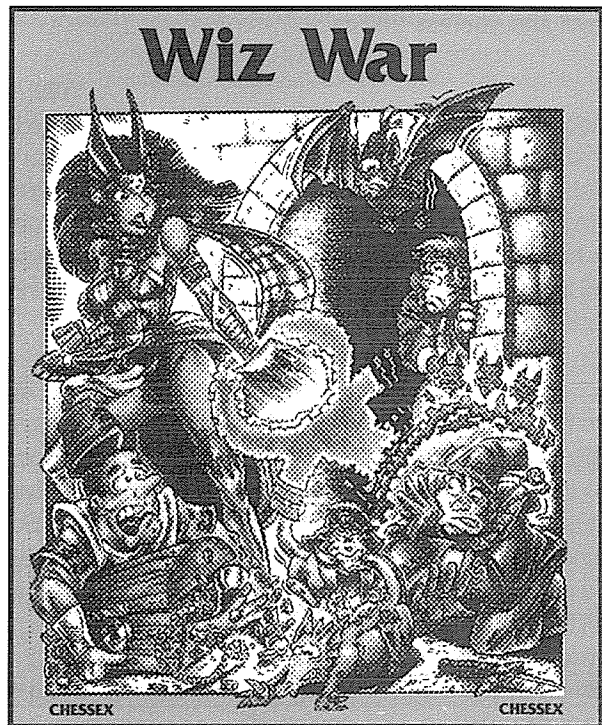
Many weak and otherwise defenseless folk have taken to the use of booby traps in their self defense. Occasionally these devices can cause more problems than they solve.

Goodrich Hill

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

The following encounter is designed as an interlude between major adventures. Most gaming groups should be able to play through it in a single session.

Arriving at a rural crossroads village while en route from one adventure to another, the characters observe a substantial gathering of locals in the village square. At the same time, the PCs intercept the following radio transmission:

"Help! I'm injured and need assistance!"

Glenn Goodrich, known hereabouts as "Doc," is the local herb doctor, acupuncturist and unlicensed dentist. He is also the closest thing to a full-time doctor available for 50 miles in any direction. Doc just contacted the villagers via CB and reported that he is injured and alone in his home. An old man in frail health, he is in dire need of medical assistance.

Unfortunately, no one but Doc's nephew ever goes up Goodrich Hill to Doc's home, and for good reason. The entire hill is elaborately booby-trapped! The nephew and Doc are the only ones who know the safe routes through the minefield. The nephew is out of town, walking to Gainesville, 50 miles away, to bring back one of Doc's grandsons. The young man has just completed his medical degree at Shands Teaching Hospital at the former University of Florida. They are not expected to return before late tomorrow afternoon. The weather is expected to fall to freezing or below tonight, and Doc will probably not survive unless help gets to him quickly.

The only one from the village who will volunteer to guide the PCs is Mike Shaw, a village boy who has been up the hill once before and thinks he can find the way again. The other townsfolk can be summed up as concerned but worth nothing but goodwill and useless advice.

AREA DESCRIPTION

Goodrich Hill is a steep-sided prominence with 65- to 85-degree slopes, impassable to any wheeled or tracked vehicle the PCs may have with them. The hill is 75 meters tall and covered with the terraced herb gardens Doc uses in his work. The garden consists of patches of dense vegetation surrounded by neatly maintained, mulch-covered paths. The foliage has flourished, creating a thick, head-high jungle of greenery. The terraces are connected by a winding footpath, so steep in places that stair steps have had to be cut into the hillside. Doc's residence is located in a saddle atop the hill. A small cottage at the base of the hill is used as a clinic by the locals, who pull on the bell cable at his front gate to summon Doc down from his house and gardens above.

REFEREEING THE ENCOUNTER

Doc has been bothered repeatedly by marauders seeking money and drugs. Fed up with such rude behavior, Doc has liberally seeded his herb gardens with hand grenade booby traps in mechanical ambushes. It is *extremely* hazardous to one's health to pay unannounced housecalls upon the doctor! Doc has a coded system to get through the booby traps, but the markers are specific types of herb plants and shrubs. Someone must successfully pass Average: Biology tasks (or Difficult: Farming tasks) to make repeated plant identifications and recognize the safe routes.

Doc uses monofilament firing line for tripwire, which is practically impossible to spot, especially if one doesn't know what to look for. It is a Difficult: Observation task to detect the monofilament tripwires and an Average: Observation task to spot the booby traps themselves. The red laser dot sighting beam will cause the monofilament fishing line tripwires to glow when they are struck by the laser, creating a fiber-optic cable-like effect. But that only works when it is dark enough to allow sufficient contrast. Meanwhile, Doc can't wait.

2027.
An AV-4 crash.
A crushed bio-hazard container.
A deadly accident.
120,000 dead.
20,000...Changed.
Welcome to the Darker Future.

CYBER
GENERATION

COMING THIS SUMMER. EVOLVE OR DIE.

Photo courtesy Dennis James

ALTERNATIVES AND VARIANTS

If the PCs persuade Mike to lead the way through the booby traps (an Easy: Persuasion task), Mike gets struck down with a gran mal epileptic seizure halfway up the hill! Asking him to draw a map is fruitless at this point—the seizures leave him weak and confused for several hours.

From his antenna on top of Goodrich Hill, Doc is broadcasting to all listeners within 35 kilometers. The PCs can talk to Doc over his CB, but he is having alternating bouts of unconsciousness and incoherence.

Burning off a clear path (and hoping the grenades cook off in the fire) is a bad move for two reasons. First, the herb crop is worth a fortune, and some species are irreplaceable. Second, the crop is so dry that there is a good chance of setting Doc's house on fire with him still in it.

Running a herd of animals up the hill to detonate the booby traps would be a possibility, if only goats or sheep were available. Pigs or cattle will refuse to make the climb. And farmers will either refuse to volunteer their flocks or ask for compensation in exchange.

To make matters worse, no one thought to mention Doc's dog, a Rottweiler named Boomer. Doc is completely dependent on that old dog and loves him like a child. To Boomer, the PCs look and smell just like somebody who is out to hurt his master.

How about *another* group of eager adventurers who want to join the player characters in the dangerous journey to the top of Goodrich Hill? These individuals have never been up the hill either, but for dear old Doc's sake, they are willing to give it a try.
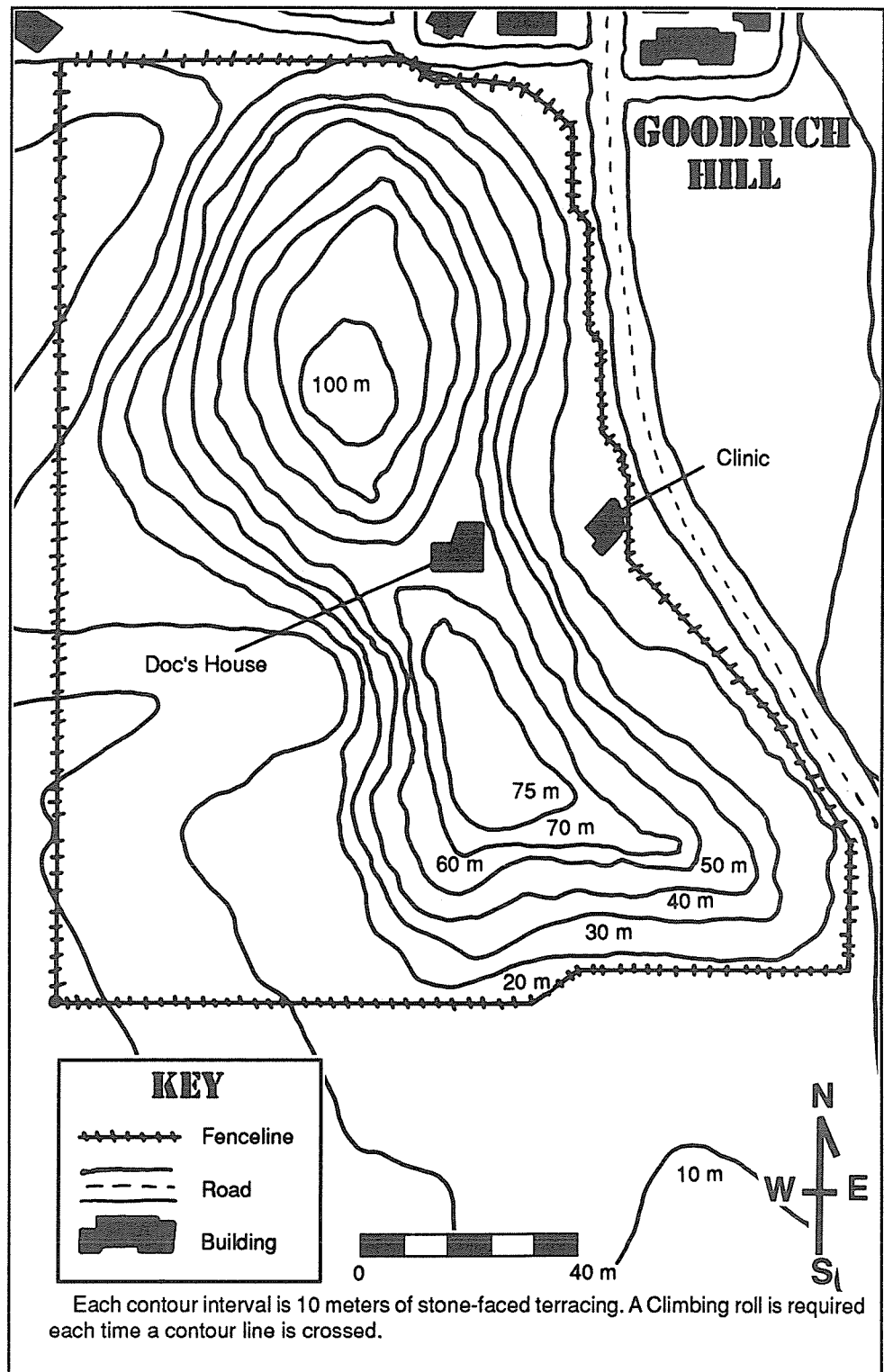
If their help is refused, they will race the player characters to the top of the hill for the opportunity to claim a hefty reward.

Oddly enough, these enthusiastic adventurers are strangers in town, too.

These individuals are actually marauders who just want to get their hands on the fabled cache of drugs Doc is supposed to have secreted on his mountain. Tailor the bad guys to challenge your particular party members according to their specific strengths and weaknesses.

MECHANICAL AMBUSH RULES

Doc's minefield is laid out to a standard pattern with a basic density of four or five booby traps per eight-meter square. The mine locations can be handled randomly by rolling even or odd for four or five per eight-meter grid distribution. Roll dice equal to the number of eight-meter grid squares

GOODRICH HILL

Clinic

Doc's House

100 m

75 m
70 m
60 m
50 m
40 m
30 m
20 m

KEY

Fenceline

Road

Building

0   40 m

10 m

N
W — E
S

Each contour interval is 10 meters of stone-faced terracing. A Climbing roll is required each time a contour line is crossed.

the party has crossed, then multiply the even-numbered dice by four and the odd-numbered dice by five. Add the results together and divide by two for the average density and number of D10s to be rolled. The D10s are the chance of accidentally activating a tripwire—any result between 1 and 6 is an activation. Roll the Observation skill of the PC in the lead and subtract that result from half that PC's Observation skill. The result is the number of tripwires that would have been activated by the PCs that were discov-ered by the pointman. If that number equals or exceeds the number of D10s that came up 6 or less, all the tripwires that would have been set off (but not all the tripwires that are there) were discovered without setting them off. If the number discovered is less than the number there, have the second character roll a Difficult: Observation task and repeat the process. If they are still undiscovered, the tripwires go off. Ω

Ask Commodore Bwana

Being in the main a continuing column chronicling the state of the art of Traveller: The New Era

and not, sadly,

a rollicking recapitulation of the divers adventures and misadventures of a comradely band of gentlemen adventurers, ruffians, and rogues, and the women they pretend to have known.

Volume I, Number 1

Dear Commodore Bwana,

As a fictitious amalgamation of numerous letters and phone calls, I would like to know what new products will be coming out for **Traveller: The New Era.** *Also, some of my fictitious composite friends would like to know when and where will we see GDW print the starship design sequence for* **Traveller: The New Era?**

Cordially,

Fictitious Amalgamation

Dear Fic,

Pseudo-reality is heck, isn't it? I should know.

GDW is planning the following releases for **Traveller: The New Era** in the coming year and a half.

For the remainder of 1993, we will be putting out **Brilliant Lances: Traveller Starship Combat** in August (which will contain starship design rules), **Fire, Fusion, and Steel: Traveller Technical Architecture** (which will also contain the starship design rules) and **Deluxe Traveller: The New Era** in September. **Deluxe TNE** includes the **TNE** book and **FF&S**, plus some additional goodies which will be available separately for those of you who already have the book. In October we will release the **TNE Referee's Screen** and the **TNE Player's Handbook.** You know what Ref Screens are like, and the **Player's Handbook** will contain more character background plus a lot of ready-to-play character templates.

In November we will release the first **TNE** sourcebook, **Smash 'n' Grab. S&G** details the *modus operandi* of the Star Vikings, from the tactics of individual planetary raids, to the Reformation Coalition's methods for interstellar expansion. It will also include several sample scenarios.

In 1994 we plan the following releases for **TNE**, in approximately the following order. Note that some of the titles will be subject to change.

The **Star Viking** sourcebook details the rest of the Reformation Coalition, its organization, and its rebuilding efforts.

Vampire Fleets is a sourcebook that details the psychology of the Virus with many examples of living machinery that can be used in your own campaign. From self-aware starships to living planetary defense networks, to an automated mining station with an inferiority complex, **Vampire Fleets** puts you inside the mind of the vampires—and that's a pretty dangerous place to be.

The **TNE Armory** is a book of small arms and heavy weapons for **TNE**, manufactured at a wide variety of tech levels, including standard mass-produced weapons and custom-made one-offs.

Free Trader is the sourcebook on the Wilds, from the point of view of the itinerant free traders that make their way through the trackless interstellar wilderness.

Ships of the Coalition is a starship catalog for the Reformation Coalition and neighboring areas. It details new Hiver and Star Viking designs, as well as old relic Imperial vessels.

Striker II is the long-awaited return of **Striker:** miniatures rules for **Traveller.**

Vampire Ship is a boxed game that includes detailed deck plans of a huge vampire ship that will be used with a large number of scenarios. Like **Azhanti High Lightning** many years ago, it will include a combat system optimized for boardgame play.

World Tamer's Guide. So what do you do when you come across a world that has been stripped clean of all life? You start from scratch to build it again, that's what you do, and the **World Tamer's Guide** shows you how.

TNE Vehicles (title subject to change) will be a sourcebook/catalog of a broad assortment of predesigned vehicles for a wide variety of purposes manufactured at all different tech levels.

Crossroads. Sooner or later, the first explorers from the Reformation Coalition will meet the first explorers from another major pocket of post-Imperial society. And when they do, culture shock will be an understatement.

Flight Commander is an expansion for **Brilliant Lances** and adds detailed rules to operate formations of fighters with their particular brand of weapons and operations.

By the way, **Twilight: 2000** is now completely com-

patible with **Traveller: The New Era** with the publication of **Twilight: 2000 Version 2.2**.

Last but certainly not least, WE'VE GOT **TRAVELLER** STARSHIP MINIATURES!!

I'll say it again. WE'VE GOT **TRAVELLER** STARSHIP MINIATURES!! New from RAFM, the first time ever **Traveller** starship miniatures of all of the standard designs: Free Trader, Far Trader, Subsidized Merchant, Patrol Cruiser, Lab Ship, Shuttle, Ship's Boat, Modular Cutter, Launch, Scout, *Gazelle*, System Defense Boat, and Type S Scout. All of these will be available in August, with plenty more to follow. Do I have to mention that they're gorgeous?

Time enough for another letter.

Dear Commodore Bwana,

As another fictitious amalgamation of a slightly smaller number of phone calls, I would like to know what is the story with Lucan. Is he still alive or what?

Sincerely,

A. Nother Fictitious Amalgamation, OBE

Dear Obie,

Now that would be telling, wouldn't it?

It looks like we've got room for one more letter this issue.

Dear Commodore Bwana,

Is this column serious or not?

Love,

Suspicious in Seattle

Dear 'Spish,

Of course it's serious. All of the substantive stuff anyway. Any factual stuff in this column is absolutely correct within the limits of my control over life, the universe, and everything, and my mandate from GDW. It's just my tone that I don't take very seriously.

Well, space-jockeys, that's it for this issue. Until next time, this is Commodore Bwana, aboard the Starship *Roxy Music*, signing off.
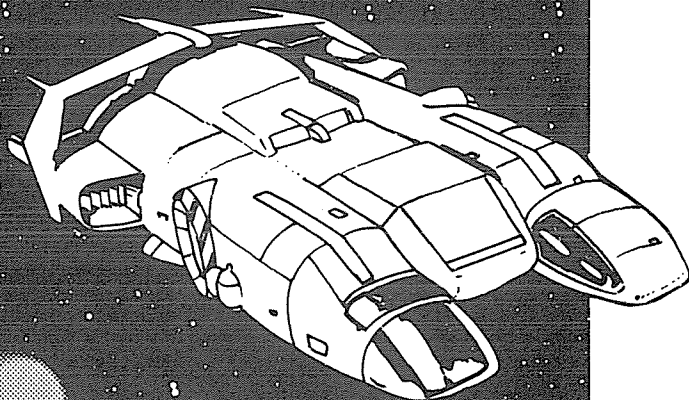
The sea-change spread throughout Imperial Space in Hard Times affects almost everything the PCs do, including the sorts of patrons likely to hire them.

Six Patrons

By James Maliszewski

The collapse of the Third Imperium and the attendant trappings of its interstellar civilization brought about a period of decay and degradation known as the Short Dusk or, more popularly, Hard Times. While this chaotic period may prove ultimately to be but the birth pangs of a new era of interstellar governance, the outlook is very different for the people living during that time. To these individuals, much has changed. The assumptions and truisms of the pre-Rebellion Imperium no longer hold as they once did. New problems and new solutions are the rule of the day.

For interstellar travellers like the player characters in **MegaTraveller** campaigns, this could hardly be more true. Hard Times present a plethora of new problems and possibilities. This sea-change throughout Imperial Space affects almost everything the PCs are likely to do. This change includes the sorts of patrons likely to hire the adventurers.

What follows is a collection of six patron encounters written specifically to reflect the changes in Imperial Space since the onset of the Short Dusk. Like patron encounters of the classic era, these will be generic enough to allow the referee a free hand in adapting them to his campaign, yet specific enough to remove some of the burden from the referee's shoulders. In addition, all of them offer multiple variations which allow these encounters to be used several times in any campaign.

Merchant Captain

Required Skills: Starship skills
Required Equipment: Armed starship (any type)

The PCs are approached by a merchant captain who wishes to hire them and their starship as starmercs. He claims that he has a cargo of medical supplies and spare parts desperately needed on a nearby failing world. He also states that he has had difficulty finding a starmerc group willing to take the job since the failing world is within the sphere of a dangerous viking lager possessing military vessels. The merchant offers to pay handsomely for the PCs' help and even offers to increase the pay if they do run into the vikings. They may not, but it is a possibility which frightens many starmercs.

There are six possible variations to this scenario.

1. All is as stated, but the PCs have no difficulty in escorting the merchant's vessel. The vikings never appear, and they safely arrive at the failing world.

2. All is as stated, but the PCs do encounter the raiders. Luckily, their reputation seems to have been exaggerated. They are mere rippers with a single worn-out vessel and should be easily defeated.

3. As in 2, but the raiders are corsairs with a single vessel which is a match for the PCs' starship.

4. All is as stated. The vikings do exist and they possess several small military vessels. The PCs are no match for them in a straight fight, so they may have to resort to other means to defeat them.

5. As in 4, but the viking lager has actually taken to protecting this failing world and its people. Provided that the PCs make clear their intentions, the vikings will not harm them and may, in fact, become useful allies in the future.

6. The merchant is lying. His cargo is really weaponry for a local rebel group on the world. The so-called vikings are what remains of the system defense force which defends the world against unscrupulous types like the PCs' patron.

Minor Alien Race

Required Skills: Weapons, Stealth, Recon
Required Equipment: Weapons

The PCs encounter a member of a local minor alien race. He explains that he is a leader among his people on this world and that he wishes to hire the PCs for a job. The alien explains further that a planetary corporation has been harassing and threatening members of his community. While the corporation denies this, he does not believe it. He will hire the PCs to investigate into these acts of xenophobia and discover why the corporation is behind them.

There are six possible variations to this scenario.

1. All is as stated. The corporation is taking out its frustrations on the aliens since they are a minority on this world. It has ordered attacks and harassment as ways to provide recreation for disgruntled employees. Proof of this would involve local authorities.

2. As in 1, but the corporation itself does not sanction these attacks. Rather, a small group within the company is responsible.

3. The attacks are not by the corporation, but by a hate group using the corporation as a cover. The corporation is indeed innocent and wants its good name cleared.

4. The corporation is responsible, but for financial reasons. The alien community lives on a rare resource area which the company wants. It wishes to frighten the aliens away so as to gain the resource.

5. As in 4, but the local military is responsible. It is using the corporation as a cover to draw suspicion. The military wishes to gain the resource itself rather than through another source.

6. The alien is lying. He and his community are taking advantage of local xenophobia for their own benefit. They want to force concessions from the company through false accusations.

Corporate Official

Required Skills: Weapons, Intrusion, Stealth, Recon
Required Equipment: None

The PCs meet a general manager for a local corporation. She asks the PCs if they would be interested in a high-paying job. If interested, she states that a megacorporate executive stationed within a nearby factional Safe area is willing to "defect" to her corporation. This "defector" possesses knowledge and skills which the smaller local company could use to good effect. Unfortunately, the megacorp is beginning to suspect the loyalty of its executive and has placed him under heavy guard at all times. Using a corporate vessel and pilot, she wants the PCs to jump into the Safe area, locate the executive and bring him back alive to this world.

There are six possible variations to this scenario.

1. All is as stated. The executive is heavily guarded, but, provided the PCs can defeat the guards, there are no additional complications.

2. All is as stated, but the executive is part of a trap set by megacorporate security. He really does not wish to defect; he only wishes to lure some of the local corporation's operatives to him so that they can be held as hostages and interrogated for information.

3. The patron is lying about parts of the mission. The executive is actually a brilliant inventor who the corporation wishes to seize. He is happy working for the megacorp and does not want to defect.

4. The patron is lying. The executive is actually a defector from the local corporation. She wants him back so as to find out about operations and strategies compromised.

5. As in 4, but the executive is actually a member of local corporate security who decided to defect to a bigger corporation.

6. The patron is telling the truth as she knows it. In actuality, a higher-ranking official is setting her up to sponsor a false mission so as to discredit her and remove her as a potential corporate rival.

Charitable Organization

Required Skills: Weapons, Medical, Liaison
Required Equipment: None

The PCs are approached by a local supervisor for a charitable organization. He explains that a nearby world is reportedly sliding into chaos and is in need of immediate aid. It may be on the brink of becoming a doomed world unless something can be done. A number of vessels will jump into the system to help, but he needs additional back-up personnel to ensure that the mission succeeds. He has no idea how bad things actually are or what will be found there. The supervisors offers pay as well as the gratitude of the organization.

There are six possible variations to this scenario.

1. The PCs jump in-system and discover that the situation is not nearly as bad as was believed. Helping the people and re-establishing some semblance of order proves relatively easy.

2. As in 1, but raider vessels are in-system. They are hostile and will immediately attack the PCs and the charity's vessels. Raider personnel are even located on the world's surface.

3. As in 1, but a wrecked vessel is in orbit around the planet in a dead man's tumble. This vessel still shows signs of life. A rescue attempt may be made to save these people, who are merchants attacked by a raider band.

4. The planetary devastation is very great, and the local military has seized control. Prison camps abound, and brutality is common. The PCs might have to deal with these people if they are to effect any change on this planet.

5. The planetary devastation is very great. Bands of armed men pillage and plunder what is left. These men are perpetrating atrocities against the survivors, and the PCs are asked to deal with them.

6. There is nothing the PCs can do. This world is indeed doomed, and no amount of help will change that. The PCs must face up to one of the innumerable tragedies of the Rebellion.

Businessman

Required Skills: Intrusion, Stealth
Required Equipment: None

The PCs are hired by a local businessman. He complains that since the collapse of the Imperial economy, he has had great difficulty in obtaining higher-tech weapons and equipment for his clients. What little of it this world gets goes to the military. To that end, he wants the PCs to break into an armory and steal enough weapons for him to sell to his clients. He claims that the military has no right whatsoever to monopolize the high-tech trade and that this is detrimental to the health of the local economy.

There are six possible variations to this scenario.

1. All is as stated. The armory is lightly guarded, and the PCs will meet with little resistance.

2. As in 1, but the armory is heavily guarded against attack. The PCs will face stiff opposition before they can succeed.

3. As in 2, but the military has been warned of the PCs' efforts on the part of the businessman. They are laying in wait to ambush the PCs and to stop them quickly.

4. As in 1, but the businessman is actually a fence for a criminal syndicate. He wants to sell the weapons to local hoods and thugs.

5. As in 4, but the armory is heavily guarded against attack. Local law enforcement supplements the military guards.

6. The patron is lying. His clients are disgruntled members of the local government who wish to take over by force. They need weapons to arm their supporters for a *coup d'etat*. The armory is heavily guarded since the government is wary of just such an eventuality.
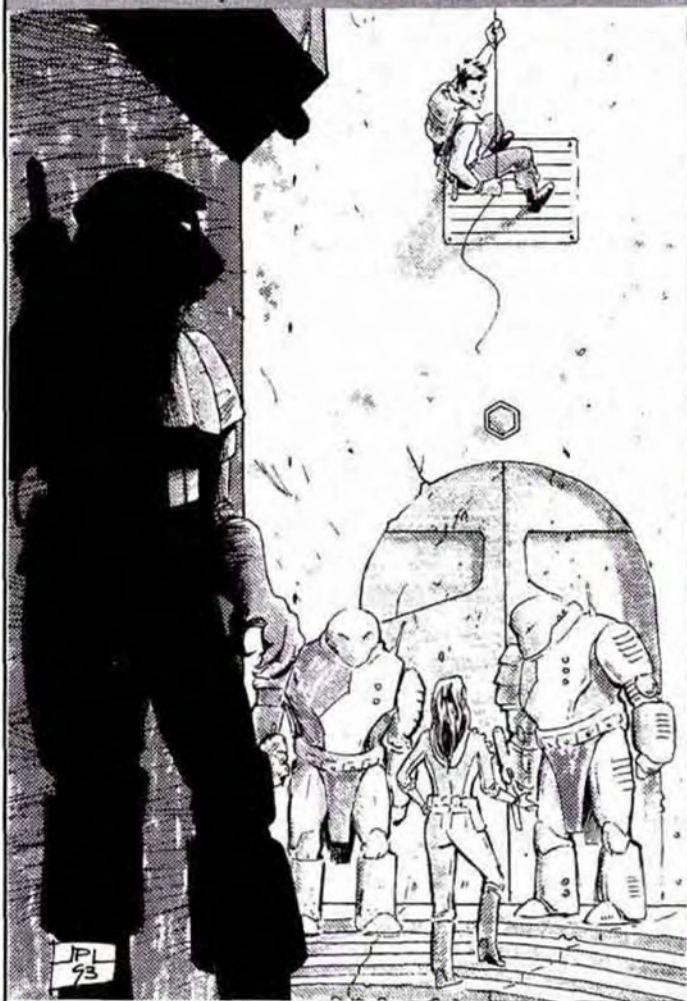
Government Official

Required Skills: Starship skills
Required Equipment: Starship (any type), starship weapons

The PCs meet an official of an interstellar polity who wishes to hire them for a mail run. She says that the secret of success for an interstellar government is communications, and she needs the PCs to carry one ton of mail from the capital world to an adjacent one. She will pay highly. She stresses the fact that the mail the PCs are carrying is official and necessary to the success of her interstellar polity.

There are six possible variations to this scenario.

1. All is as stated. The PCs easily carry the mail from the capital world to an adjacent one. There are no complications.

2. As the PCs jump in-system at the adjacent world, they are met by a ripper band which has been raiding the worlds of the polity. They must face the rippers in combat if they are to complete their mission.

3. As in 2, but the PCs face a band of rebel ships instead of rippers. The rebels oppose the current government of the polity and wish to bring it down by any means necessary.

4. The ton of mail is actually filled with weights and nothing more. The PCs have been chosen as decoys for rebels against the polity. They will be followed and attacked at a convenient time. The government official knew this and hoped that the PCs would divert attention from the actual courier.

5. The ton of mail is actually a cache of stolen merchandise. The "government official" is really a member of local criminal syndicate which is fencing valuable and hard-to-obtain items. The PCs are being used as ignorant couriers for this illegal trade.

6. The ton of mail is actually purloined military and economic information about the interstellar polity. The official hopes to sell these to the highest bidder on the adjacent world. She has no agenda other than greed. She would sell the secrets to rebels or vikings without regard for the polity. All that she desires is to make a quick credit by exploiting the precarious situation in the emerging interstellar polity. Ω
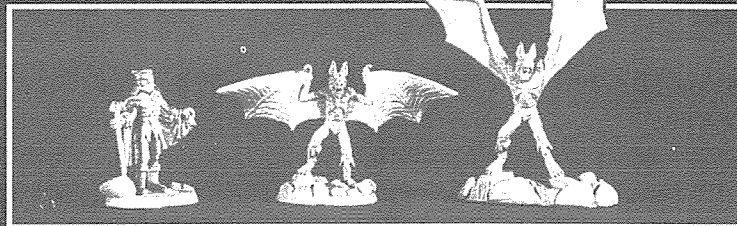
TORAAGO

The player characters
may find themselves
forced into slavery
when the Darakha jumps
into the wrong system.

By Clayton R. Bush
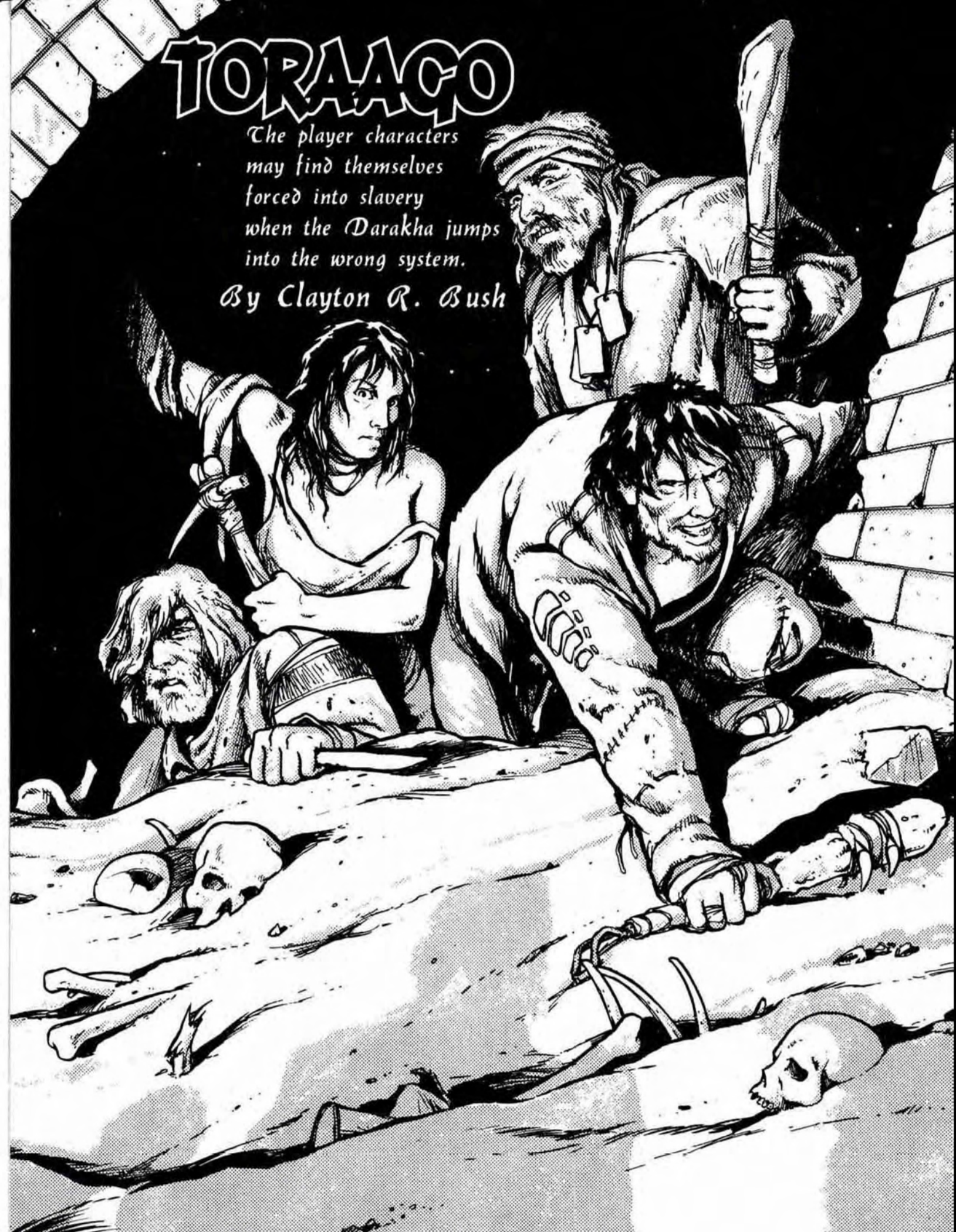
This adventure takes place on the world Toraago in Gushemege Sector during the Rebellion. The adventure can be set during **Hard Times** and in other locales. As written, the following assumes the characters are cultural Vilani leaving Gushemege Sector for Vland Sector. They have no interest in staying near this world after the adventure is over.

This scenario is written in the adventure nugget format, which means that, depending on choices of individual characters and referees, each gaming group will make its own way through the plot, choosing a unique path through the possible encounter nuggets presented.

ARRIVAL

The adventure begins on 234-1120 when the *Darakha* (a lightly armed merchant with a minuscule arms locker and one 40-ton small craft) exits jumpspace. After being fired at and hit repeatedly in the previous system, the ship jumped hastily. Fears of a misjump followed when one passenger complained of nausea, but subsided as no one else followed suit. The engineering crewmembers were repairing damage to systems until six hours before, when they announced they had done all they could without a shipyard.

Alas, the *Darakha* is not in the intended target system. There is a habitable planet, but no orbital station. The starport does not respond to radio or laser commo, and there is no system traffic. The lack of a gas giant limits refueling options to the habitable world.

Barring damage to the computer and its library data, the party should eventually identify its location as Toraago (1018 C244412-A S Ni 700 Im M0 V M3 D).

Toraago has several seas, with rivers running into them from intervening mountains. Settlement is 90% in one city, with only a handful of very minor abandoned settlements not connected to the city. Manufacturing electronic parts for export to nearby Kamurinmur (1015 A260985-E) was the major industry.

A minor nonhuman race originally seeded the world with alien plant life, adding to the limited local flora. The race's government abandoned the project to settle this world before importing livestock, and left its mixed biology on its own.

Humans eventually settled the world. Efforts to import human livestock failed when the plant life poisoned the livestock. The major food source is fishing in the sea near the city, and the harvest must be processed to separate local from transplanted varieties of fish.

PLOT LINE

Toraago's economy collapsed after a raid in 1119. The population fell by over 80% due to famine and evacuation. An ex-security officer, now called "Mad Dog," organized remaining workers at the high-tech center and established an enclave. Using the old extrality perimeter, strengthened by the raiders, as a border, he has set up a fief that monopolizes most remaining pieces of the technology.

Robots capture and oversee enslaved human workers. Slaves tend gardens and do some repair work. Any captured PCs will be assigned to unloading the one remaining seafarming ship and helping process the fish products. (Slaves lead dull lives, with life-styles dictated by their work gang assignment.)

Resolving the adventurers' problem involves using the fief's workshops. Stealth is possible. If the players are all captured, assume that a second group from the ship contacts local merchants (outside the fief) who barter for certain parts.

STRANDED

As the ship nears the starport, a missile volley misses it. If the ship persists in trying to land, laser turrets and two bay fusion guns open fire at closer range. At a safe distance, Captain Kadarin will chair a meeting of the ship's company to discuss what to do. An older, experienced ship captain who does his job and leaves trading and landing parties to others, Kadarin will veto any idea to use his crew "as bearers and gofers."

A decision to jump again is almost inevitable, but cultural Vilani always discuss decisions.

1. The ship can refuel away from the starport. There are other seas.

2. It is not a scheduled stop, and they have no one to pick up. A check of the computer's record shows no Vilani megacorporation presence on this world.

The discussion permits some role-playing: Some players will advocate leaving, or staying and investigating. The referee should have NPCs act out the Vilani preference for avoiding risk.

Refueling at a sea distant from the starport goes uneventfully. When the *Darakha* attempts to jump, smoke billows out of the engineering section. Things quickly calm down. After a brief review, the engineers say the ship must land somewhere so they can take the jump drive apart.

If they are running the ship, the players may choose where to land. Otherwise, the ship settles into a wooded valley 30 kilometers due west of the starport. NOE approach and local hills should have concealed its arrival from ground-based sensors. (There are no orbiting satellites, and there has been no sign of any flying vehicles.)

No one approaches or sneaks up on the ship. Its approach did go undetected. (Mad Dog and company do not care about passersby.)

To diagnose problem:
Routine, Engineering, 1 hour (safe).
Referee: They need a new germanium capacitor, or a crystaliron forge to make a new one. On outstanding success, they learn that a crystaliron forge requires weightlessness or antigravity.

Another meeting is needed to discuss the new situation. A "need part" situation can be resolved in one of five ways: make the part, jury-rig around the part, buy (barter for) the part, salvage (or steal) the part from a wreck (or someone else's ship), become a native.

MEDURMA PRINCE

The ship receives a repeating message signal: "This is Captain Bryan Nobbles of the long liner *Medurma Prince* requesting evacuation. Our ship cannot be repaired. Do not approach the starport. It fires at anything that flies. Approach our perimeter in daylight."

The signal comes from the southwest and is probably 20 miles away. Kadarin can provide a cutter for the group's use. The ship's locker can provide autopistols for each person in the landing party; only one or two ACRs, shotguns or hunting rifles are available. They can spare one hand computer; the engineers have already entered the specifications on the needed part.

The forested area has evergreen trees rising 30 to 40 meters above the surface. This permits a concealed approach on foot. The signal comes from a clearing, about a kilometer wide at its widest. A ship sits within a staked perimeter, with one entrance through the stakes. The ship's cargo hatch is open, facing away from the entrance.

When the first PC enters the clearing, dark, squat, cylindrical robots emerge from hiding. One rises out of the ground (antigrav), shedding a covering layer of soil. A second (tracked) rolls out from bushes beside the clearing.

They converge on the lead PC, while calling for him to drop any weapons. They will not look for or react to anyone

MAD DOG

Mad Dog, ruler of the redoubt, is an ex-security officer who organized remaining workers at the high-tech center and established an enclave. He and his wife were security staff at starport. Since his wife's death fighting the raiders, he has stopped caring about others. Now he looks out only for himself.

After the attackers left him behind, he organized some people in the factory. They used parts to develop simple robots and electronic surveillance systems, which gave them the edge in fighting gangs. He is now enslaving people to expand his domain until it is large enough to be self-supporting.

Player characters will meet Mad Dog only if a captive attracts exceptional interest, if someone reconnoitering the building goes into the right one or if a pursuit occurs.

else unless fired upon. The robots do not respond to any questions. Their vocabulary seems limited to direct orders. They will not search the character for *anything*, including commo gear.

The characters' initial impression is that the robots are heavily armored. The antigrav robot has an ACR built in, and the tracked robot has a laser rifle.

After the lead character surrenders, a third robot drives an air/raft out of the ship's cargo hold and over to the character. After he and the other two robots get in, the air/raft flies off in the direction of the starport city.

Play out the eventual search of the wreck. The lights do not work, and the characters are unfamiliar with the ship's layout. The *Medurma Prince* has been stripped of many useful parts, and no sections of her engineering or controls still function. While there are useful parts here, there are no germanium capacitors or crystaliron forges. The ship's log (along with other recording equipment) is not here.

KLACKEN

Located near the coast in a flat river bottom, the city of Klacken looks ravaged. Several tall buildings are missing their upper halves, and there are few lights. The outermost areas are residential, with a few small stores. Later there are residential, commercial and industrial sections, as well as parks.

The PCs may think to climb to some height. Entering buildings should pose no problem. Surveyed at night from atop a tall building, the starport has several well-lit areas, with a lighted perimeter around the starport and an adjoining area.

Possible events include meeting animals (wild or abandoned), gangs, vehicles or robots. Contact with local inhabitants can lead to meeting with local merchants, who trade with the redoubt and accept protection. Robot attack is presented after the meeting nugget, but could be an encounter in its own right.

RESCUE

While exploring, the group hears sounds of a power drill. Several men are trying to force their way into a building, apparently a bank. Some wear Starport Authority jumpsuits.

The men are cannibals. (This will not be apparent—it's not stenciled on their foreheads.) Some young orphans and an adult female occupy the bank building. Their protector went out four days ago and did not return.

If any of the attackers are captured, one is Gerry Laskur. He admits being a small-time hood, but, hey, a man's got to make a living. He's not a mechanic, but his gang collected a lot of stuff, and the characters are welcome to any of it they want.

Laskur and other prisoners (if any) will lead the party to their base. It's in the basement of a ruined church about three kilometers away from the bank building. Most of the stuff there still works, but little is of immediate use. A few cans of food turn up, but so do human bones.

At that moment, the remaining concealed cannibals attack. Their leader signals the attack with a laser. It burns out after one shot, then they all rush with clubs.

MEETING

After contacting a gang or some wandering citizen, the group is brought to meet assembled merchants. All of them look hungry and dirty. They run various trades, supply other survivors with tools and stuff, and trade with the redoubt.

The world was attacked and troops landed. They wrecked much of the seafarming machinery and took many skilled technicians with them. A few merchant ships visited afterward, but did not bring enough parts to repair the seafarming machinery.

Famine followed, then disease. The population is less than one-tenth what it was. Still, some of those missing could have escaped to other areas, which were almost uninhabited before the Rebellion. Food would be a problem, as the local biochemistry is only partially compatible with humans.

Some group kept the starport secure. Who they were no one now knows. People were busy surviving themselves.

Of late, robots have been scavenging the ruins of the city. People without ID bracelets are picked up and carried back to the redoubt. There they are put into work groups preparing or unloading a working seafarming ship or working on gardens.

ROBOT ATTACK

If the characters radio back to the ship, the redoubt's occupants will triangulate the group's location. Robot patrols may also be encountered even if no radio messages are sent.

When attacking, robots converge and carry some people back to the redoubt. These robots may be tracked, hover or antigrav. All have built-in ACRs, and they fire tranq rounds. Treat any weapon skill as 0.

With their usual level of interest, the robots tend to gang up on one or two characters while the rest escape. (They can't all escape all the time.) If the robots do split up, each will try to take one captive.

The robots have short arms built in; any unconscious captives will placed on a tarp and dragged back to the redoubt. They will drag a captive even if another robot has a conscious captive who could carry the first. Attempts to help a dragged captive will elicit orders to surrender.

REDOUBT

No one on the outside knows the current layout inside the redoubt. Shoreline and roads have not moved, of course, but which buildings are in use and what for are unknowns.

The perimeter encloses the starport, scout base and an industrial park. A canal with a high fence separates the redoubt from the city, draining marshlands and lake. In a sense, the redoubt forms a peninsula surrounded by the sea, the swampy marshlands and the canal draining the lake.

Immobile robots dot the redoubt. It is impossible to tell if they are watching or if they have powered down. This deployment permits even inactive robots to maintain order.

The starport and scout base have hangar buildings with closed doors. There is no movement around them. All are empty, except for gutted wrecks. The raiders were very thorough, and the redoubt's occupants found only a few scraps themselves. No amount of searching will find a germanium capacitor in the hangars.

The port section has several piers. The one working seafarming ship ties up at a pier at night. The other three remain at anchor at all times and are not maintained.

The industrial area consists of several prefabricated concrete buildings in assorted grays and light browns. Several have trademarks or names built into the walls, but other exterior signs were deliberately removed.

Players on the outside may approach the perimeter afoot, in a repaired local ground vehicle, or in the cutter, either flying or underwater. Once detected, fire from the starport defenses or from shoulder-mounted antiair missiles becomes possible.

CAPTIVITY

Any captives are dumped in a slave barracks. The floor is dirt over a concrete foundation, the windows are barred, the walls are made of wood, and the door is locked. This building is about 300 meters from the pier (passing other buildings). A 60-meter open area separates the *rear* of the barracks from the perimeter.

The perimeter here is a 20-foot-tall mesh steel fence topped by barbed wire. There is an ugly looking canal on the other side, and it is about 15 meters across; how deep it is the PCs cannot tell. Two elevated guardhouses can see this stretch of the perimeter from either direction.

The dock-gang holds new captives and those the overseers do not trust, but no one will volunteer that information. No special interest will be shown in captives. They will not be connected with a starship still on this world, because the redoubt's occupants believe that ship left the system.

Any captive is dumped here and left until the dock-gang returns. The dock-gang works in the morning and the afternoon, and is locked in the barracks at night and midday. When they go to work, everybody in the barracks is made to go to work.

The work involves moving raw seafood into containers and trucking it across the pier to a processing plant. There it's treated to remove impurities and packed into food cakes. The ship's machinery has many sharp parts, including some cutting blades. Characters without gloves may stick their hands on sharp fish bones. Other variety includes hosing out the containers when done moving fish parts.

About 20 individuals will be locked in the barracks for the night. The building and doors are stout enough to withstand any one individual's attempts at forcing them. The lock is not especially hard to pick, if the characters have any relevant skills or equipment.

The other slaves think the characters are spies. They will not admit this, but it will hamper getting cooperation. None will initiate any conversation with PCs.

If a PC discusses escape, the other slaves will ask what the character's plan is. How does he plan to get out of the redoubt, and where would he go afterward? If he does not have a good answer about where to go, no one will assist him. (They are curious about his ideas, mainly.) None will report or restrain him, either.

EXPLORING

Visibility is limited. With no moon, night is very dark. Raised lights illuminate the perimeter, and most of the light available comes from this source.

From the front of the barracks, any character can see a three-story building to the east and a row of one-story buildings to the west. The tall building is windowless, and the character should recognize it as the seafood-processing plant. The other buildings have windows, but no lights are on.

The other buildings are shops. This is apparent when looking in through the windows. The doors can be forced or the locks picked. Forcing a door will automatically sound a silent alarm.

To *not* set off silent alarm when picking the lock:
Routine, Dexterity.
Referee: Increase difficulty to Difficult if the characters do not have applicable skills. Three robots will appear 10 minutes after the alarm is sounded, but will take only one prisoner (unless the second person is rather incautious). They will relock the door behind them.

Rows of machines line the work area, with work tables mixed in. Investigation shows that most of the machines present work on wood, aluminum, etc. Further search leads to back rooms (an office, lockers with clothing and perhaps some food) and connections to other buildings. Determined search will eventually find, in a separate room, a crystaliron forge.

To make the needed part:
Routine, Engineering, 10 minutes.
Referee: Increase difficulty if the character is unskilled. An experienced engineer (level 2 or better) could guess at the specifications or make several parts (hoping one is close enough). Anyone without engineering experience or the hand computer (with the specifications) will have to come back.

If the merchants were contacted 24 hours earlier (by someone with the specifications), the characters find a set of 12 recently made parts. They will need experience or specifications to recognize them as possible germanium capacitors; naturally, they can take them.

ESCAPE

The other slaves in the dock-gang have an escape plan. What they need is somewhere to escape to—someplace with edible food. They can pick the lock, know where the redoubt's two air/rafts are, and could pilot them. They do not know anything about a crystaliron forge or have any engineering skills.

The dock-gang will not reveal the escape plan to a possible spy.

The route to the air/rafts crosses several areas "watched" by immobile robots; the dock-gang will not risk the route until the night of the escape. The slaves will suspect

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ROBOTS

These cylindrical, squat beings resemble the Daleks of the *Dr. Who* show. Apparent parts are (top to bottom): a rotating turret mounting sensors and one weapon, a solid body looking like armor plate bolted to a framework and a covered locomotion section on the underside of the body. The armor is sufficient to render personal projectile weapons useless.

Common weapons mounted are ACRs, laser carbines, gauss pistols and grenade launchers. Locomotion varies; the types in use are wheels (most common), tracked (rare), air cushion (rarest) and antigrav.

If one is opened (most likely by landing the cutter atop it, damaging the cutter), characters will find biological parts mixed in with the mechanical ones. Careful study (only) will show no evidence of brain tissue. Instead, things like eyes and muscles are part of the mechanism.

The reason for the divergence in types is that these robots were assembled from available parts. Various workers were left on the planet, but no engineers. Personnel have assembled parts together and installed rudimentary programming, but that is all they knew how to do.

BIOTECH RESEARCHERS

The researchers cooperate with Mad Dog, as he has superior force. They are working to re-create food crops so that people can survive here, and they do not have time to get involved in ideology. Besides, Mad Dog has weapons.

Player characters will meet the researchers only if they reconnoiter the right building. During any trouble, the researchers will hide.

anyone who suggests trying it earlier of being a provocateur.

The air/rafts are disabled for the night. One can be repaired easily enough if there is time, and the other needs extensive work but could be flown. Conjure up red oil lights, the smell of burning transmission fluid, grinding noises, etc.

It is technically possible to carry the crystaliron forge out in an air/raft, but it weighs two tons. How anyone could manhandle it from being bolted to the floor of a locked room and into a stolen air/raft fast enough to avoid recapture is beyond the dock-gang.

RESOLUTION

The finale depends a great deal on what goes before. The robots will act to divide the group, perhaps into three parts. Getting everyone together again—after acquiring the needed part—can be most of the trouble. It helps if captives have and retain communication gear.

(Mis)communication with the slaves can enliven things. For example, they could be coerced to discuss escape, and even agree to doing certain things. Execution depends on what they really believe, which they won't tell to a suspected spy. In playtesting, in the middle of their escape attempt, when the PCs' cutter actually did fly into the compound, they were temporarily confused. They had been sure it did not exist, and they were about to skip out to the air/rafts, leaving the PCs as a diversion.

Contacting the local merchants and having them special-order some parts may be critical. It permits any unskilled characters inside the redoubt to stumble across the parts themselves, and it increases the odds of getting the characters and the part out of the redoubt. If all PCs are captured, determine when a second group would have made these arrangements.

There will be no pursuit if the group leaves by air. An escape by foot will bring some pursuit, as the redoubt has the means to respond in that case.

Complications range from the characters inside not having the specifications, to an antiair missile crashing an escaping air/raft just outside the perimeter (30 kilometers from safety). Ω
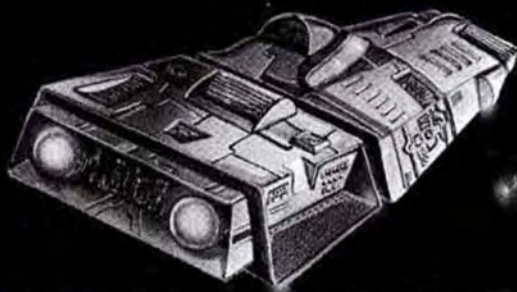
Proto-Dimensions ™

Warning: Proto-Dimensional walking can have severe side effects... maybe.
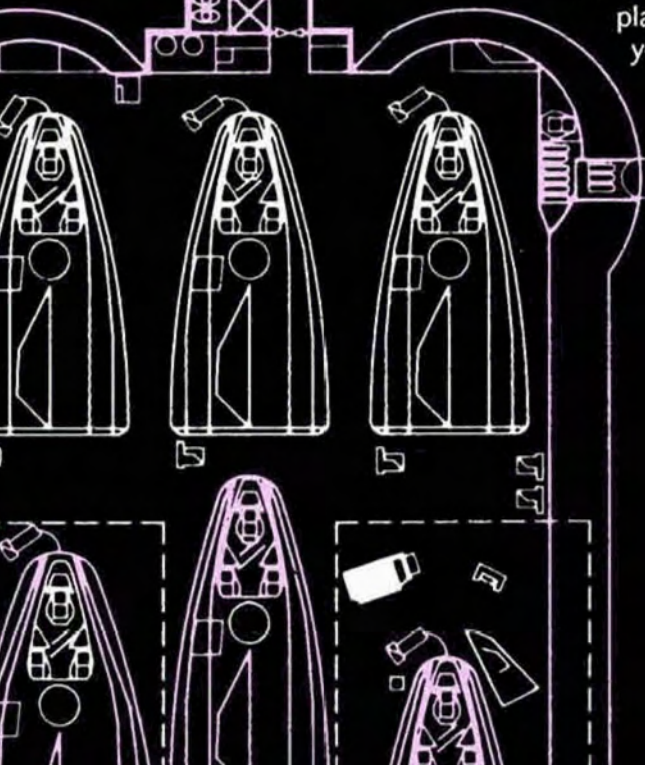
Volume 1

The time machine has yet to be built in our world. However, in **Dark Conspiracy**, you can learn to walk through dimensions. The **Proto-Dimensional Compendium** provides you new dimensions to explore. Each new dimension is presented in adventure format, describing how player characters discover them, what they encounter within, and how they might get out again. Covered in this compendium are more than 12 dimensions to explore, as well as a multitude of information for the referee so that the dimensions can be used repeatedly within a **Dark Conspiracy** campaign. GDW: 2109. $12.

GDW

Fear and Loathing

A fear mechanic rules variant by Craig Sheeley

Morlocks. Vampiric things that make the vampire in *Nosferatu* look handsome. Horrid flesh-eating slugs and the chitinous monster bugs that they grow into. Ghastly mutants, worm-infested zombies, hideous technohybrids and otherworldly spirits. These are the denizens of **Dark Conspiracy**, "a roleplaying game of unearthly horror." Yet **Dark Conspiracy** lacks one key element present in every other horror game on the market--a fear mechanic. True, the monsters and foes in **Dark Conspiracy** are horrific, but there is no mechanism to translate the horror into game-play.

There *are* rules for panic (page 77): "This is not blind panic which sends them screaming away, but which rather causes them to freeze momentarily." This panic is caused by wound damage or surprise. Nothing supernatural here; this reaction is instinctive, the "fight or flight" response warring with intellect.

There are also rules for active fear protection; many Dark creatures can project fear or other emotions through Project Emotion. This means that the emotion is imposed from outside. It is an effective weapon, not a response.

But horror means a reaction from within, a situation arising from a person's own fears and phobias. It is not voluntary, or imposed from without, and it runs much deeper than merely being startled. It is the gut-wrenching, brain-paralyzing chill that sticks hearts in the throats, the "blind panic which sends them screaming away." And it's lacking in **Dark Conspiracy**. Certainly, a good referee and good roleplayers can create it, feel the chill and enjoy the suspense—until the Initiative count starts. Once the combat sequence is begun, horror usually goes out the window. Few roleplayers have the dedication to stick to the situation and roleplay panic when a chance comes up for them to strike back.

For example, take the following situation: The characters are out in a deserted town, at night, looking for something that has already killed several people (NPCs, naturally) in a particularly gruesome fashion, but in such a way that the killer's identity remains a mystery. In short, the PCs don't have the foggiest idea what they're looking for.

They skulk onward, ever aware that they're terribly vulnerable to attack, and they don't even know what (or who) might attack them. A sliver of a moon is all that lights the scene, and the PCs' flashlights seem terribly inadequate to illuminate the empty houses around them. They feel more and more uneasy, certain that there are eyes watching them.

The referee, feeling whimsical, has the killer join the procession at the rear, shuffling along behind the rear-guard. Sooner or later, someone looks back and sees it, a creature that is clearly not human, not even terrestrial, an alien thing that would put fear into an alien skull-collector from *Predator*. What happens?

In a real-life situation, plenty of adrenaline would start flowing, and a lot of psychological and instinctive reactions would flood the minds of the people so involved, hampering or overwhelming intelligent thought. In *Call of Cthulhu,* the characters would be making Sanity rolls right and left. In *GURPS,* it would be time for a Fear Check, at a nasty minus (about –5), with various embarrassing and inconvenient consequences.

In the game of **Dark Conspiracy**, the characters were surprised, so there's a panic check, which the average character (PC or NPC) has a 33% chance of passing without incident. And if the panic check is failed, the only response is that those who failed seek cover. No fear, no horror, no real panic, just a measured military-style response to sudden attack. Which is fine in a military situation such as **Twilight: 2000**, but fails to fit the bill in a "game of future horror."

TERROR TEST

When characters run into a situation that should inspire terror, they test to determine their reactions. This is a standard skill check, based on Initiative (representing the character's conditioned responses to perceived threats) or Willpower (representing the character's self-control), whichever is higher. *This test is in addition to the panic check, if the characters are surprised/ambushed.* The difficulty of the test is determined by the ghastliness of what they're facing: Discovering a deadly spider crawling up one's arm, or being menaced by a psycho-killer brandishing a bloody weapon, etc., would be Easy difficulty; the object of fear is easily identified and not really too terrible. (So why do victims in bad cinema always panic and run screaming? Because they have Initiative 1 and no Willpower skill, usually.)

Facing a werebeast, its muzzle dripping gore from its last victim, being gripped by a yeti, encountering a barghest or tentacular ET, and so on, would be an Average difficulty test.

These things are scary, but more-or-less identifiable.

A close encounter of the worst kind—being gripped by a bloodkin troll, at the mercy of an oni or other dæmon, surrounded by hordes of insectoid grubs or even bumping into one of the Dark Masters in person (think of going toe-to-toe with Cthulhu to get an idea of this level of fear)—is a Difficult test. The key is the utter alien reality of the terror faced, the ultimate fear of the unknown. Fear retreats before intelligence, and knowing what you face reduces fear.

CONSEQUENCES

The results of a terror test are interpreted as follows:

Outstanding Success: Such characters immediately get a free action—if they are already in the combat sequence and in a phase where they act, they get another action to specifically respond to the menace, even if they've already acted in that phase. No terror here.

Success: The character may act as normal. There's fear, but the character has controlled it.

Failure: Such characters are terrified. They may not take any offensive actions until they have controlled the fear (see below). They may run away, move to cover or defend themselves in melee combat. No skills (except the appropriate Melee Combat skill used in defense) may be used until such individuals have controlled their own fear.

Catastrophic Failure: Such characters have lost control of their actions. They may run away, faint, huddle into a whimpering ball or even lapse into gibbering insanity (the referee and such player should work together to determine a character's exact reaction). These characters may not do anything effective except, perhaps, run away. No skills may be used, and they may attempt to control their own fear, but it's more difficult (see below).

CONTROLLING FEAR

If a character fails a terror test, he may attempt to deal with the fear and regain control in later phases. When a terrified character gets a chance to act (taking into account actions lost if startled by a panic check), the character may test to control the fear. This is done as a regular terror test, but at one level of difficulty easier than the test that caused the fear in the first place—for instance, a Difficult test becomes Average, and an Average test becomes Easy. Easy tests stay Easy. Apply the results of this test as those from a standard terror test (above). So it is possible to snap back to violent action after a brief scare (if an Outstanding Success is rolled), or lose it completely (a Catastrophic Failure).

Characters suffering the effects of a Catastrophic Failure on a previous test attempt to control their fear at the difficulty first encountered (i.e., a Difficult test remains a Difficult test, an Average test remains Average, etc.).

THERE IS HOPE

If this optional rule is used, give a specific experience point toward Willpower advancement to any character who managed an Outstanding Success on a terror test. In addition, give a specific experience point toward Willpower advancement to any character who was subjected to a terror test and subsequently saw the menace defeated ("So, they *can* die! Next time, I'll know better!").

With this rule, Willpower is even more important in **Dark Conspiracy** than ever. Particularly with the new Initiative Experience Costs introduced in the **Dark Conspiracy PC Booster Kit**.

Enact the terror test at your option. I find that it makes for a much more challenging game, since the players can't always count on their characters to act with complete cool and courage any more. And it's amusing to see a high-Initiative combat monster go goo-goo while the strong-willed pacifist calmly stands firm. Ω

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conventions

Operation Green Flag: Battle-Tech III Plus, July 24-25 at the Embers in Carlisle, PA. Contact M. Fonier's Games Only Emporium, 200 Third St., New Cumberland, PA 17070.

CanGames '93, July 30-Aug. 2 at the Citadel Inn (formerly the Skyline Hotel) in downtown Ottawa, Ontario. Contact CanGames '93, PO Box 3358, Station D, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada K1P 6H8.

GameFest, Aug. 4-8 in historic Old Towne in San Diego, CA. Contact GameFest XIV, 3954 Harney St., San Diego, CA 92110.

KingCon '93, Aug. 6-8 in Dayton, OH. Contact KingCon '93, POB 31174, Dayton, OH 45431.

1993 GenCon® Game Fair, Aug. 19-22 at the MECCA Convention Center, Milwaukee, WI. Send a SASE to GenCon® Game Fair, PO Box 756, Lake Geneva, WI 53147.

DRF-Con '93, Aug. 27-29 at Katrinedalsskolen in Vanlose, Denmark. Contact André Kist Simonsen, Rytterkær 21, Herringlose DK-3670 Vekso Sjælland, Denmark.

FRON 9, Aug. 28-29 at the Buergerhaus Griesheim, Schwarzerlenweg 57, Frankfurt, Germany. For details, contact 252 e.V., c/o Martin Kliehm, Inder Roemerstadt 164, 6000 Frankfurt am Main 50, Germany.

Sioux City GameCon VIII, Sept. 3-5 at the Marina Inn, 4th and B streets, South Sioux City Nebraska. For information, send a large SASE to Kurt Lyons, 2801 Jennings, Sioux City, IA 51104.

Gateway '93, Sept. 3-6 at the LA Airport Hyatt Hotel. Contact Strategicon, PO Box 3849, Torrance, CA 90510-3849.

ConFrancisco/Worldcon 51, Sept. 3-6 at Le Meridien and Parc 55 hotels and Moscone Convention Center, San Francisco, CA. Contact ConFrancisco, 712 Bancroft Road, Suite 1993, Walnut Creek, CA 94598.

DemiCon 4, Sept. 24-26 at the Sheraton Conference Hotel, Dulaney Valley Road and Fairmont Avenue, Towson, MD. Send a SASE to Harford Adventure Society, c/o The Strategic Castle, 114 N. Toll Gate Road, Bel Air, MD 21014.

Tacticon '93, Sept. 24-26 at the Sheraton Hotel of Lakewood, Co. Contact the Denver Gamers Association, PO Box 440058, Aurora, CO 80044.

Kaleidoscope '93, Sept. 24-26 at the Radisson Hotel, Lynchburg, VA. Contact Kaleidoscope, c/o Dave Davies, 300 Harrison St., Lynchburg, VA 24504.

Earth '93, Sept. 25-26 at the Freizeitheim Stocken, Eichsfelderstr.101, Hannover/Germany. Contact Arne Rassek, Berliner Str.23, D—W 3005 Hemmingen 1, Germany.

NOVAG VIII, Oct. 2-3 at Elks Lodge #2188, Fairfax, VA. Contact NOVAG VIII, PO Box 729, Sterling, VA 20167.

Rally 'Round the Flag '93, Oct. 8-10 at the Columbus Convention Center, 400 North High St., Columbus, OH. For details, contact HMGSNT, PO Box 14272, Columbus, OH 43214.

P.E.W. KAHN-U II, Oct. 16-17 at the Embers in Carlisle, PA. Contact M. Fonier's Games Only Emporium, 200 Third St., New Cumberland, PA 17070.

U•Con '93, Oct. 29-31 at the University of Michigan Union in Ann Arbor, MI. Contact U•Con '93, PO Box 4491, Ann Arbor, MI 48106-4491.

LagaCon 16, Nov. 6 at the Fraternal Order of Eagles, 116 North 8th St., Lebanon, PA. Contact the Lebanon Area Gamers Association, 806 Cumberland St., Lebanon, PA 17042.

Pocon '93, The Rematch, Nov. 12-14 at the Holiday Inn, Bartonsville, PA. Contact Ed Dowgiallo, The Pocono Encampment, PO Box 390, Effort, PA 18330.

PentaCon IX, Nov. 13-14 at the Grand Wayne Center, downtown Fort Wayne, IN. Contact Steve and Linda Smith, 836 Himes, Huntington, IN 46750.

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Wherever there are powerful interests, there are shadowy special agents doing their bidding. This article is a description of the secret agent archetype for *Shadowrun*; the character concept, though, can be used for any cyberpunk or near-future game.

The secret agent was created by giving Priority A to Tech, B to Attributes, C to Skills, D to Magic and E to Race, using *Shadowrun* 2nd ed. and the *Street Samurai Catalog*.

The secret agent in *Shadowrun* is a shadow within the shadows: posing as just another shadowrunner, he is in fact still employed by a government, corporate or tribal intelligence agency to act as a street-level operative. The secret agent is well-placed to keep an eye on things in the shadows and to act as a "troubleshooter" for any situation the agency sees to be a problem.

The agency (a generic term for any spy agency, as they are all alike in fundamental ways) is the intelligence-gathering and covert operations branch of a host organization. Its purpose is to protect and further the interests of its governing body.

The secret agent is the agency's most versatile operative—the agent's high level of skillwires enable him to be capable of just about any job that a mundane could accomplish. The secret agent prefers using stealth to accomplish the agency's goals. When violence is absolutely necessary, the secret agent prefers to use very "surgical" methods—precise, quick and, if possible, quiet.

Secret Agent

By Dave Panchyk

Shadowrun 2nd ed.

The secret agent has been thrown SINless into the shadows, with a thorough cover story prepared by the agency whenever possible. The agent will often pose as a former company man because the agent's skills and cyberware are much like those of a corporate troubleshooter. The agency will often have a corporate "front" complete with computer records in order to make the agent's background story credible.

The secret agent has two missions: to uncover, assess, report and neutralize any threat to the agency's interests; and to gather information about shadowrunners, corporations, etc., and pass this information on to the agency.

The agency is a 100,000 nuyen contact for character creation purposes. The secret agent character can communicate with the agency via a secured line. With a successful Etiquette (Agency) roll, the character can gain limited access to information (or more rarely, money, equipment or human resources) to help with a shadowrun. The amount of help the agency gives depends on the number of successes the player rolls, and also on how suspicious outside help would look (would it blow the agent's cover?), how the results of the run would benefit the agency and how the character has performed for the agency in the past.

Remember, the secret agent character is still an employee of the agency. He must report at least every 14 days and must act on orders given by the agency, even if they complicate a shadowrun. Any breach of conduct will be secretly investigated by the agency, possibly by an operative the character doesn't know. The agent's income while in the shadows is what he gets from shadowruns, to better fit in with "genuine" shadowrunners.

The secret agent's extensive cyberware modifications mean that the agent has an extremely low Essence. While for many people a low Essence means that they become borderline psychotics or tend toward being moody and depressed, the secret agent is one of those whom a low Essence turns cold and hard. His psyche finishes the job the invasive insertion of cyberware began and turns the agent into an almost totally unfeeling, machine-like person. The "spook" is one of the spookiest people on the street.

PLAYER TIPS

The secret agent is usually a cold-hearted, ruthlessly efficient individual, but doesn't always have to be this way. A tribal council agent, for example, is going to be different from the typical government "man in black." Remember, though, as an agent, that the agency made you, and its goals always come first. You are a well-constructed weapon in its service.

Part of your importance to the agency is your "deniability" as an operative. Don't let anyone, even the other shadowrunners, know that you are a secret agent. Arrange with the GM to refer to the agency as your "government contact" or something else that will not arouse suspicion. Part of your job is to gather information on shadowrunners and give that to the agency; your teammates wouldn't be happy to find this out.

Contact the agency every two weeks. It's assumed you'll tell the agency about everything you've learned and everything that's happened to you, unless you tell the GM you're holding something back. You can call the agency for help or information during a shadowrun, but only as a last resort, and you should never ask for too much.

REFEREE TIPS

Always keep game balance in mind when giving agency help to the secret agent character. Although the agency values its field agents, the character should not expect to be loaned a Banshee LAV, for example. By the same token, the agency will not reject reasonable requests for information or other services, nor will it continuously make demands that interfere with the character's shadowrunning.

When the secret agent character asks for information, help or equipment, decide what that particular agency would have access to. A government agency would have some information on corporate figures (at a +2 target number to Agency Etiquette rolls), but not on go-gangs or many people in the magic world, for instance. (Part of the reason the secret agent is on the street is so the agency can expand its databases.)

And even if a tribal agency were fond enough of the indiscreet agent in the example above, it would be hard-pressed to supply him with a Banshee. The help the agency gives also depends on the number of successes the player makes on an Agency Etiquette roll.

Help keep the character's connection to the agency a secret. The easiest way to do this is give a code name to the character's contact inside the agency, for when the agency needs to contact the character.

This is much better than the old standard of note-passing, which immediately makes the other players suspicious.

The agency can be a little bit of a mystery even to the player character, which allows you to have a little fun. Information can be passed on by agents on the street, such as a bag lady who passes the character a note and disappears.

The character can pick equipment up from a store that is then boarded up and empty the next day. You set the ambience for the agency.

SAMPLE AGENCIES

Each type of agency is obviously going to have different concerns. In general, though, the main concern is sovereignty. The geopolitics of post-Treaty of Denver North America are fairly fragile, and most governing bodies don't want to see any threat to the new status quo.

The following examples serve to show the primary objectives of the various kinds of agencies. The secret agent is expected to follow those objectives and, if possible, deal with any threats with the prior clearance of the agency.

Intelligence agencies try to remain secret, but hardly anything ever is—nonagent characters who make a Street Etiquette (5) test will have heard of one or more of these agencies.

Salish-Sidhe Tribal Security Council: The main threat to any Native American nation is terrorist Humanis groups; tribal secret agents are expected to keep an eye on any potential trouble from them. The council is also on the lookout against organized poaching and corporate despoiling of the land.

Bureau des Affaires Spéciales (Québec): The Office of Special Affairs monitors any potential threats to the independent state of Québec. Agents have the basic duty of gathering intelligence on organized crime (Montréal has been a Mafia stronghold since the latter part of the 20th century) and on radical or terrorist policlubs such as Der Nachtmachen. Since the Oka confrontation in 1990, the government has also been concerned about land claims from the Mohawk nations.

UCAS Intelligence Service (UCASIS): In addition to the potential trouble from organized crime and radical policlubs, the UCAS government has a great concern with corporations. The government does not like the extra-legal status most megacorps claim for themselves and so watches their activities closely. This is especially important in Seattle—the UCAS does not want anything to jeopardize its control of Seattle as a treaty city.

Special Operations Cadre (Mitsuhama Corporation): The cadre exists to identify and monitor interests hostile to the corporation. Primarily, these are other corporations; the cadre has a special interest in keeping tabs on shadowrunners, as they do the bulk of corporate dirty work. Mitsuhama also likes to know in advance about any tribal or federal attempt to interfere with the running of the corp.

Secret Agent
Character Creation

Priorities: Race-E, Magic-D, Skills-C, Attributes-B, Tech-A.

Cyberware	Essence Loss	Nuyen Cost
Skillwire (5)	1.0	500,000
Wired reflexes (2)	3.0	165,000
Smartgun link	0.5	2,500
Fingertip compartment	0.1	3,000
2 chipjacks	0.4	2,000
Datajack	0.2	1,000
50 MP memory	0.5	5,000
Subtotal	**5.7**	**678,500**

Equipment	Nuyen Cost
Secure long coat	650
Scorpion machinepistol (smart variant)	1,700
Narcoject pistol	600
Walther WA 2100 sniping rifle	6,500
Monofilament whip (in fingertip compartment)	3,000
Silencer for Scorpion	500
Concealable holster for Scorpion	100
Ford Americar	20,000
Pocket Computer—1000 MP memory	5,000
Dataline Tap (3)	15,000
Data encryption system (6)	6,000
Dataline scanner (6)	600
Wristphone	1,000

Ammunition	Nuyen Cost
100 rounds APDS (Scorpion)	700
40 rounds APDS (sniper rifle)	280
5 Narcoject darts	1,000

Skillsofts	Nuyen Cost
Unarmed Combat: 5	25,000
Etiquette (Street): 5	15,000
Etiquette (Corporate): 5	15,000
Car (Passenger vehicle): 4	12,000
Athletics: 5	25,000
Negotiation: 5	25,000
Interrogation: 5	25,000
Middle Lifestyle (two months prepaid)	10,000

Contacts	Nuyen Cost
Agency	100,000
Fixer	5,000
Street Doc	Free
Armorer	Free
Total	**998,130**

Secret Agent Archetype

Attributes
Body: 4
Quickness: 5
Strength: 4
Charisma: 2
Intelligence: 5
Willpower: 4
Essence: .3
Reaction:5 (9)

Initiative
9 + 3D6

Dice Pools
Combat: 7

Skills
Etiquette (Agency): 6
Firearms: 6
Stealth: 6
Armed Combat: 6

Cyberware
Skillwires (5)
Wired reflexes (2)
Smartgun link
Fingertip compartment
2 chipjacks
Datajack
50 MP memory

Equipment
Secure long coat
Scorpion machinepistol (smart variant)
Narcoject pistol
Walther WA 2100 sniping rifle
Monofilament whip (in fingertip compartment)
Silencer and concealable holster for Scorpion
Ford Americar
Pocket computer—1000 MP Memory
Dataline tap (3)
Data encryption system (6)
Dataline scanner (6)
Wristphone

Ammunition
100 rounds APDS (Scorpion)
40 rounds APDS (sniper rifle)
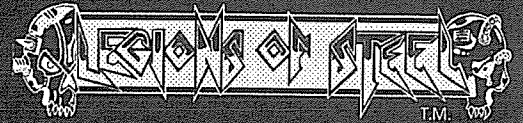5 Narcoject darts

Skillsofts
Unarmed Combat: 5
Etiquette (Street): 5
Etiquette (Corporate): 5
Car (Passenger Vehicle): 4
Athletics: 5
Negotiation: 5
Interrogation: 5
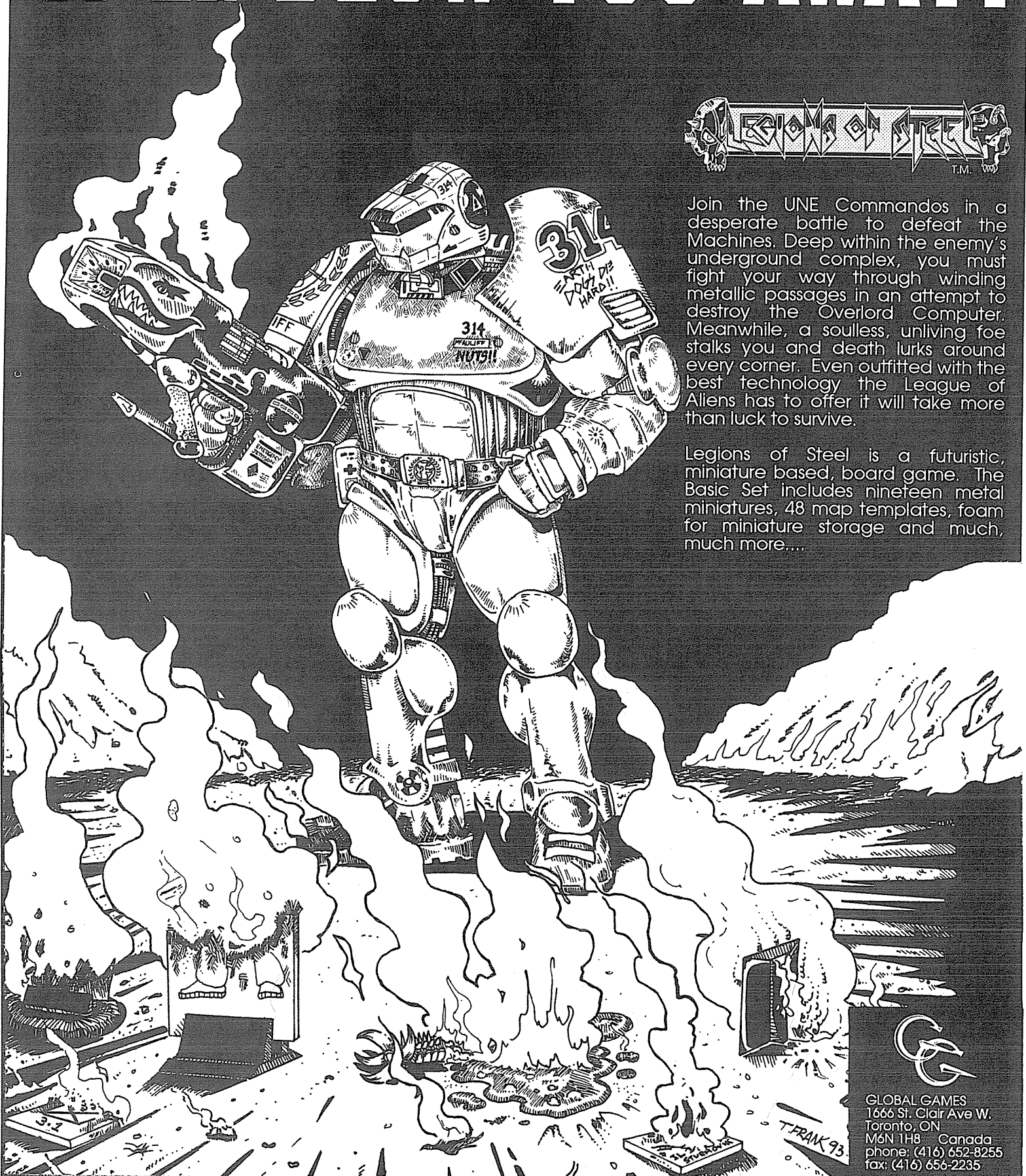Middle Lifestyle (two months prepaid)
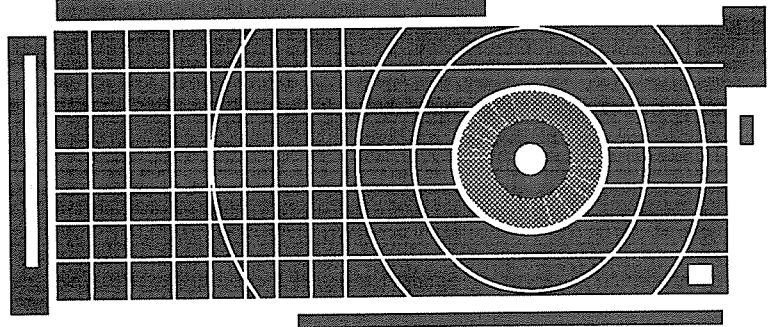
Contacts
Agency, Fixer, Street Doc, Armorer Ω

Assassin Archetype

"You want somebody what? 'Terminated with extreme prejudice?' Why can't anyone just say 'kill' these days?

"So you want someone dead, and you came to me because I'm the best. But in this world, excellence costs, my friends, and my type of excellence costs a great deal. How much are you willing to pay?

"That is within negotiating range of my price. Sit down, and we'll talk."

Calculating, efficient and totally business-like, the modern assassin will always get his target, no matter who gets in the way.

Attributes
Body: 3
Quickness: 4 (5)
Strength: 3 (4)
Charisma: 2
Intelligence: 4
Willpower: 5
Essence: 0.2
Reaction: 4 (8)

Skills
Firearms: 6
Demolitions: 4
Unarmed Combat: 5
Stealth: 4
Etiquette (Corp): 3
Car: 3
Electronics: 3
Throwing: 3

Cyberware: Wired reflexes (2), retractable hand razors, smartgun link, air filtration, cybereyes with low-light, flare protection and thermographic imaging, skillwire (level 3), muscle replacement (1).

Equipment: Armor jacket, docwagon contract (Gold), H&K 227 S variant with smartgun link, Ares Predator with silencer, Ranger Arms sniper rifle with smartgun link and silencer, maglock passkey, plastic explosives, compound 12, radio detonator, two neuro-stun grenades, two flash grenades, neuro-poison (ingestible, five doses).

Skillsofts: Korean: 3, Japanese: 3, Projectile Weapons: 3, Sun Tzu's Art of War: 3, Toxicology: 3.

Contacts: Mr. Johnson, Fixer, Yakuza Boss, Decker.

Description: Elegant and cool. Always dressed immaculately. Utterly charming, totally deadly. Ω

By David Perry

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Articles use three levels of headings (refer to past issues for examples). The first level is the article title. Next, any divisions within the article need *section headings*, which are all caps on their own line (like Subject Matter, below). Any further divisions within a section need *subsection headings*, which are upper and lower case, followed by a colon and text (like Format, above).

References: Always include clear, precise sketches of maps, diagrams or pieces of equipment for artist reference. If you send photocopies for artist reference, always indicate the original source or publication. If your article includes tables, send a printout of each table the way it should appear. Always send a copy of your technical design spreadsheets, if applicable (especially for Traveller). Also, please include a bibliography of your sources, especially with historical or geographical submissions. Mark both technical design sheets and bibliographies "for reference only."

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We will consider articles on any science-fiction roleplaying game by any publisher, including Twilight: 2000, Merc: 2000, Traveller, Dark Conspiracy, Space: 1889, 2300 AD, Shadowrun, Star Trek, Star Wars, BattleTech, High Colonies, Call of Cthulhu, Paranoia, Cyberpunk 2.0.2.0., Vampire, Werewolf and others. We will not provide coverage for any products produced by or licensed to Palladium Books, at the request of Palladium Books.

Adventure scenarios are preferred. Sourcebook-type articles should be combined with adventure ideas whenever possible. *Game variants* should be playtested in advance by you and be applicable to a broad range of gaming situations. *Referee's notes* should give hints to the referee on how to increase interest in the game, make his life easier or spark his imagination. In general, articles should be consistent with previously published information.

Twilight: 2000, Merc: 2000: Articles must be usable with Twilight: 2000 2nd edition or Merc: 2000. Ideas include an adventure situation with a geographical setting, short equipment descriptions, generic personalities or locations for use in a variety of situations, and examinations of modern military life or military equipment.

Traveller: All Traveller articles must be usable in the Traveller: The New Era universe. Include tasks and game statistics where appropriate. Ideas include an adventure with relevant background data, bestiary or short equipment description. Articles may follow either the "adventure nugget" or traditional Challenge format.

Space: 1889, 2300 AD, Others: Short adventures (2000-3000 words), plus a page or so of maps. See Twilight Encounters (a GDW supplement) for samples of the preferred format.

Reviews: Product reviews are not limited to the gaming systems normally covered in Challenge. Evaluations of science-fiction films, novels and other products are also accepted. All reviews must include the approximate date of release, plus the publisher, price, credits and components, if applicable. See previous reviews for format. Reviews should be 500-1000 words in length. Challenge will not publish a review by anyone listed in the credits of the product reviewed.

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Good luck. If you have any questions, send them along with a SASE to:
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Treasure of Melas

...You may search from the bronze dragon's egg 'till you run out of hope and persistence. Yet all you find is lifeless and cold, fit only for exiles or dead men.

By James L. Cambias

While in Syrtis Major, one of the player characters gets a letter from an old acquaintance named Simon Moon. Moon is a trader and adventurer who has been involved in odd bits of business all over Mars. He has been, at times, an explorer, mercenary, gun-runner, missionary, privateer, bounty hunter and bartender. The letter is brief and cryptic:

> Dear (PC),
> Being followed—no time. Keep papers safe until I claim them. Worth a fortune.

There are two other documents with the letter—a poem, written in some Martian language, and a much-worn commercial map of the city of Melas, in the Belgian Coprates.

Unfortunately, Moon will never reclaim the packet. In the evening edition of the *Martian Gazette* is a short item telling of the unfortunate death of Mr. Simon J. Moon. According to the police, Moon was found dead in an alley near the harbor district of Syrtis Major. He had been stabbed several times with a large knife. As yet, the police have no suspects.

POEM

The poem enclosed with the letter is written in the Memnite dialect (the dominant tongue in the Upper Coprates Valley). Using available resources in Syrtis Major, it is not hard to produce a decent translation:

> Truth lies hidden, and lies hide truth.
> You may search far and wide and find nothing.
> You may search from the house of Ak-taar-voon's love
> to the place where the stars are collected.
> Or else you may search from the bronze dragons' egg
> 'til you run out of hope and persistence.
> Yet all you will find is lifeless and cold,
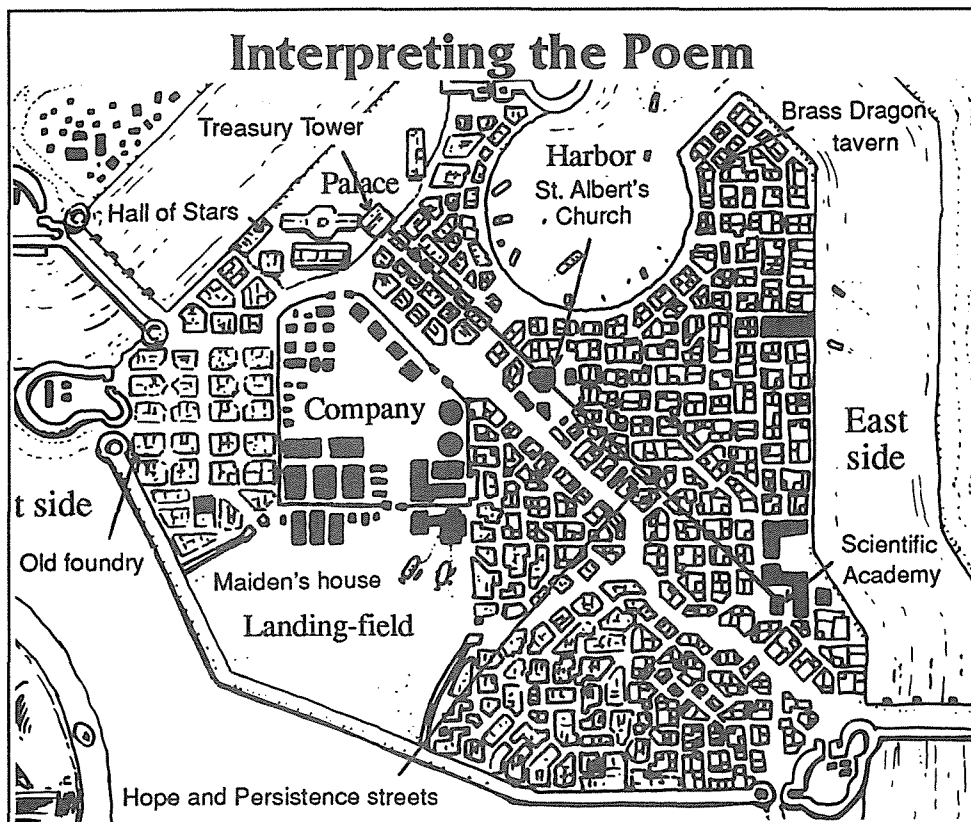> fit only for exiles or dead men.

Nobody familiar with Martian literature can recognize the poem or shed any light on its meaning.

SINISTER VISITORS

If the player characters remain in Syrtis Major, a few nights after Moon's death they will be visited by a man named Gustave Brun. Brun wants to buy the documents which Moon sent to the PCs. He offers £1000 for them.

If the characters want to sell, Brun may be talked into raising his bid to £2000. If that isn't enough, he will sigh and depart. Two nights later, the home of the character to whom Moon sent the letter will be burgled by a pair of hired Martian thugs looking for the documents. If questioned, the robbers will claim they were hired by a short, heavy-set Earthman to find the poem.

Naturally, this sort of strange goings-on should encourage the adventurers to go to Melas

Interpreting the Poem

Treasury Tower — Hall of Stars — Palace — Harbor — St. Albert's Church — Brass Dragon tavern — Company — East side — Old foundry — Maiden's house — Landing-field — Scientific Academy — t side — Hope and Persistence streets

and get to the bottom of the matter. Otherwise, they will continue to be plagued by robberies and mysterious threats.

MELAS

Undoubtedly, the PCs will have several interesting adventures in the course of travelling to Melas. Once there, they can begin trying to find out why the poem is so important.

Shortly after their arrival, the player characters will get a message inviting them to meet with Captain Jean Tenbroek, head of the Melas Police. If they do not go, Tenbroek will send Sergeant Gustave Brun and some police to bring them by force.

At his office, Tenbroek informs the adventurers that he wants to tell them a little story. *"When the legion began final assault on the city of Melas in 1883, the prince resolved to hold out until the bitter end, though it was obvious that the city had no chance. To keep the crown and other regalia out of Terran hands, he concealed it somewhere in the city and hid clues to the location in a poem. Somehow, your friend Mr. Moon came into possession of that poem, and I believe you now have it. Let me be frank—it is useless to you. Only someone like myself with an intimate knowledge of the city can find the treasure. I offer you £2500 and passage back to Syrtis Major in exchange for the poem. If you do not sell it to me, your visit to*

Melas will not be a pleasant one."

If the PCs refuse to sell the poem, Tenbroek will indeed take steps to harass them. A police agent will follow the party members whenever they go out, and the characters' rooms will be searched frequently.

Captain Tenbroek will also have his spy Ta-na-roo attempt to ingratiate himself with the adventurers and report back on their progress. And if the PCs do violate any law while in Melas, they can be sure of spending some time locked up.

DECIPHERING THE POEM

The poem is a coded set of directions to the hidden Melassian regalia. There are four major clues—each refers to a specific location in the city, all noted on the referee's map. Lines drawn connecting the four spots will intersect at the treasure's hiding place. The clues were devised so that only a native Melassian could figure them out, thus protecting the treasure if the poem fell into Belgian hands.

First Clue: The third line of the poem mentions "the house of Ak-taar-voon's love." Most older Martian inhabitants of the city will recognize the name; Ak-taar-voon was the ruling prince from 1805 to 1823. But he never married and kept no harem. Some historical research, possibly at the Melas Academy, will reveal that the prince was an extremely rapacious and miserly ruler, who raised

taxes to the limit and cut spending to the bone. A little logic may lead the players to see that the line refers to the treasury tower on the palace grounds, where all the royal money (the prince's true love) was kept.

The player characters may encounter a red herring in their research: a talkative old Martian in the market square will tell them that the prince once fell in love with a beautiful low-born maiden. His family opposed the match and had her assassinated. In his grief, the prince swore never to love again. Her house was in the center of the district now occupied by the Coprates Company compound. The old Martian is lying—he just likes to tell tall stories to Earthmen.

Second Clue: The fourth line of the poem mentions a place "where the stars are collected." The key word is *stars*. The Melas Scientific Academy has a tall tower built for astrological observations. Anyone at the academy can tell the adventurers about the tower.

A fiendish referee might add the following red herring: one room at the palace is known as the Hall of Stars, and is decorated with hundreds of crystal stars set in the ceiling.

Third Clue: The fifth line of the poem mentions the "bronze dragon's egg." This is a very obscure clue. The "bronze dragons" refers to the old bronze cannons, which are decorated to look like fantastic dragon heads. The "egg" is the old foundry where the guns were cast. If the characters do any historical research about Melas, they may find a written reference to the dragon-shaped cannons. Otherwise, the adventurers might see some of the guns and notice their appearance. Once the "bronze dragons" have been identified, their egg should be deducible.

If it seems that the players are figuring out the clues too easily, the referee can add a diversion in the form of the Brass Dragon tavern, by the harbor mouth. The tavern is a favorite with bargemen, and can be dangerous for Terrans after dark.

Fourth Clue: The sixth line of the poem advises the reader to search "till you run out of hope and persistence." This refers to the intersection of Hope Street and Persistence Street, in the affluent west side of Melas. The players may notice the street names while visiting the British Consul, whose house is on Hope Street. And a good map of the city will have the street names marked.

HIDING PLACE

After the PCs have deciphered the clues in the poem, they must still find the

treasure's hiding place. The two bearings indicated by the four locations intersect at what was once a Martian temple, now used by the Belgians as St. Albert's Church.

Church: The church is a large domed building, built of massive stone blocks. Inside is a huge central chamber and a number of rooms off to the side. The old Martian idol depicting the Harvest Goddess has been removed. Most of the chambers are unused and empty. All of them once had elaborate decorations—mosaics, reliefs and statuary—but the Belgians looted the building thoroughly before turning it over to the church. Father Anton Lascaux lives in one room at the rear of the temple.

Stone: In a small room opening off the main temple chamber, the player characters will find a stone slab set in the floor, carved with the words "*Truth lies hidden, and lies hide truth.*" That is the first line of the poem, and beneath the slab is hidden the regalia.

Treasure: The cache beneath the slab contains a crown, a golden sword and a bejeweled ceremonial robe. The three items are worth £15,000 intact, and the gold and jewels would bring £9000 separately.

Confrontation: Unless the adventurers have been extremely careful, Captain Tenbroek will know when they have found the treasure. He will send Sergeant Brun and a squad of police to confiscate the regalia. The player characters may have to battle the police to keep their treasure. Even if they evade the police, getting the treasure out of Melas could be an adventure in itself.

SERGEANT GUSTAVE BRUN

Sergeant Brun is in charge of the "special squad" of the Melas Police. His job is to eliminate rebels and their sympathizers by any means necessary. Sergeant Brun is totally loyal to Captain Tenbroek and will do anything the captain commands.

Motives: Loyal (to Captain Tenbroek), Aggressive.

Appearance: Brun is a short, barrel-shaped man, and is massively strong. His bullet-shaped head seems to rest directly on his wide shoulders. The sergeant wears a Coprates Company uniform and always goes armed. He speaks French with a Flemish accent.

Attribute		Skills
Str:	6	Fisticuffs 5, Throwing 3, Close Combat 3 (edged weapon)
Agl:	5	Stealth 4, Marksmanship 2 (rifle), Crime 2 (pick locks)
End:	3	Wilderness Travel 3 (foraging), Fieldcraft 2
Int:	4	Observation 4, Gunnery 1 (machinegun)
Chr:	1	Linguistics 2 (Memnite, Koline), Theatrics 2
Soc:	2	Riding 1 (gashant), Leadership 1
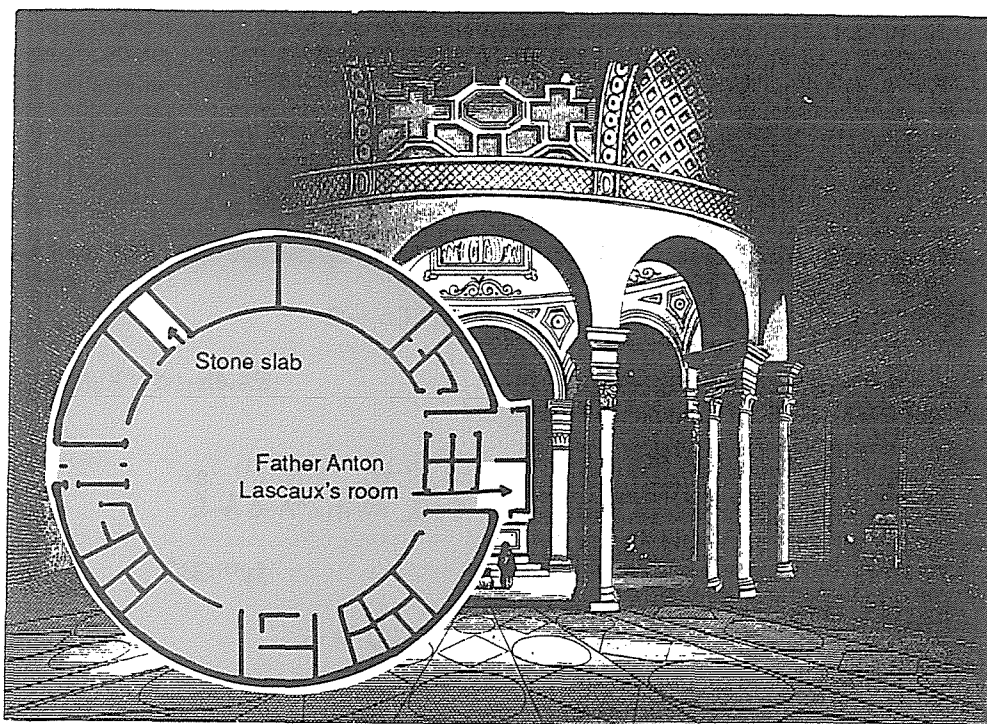
TA-NA-ROO

Ta-na-roo is a young, innocent-looking Martian, who is Captain Tenbroek's most resourceful spy. He is totally amoral and doesn't care who he betrays so long as the price is right. His reports have sent scores of rebels to the gumme plantations. Captain Tenbroek has ordered him to attach himself to the party of PCs, as a servant or guide, and stay with them as they try to locate the treasure.

Motives: Mercantile, Liar.

Appearance: Ta-na-roo is painfully thin, even for a Martian, and his hair is long and unkempt. He wears ragged, cast-off clothes, held together with string. But he can be very charming, and is very useful as a guide to Melas. His native language is Memnite.

Attribute		Skills
Str:	2	Fisticuffs 1, Throwing 1, Close Combat 1 (edged)
Agl:	6	Stealth 6, Crime 4 (pick pockets)
End:	3	Wilderness Travel 2
Int:	5	Observation 5
Chr:	4	Eloquence 4, Linguistics 3 (French, Thark, Koline), Theatrics 4, Bargaining 1
Soc:	1	

FATHER ANTON LASCAUX

Father Lascaux is the vicar of St. Albert's Church and is in charge of all Catholic missionary efforts in Melas. He is a kindly old man, who is terribly distressed by the brutality of the Coprates Company and the Belgian Legion. His missionary work has been very unsuccessful—the Martians consider him to be just another Terran come to enslave them. Father Lascaux has made an extensive study of antiquities in Melas and knows a great deal about the city's past.

Motives: Honest, Friendly.

Appearance: Father Lascaux is a tall and slender old man with snow-white hair and thick spectacles. He has a pleasant expression and speaks softly. He always wears a threadbare black cassock. Lascaux's native language is French.

Attribute		Skills
Str:	1	Fisticuffs 1
Agl:	2	Stealth 1
End:	4	Wilderness Travel 3 (mapping)
Int:	5	Observation 4, Science 4 (archaeology)
Chr:	6	Eloquence 6, Linguistics 4 (English, Memnite, Thark, Koline), Theatrics 1
Soc:	3	Riding 2 (horse), Leadership 2, Medicine 2 Ω

For background information on the Martian city of Melas, refer to "Melas" by James L. Cambias in **Challenge 69.**

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GORGON Hunt

Our tilt-rotor was two klicks out from the Gorgon when Chan's screen showed a burst of PCM radio that wasn't in the talkdown procedure. She looked around, ashen-faced, and started to call a warning....

By Andy Slack

This scenario is suitable for three to six mercenary or troubleshooter PCs. It can be set on any garden world in the French Arm overrun by Kafers. The time is shortly after the Kafer War depicted in **Invasion**. The referee will need the **2300 AD** rules; access to **Colonial Atlas** and/or **Invasion** may be helpful, but is not essential.

MISSION BRIEFING

The French Army deployed an experimental type of artificially intelligent robot tank, called the Gorgon, on this planet just before the Kafer invasion. The intent was to conduct field trials under controlled conditions in a remote, uninhabited area. The trial facility has been assumed destroyed in the invasion, but now that humanity has regained control of the planet, satellite reconnaissance reveals that at least one of these vehicles is still in operation. The army wishes to recover this valuable asset, partly for its intrinsic value and partly to examine its log tapes for intelligence data. The PCs are hired to approach the vehicle and "talk it down" (i.e., persuade it to allow itself to be shut down and brought in for examination).

The PCs will each be paid Lv300 up front, Lv300 on successful completion and Lv100 per day spent on the mission. In addition, any equipment within reason, including two Bessieres hover APCs or tilt-rotor aircraft (players' choice), will be loaned to the PCs for the duration of the mission.

If the PCs are troubleshooter types, a squad of NPC infantry will be assigned to protect them. If they are mercenaries, they will be assigned to protect a bunch of nerdy technicians who will do the talkdown.

APPROACH

The PCs drive for several days, or fly for one, to reach the target area in the vehicles loaned to them.

RETRIEVAL

The PCs will make their own way back to base, with whatever vehicles survive the mission. Ideally, they will be escorting the subdued Gorgon.

MAP DESCRIPTION

The map depicts the area of wilderness where satellite recon shows the Gorgon is hiding. This map can be photocopied and given to the players.

The referee should choose a spot for the Gorgon's lair. This will probably be a

sheltered area where it can hide from recon aircraft or satellites (a wooded area or a cave in hilly terrain). It will be near to water, so that the Gorgon can acquire hydrogen for its MHD turbines. If you place the Gorgon in some other kind of terrain, it will be playing dead.

REFEREEING THE SCENARIO

The PCs move across the map at one-quarter normal speed as they are searching for the tank. They will need to stop every few hours to eat, sleep and perform routine maintenance and refueling on their vehicles.

As the PCs move across the map, they should roll for an encounter in each hex.

Task: To detect an encounter (unskilled): Difficult, Sensor Ops, Instant.

Each time the PCs succeed, the referee should apply one of the following encounters. If the PCs are in the same hex as the Gorgon's lair, they encounter the Gorgon itself, whatever the result of the task die roll.

Kafer Missile: An antivehicle missile left over from the Kafer invasion engages the party's vehicles. Use the normal rules for missile attacks; the missile is equivalent to a Blindicide-9.

Kafer War Band: A group of 2D6+1 armed and hostile Kafers (as if there were another kind!) left behind when the main force retreated. These will attack the party if possible; they will be unable to attack the PCs if they are flying, but in this case will stalk them. If they can catch up (assume they are walking at normal speeds), they will attack the party when it stops for the night.

Destroyed Gorgon: This is one of the live Gorgon's brothers, destroyed in a skirmish during the Kafer invasion. It is surrounding by a truly appalling number of dead Kafers and burned-out enemy vehicles, indicating to the PCs just how bad it would be if they had to fight a Gorgon. Examining the wreck will reveal to the PCs what equipment the Gorgons were fitted with and most of the performance data, in case they didn't think to ask for these details before setting off.

Battlefield: This is the site of a brutal firefight between Kafers and Gorgons. It is littered with wreckage and spent ammunition, but there is nothing useful left.

The referee may also impose animal encounters if desired.

GORGON

This vehicle should be treated as if it

had an Experienced crew (who, of course, cannot dismount as they are an integral part of the vehicle's electronics fit).

Use whatever type of tank you see fit; I favor the M-9 from the **Ground Vehicle Guide** because of its whisperdrone, which gives it an extra edge in observing the PCs as they sneak up on it, but you can always give the tank control of a few RPV drones (some armed with access to Orge: 2300 (**Challenge 34**) can use an Orge instead of a mere hovertank.

Whatever kind of tank you choose, it has survived an invasion by Kafers, and its AI brain has learned from the experience; what it has learned is that to survive, it must massacre any Kafers it runs across before they can "wake up." It is intimately familiar with the terrain and will make best use of it to hide from, or ambush, the player characters.

The tank carries a few small robots for maintenance and refueling. These look like large, self-mobile Swiss Army knives (about 20 kilograms mass) and should be treated as Green NPCs with Mechanical and Electronics skills. If the tank gets desperate enough to use them in combat, they attack at -4 to hit with clubs and knives improvised from their tools. Any hit disables them.

Like most AI brains created to date, the Gorgon is mentally unstable. It is by now completely paranoid and will view any approach the PCs make as yet another devious Kafer trick prefacing an attempt to blow it up.

Persuading it that the PCs are friends is a task:

Task: To talk down the robot tank: Difficult, Computer, 10 minutes.

Referee: The talkdown procedure is an intricate ballet of passwords and vehicle movements which allows technicians to close in on a live AI hovertank and gain access to the master control panel on the turret. Given the tank's current suspicions, any failure will trigger an all-out attack (if the tank believes it can wipe the party out without serious damage) or a rout (if it doesn't). This task can only be attempted once (the Gorgon will not permit a second attempt, as it will assume failure means the enemy has gained access to the talkdown codes), and any combat during the procedure automatically triggers an attack.

NPCS

Any technicians who are escorted by the characters' party will be Green aca-

Wilderness Area

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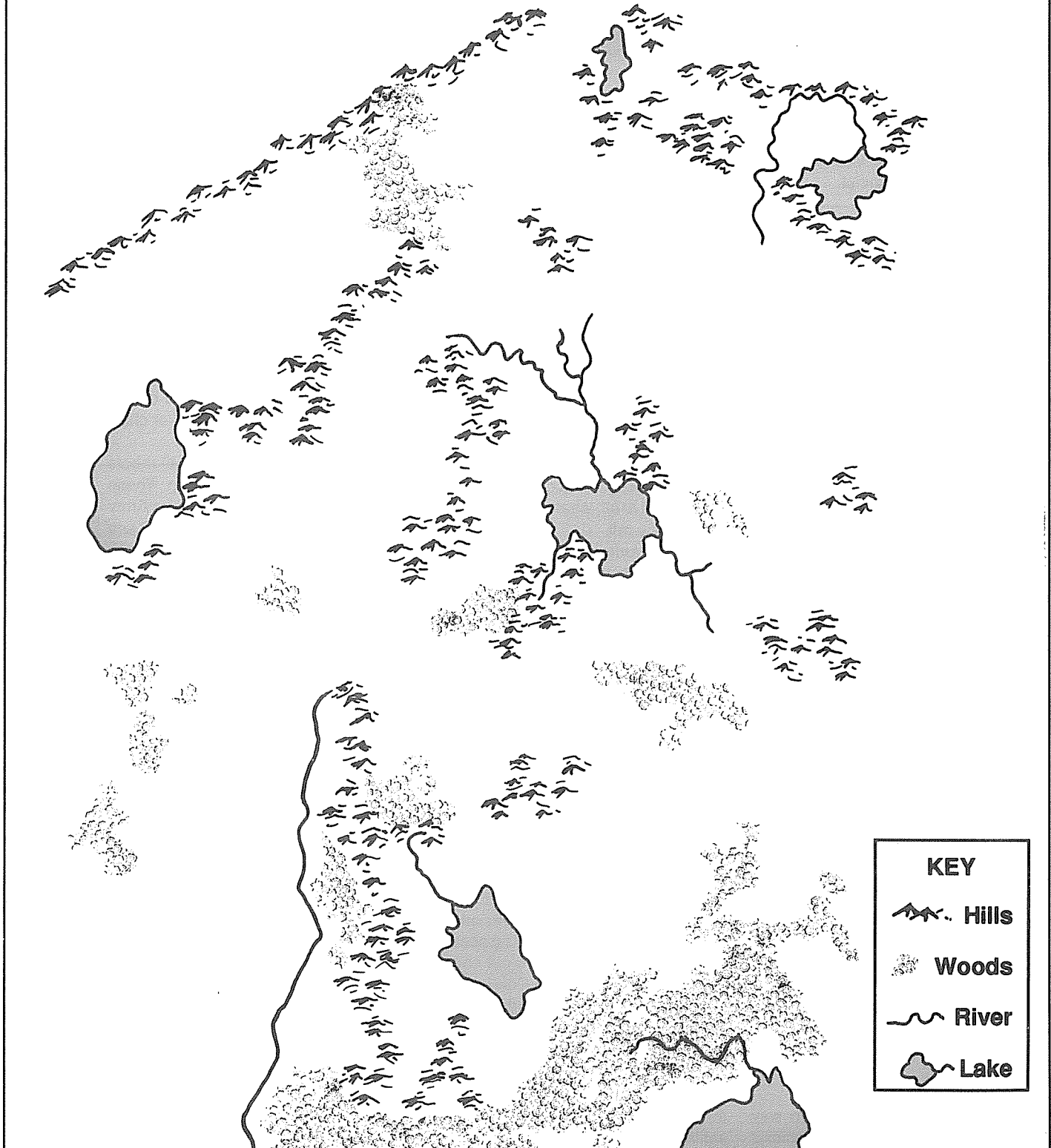
demic nonplayer characters who between them can muster skill level 4 in Computer, Electronics and Security Systems.

Any troops escorting the party will be Veterans of the ground military career, equipped with current French-issue weapons and gear, including a number of antivehicle missiles.

ALTERNATIVES

If the the PCs are having an easy time of it, start a firefight during the talkdown procedure. Possibly a band of Kafers encountered earlier has just caught up with the group and opens fire at an awkward moment. Possibly the Gorgon has been shadowing the party with an armed RPV drone, and one of the NPCs

panics and shoots at it.

If things turn out too difficult for the PCs, have a band of Kafers attack them, then have the Gorgon intervene (it is still sane enough to realize that anyone else fighting Kafers is on its side). Ω

This scenario was inspired by the novel Demon-4 *by David Mace.*

BANTHA CANNON

While the vortex of hyperspace swirled outside the ship, I looked over the datapad once again. <<Proceed to Entooine. Focus dedicated energy receptors on planet. Wait for further instructions.>> Was it any coincidence that Rebel Command's briefings became increasingly brief as its bureaucracy grew in size and "efficiency"? Without a computer-research dump on Entooine, we wouldn't have known that the planet's temperature flickers between "tundra" and "carbonite." And who knew what season we'd be jumping into?

The rebels receive vague mission instructions which direct them to distant Entooine. Senior staff have nothing more to say (or are themselves poorly informed). The team may preform some independent research, as long as it is done quickly.

A Moderate Planetary Systems roll explains that Entooine is frozen for much of the year and cold the rest of the time. With few important resources, the planet has little to offer the Empire. The lichen and shrubs which grow during the mild season become bantha fodder, while banthas are food for packs of quohr.

A sentient race, the Askhew, inhabits Entooine. A Moderate Alien Races roll elaborates on the Askhew: These short, furry humanoids have ironage technology. They hunt banthas for food, clothing and building material. They supposedly support the Rebel Alliance, but how they contribute to the Rebellion is unclear.

The Rebel base where the characters are currently stationed has all the above information stored in the computer, requiring an Easy: Computer Prog/Repair roll to access. With this information, the characters may better equip themselves. Thermal suits or sub-zero parkas, survival tents, sleeping bags and a light fusion power generator are appropriate.

INTO THE HAILSTORM

When the Entoo System was first discovered, explorers thought it so unpromising that they simply applied an alphanumeric code (N-2) and continued on their way. Since then, the system's name has evolved to Entoo, and the only inhabited world became known as Entooine. Some distance from the star, Entooine orbits a large gas giant. One side is tidal locked.

As per instructions, the characters should move into orbit around Entooine

and scan the planet's surface for electromagnetic emissions. The planet's strong magnetic field—and other current electronic disturbances—makes for poor reception. Each hour, the sensor operator makes a Computer: Prog/Repair or MEC roll. A result of 11+ picks up a homing beacon and a crackly transmission: "Visibility...clear...approach... recommended...." (The full transmission reads, "Visibility poor. Storm should clear in six hours. Approach run not recommended.") A scanning roll of 16+ also picks up an energy reading—perhaps a comlink transmission or a high-technology power-source—six miles from the homing beacon.

● If the characters are encouraged by the optimistic but garbled message, they may attempt to land. Then they discover why the message was so garbled. A colorful electromagnetic storm ripples across the upper atmosphere, ionizing all ship controls. Below, a blizzard pelts the ship with hail, coats the thrusters with ice and reduces visibility to three meters. The pilot must make a Difficult: Starship Piloting roll (adding the ship's maneuverability but subtracting 1D due to ionization) to successfully land near the homing beacon. A failed roll results in a crash landing—crewmembers take 3D damage (or 6D if they were not belted in), and the ship's ion drives burn out. Go to Entooine, Not Tatooine below.

● If the rebels maintain control of their ship or wait for the storm to subside before attempting a landing, they reach the beacon safely. Go to the section entitled Spring Cleaning.

● If the rebels decide to check out the strange energy reading (and land safely), go to the section entitled Smuggling Ivory.

ENTOOINE, NOT TATOOINE

At ground level, electromagnetic interference is minimal; the landing beacon broadcasts clearly from the northwest. An Easy: Technology roll will modify a standard comlink to lock on the beacon's frequency. Also, if characters picked up a strange energy reading earlier, they have little difficulty receiving it now (from the north). With disabled ion drives, the rebels face a cross-country hike during a blizzard. Whether the team heads toward the beacon (see Spring Cleaning) or the energy readings (see Smuggling Ivory), Entooine offers similar hardships.

Climate: If the team failed to pack thermal suits or sub-zero parkas, the hike will be a cold one. Before setting out, allow each character to make a Survival skill roll. The difficulty is Easy

for those who have visited frozen worlds before, Moderate for most characters and Difficult for Tatooine dwellers. Success allows the individual to realize the dangers of a blizzard and improvise some form of protective clothing from the ship's supplies. Failure involves reducing all skill codes by 1D while exposed to the weather (due to numbing effects of cold and perhaps frostbite). The characters have little chance of dying from exposure since the hike will take only about three hours.

Crevasse: At one point, an ice crevasse spits the glacier, blocking progress (it could stretch for kilometers either way). The crevasse is three meters wide, so an Easy: Climbing/Jumping roll will clear it. A poor jump is followed by a 10-meter fall (4D damage); a falling character needs a Moderate: Climbing/Jumping roll or the help of a dangled rope to escape the crevasse.

Quohr: DEX 3D, PER 3D, STR 2D, Orneriness 1D, Speed Code 3D. These carnivores roam the glaciers and tundra of Entooine in packs of eight to 12. They stand 1 to 1.5 meters at the shoulder, and their fur coloration ranges from snow-white to gray-streaked. They attack their prey by pouncing (1D damage) and biting (3D damage). This particular pack (with members equal to the number of characters) is starving and attacks until killed. Since visibility is poor, the quohr probably gain surprise.

SPRING CLEANING

The source of the beacon is an antenna poking from the top of a huge snow-drift. Suddenly, the drift shudders, causing a minor avalanche and revealing a white blast-door which splits open. As hail pings off its metallic skin, a silver 3PO unit standing in the entrance beacons the rebels in.

The snow-drift covers what appears to be a large fighter hangar. The upper portion is constructed of Formex, while the lower levels are carved from the rocky ground. A dozen engineers scurry about, some off-loading a freighter, others setting up maintenance equipment. The droid turns to the characters and says: "Welcome to Entooine. I am A-3PO, administrative coordinator for this base until the full staff arrives. I am not surprised you attempted a landing, despite my warnings. Humans can be so reckless. But perhaps this situation calls for recklessness."

A-3PO: DEX 2D, KNO 2D, Alien Races 4D, Cultures 4D, Languages 5D, Planetary Systems 3D, Bureaucracy 5D, PER 2D, STR 1D, TEC 1D. A modified 3PO unit.

The 3PO unit then elaborates upon the mission instructions: Entooine is strategically important to the Rebellion, lying close to an Imperial shipping lane. This outpost launches strike squadrons during the mild season and is abandoned when hostile winter arrives. Rebel command has planned a dozen upcoming strikes. In order to fit these into Entooine's seasonal cycle, the ground crew has begun preparations early (Entooine's winter has ended; the weather outside is just a light spring storm). Unfortunately, the Askhew have a problem. (Here, 3PO gestures to a six fur-clad humanoids squatting across the hangar. Dozens of tame but barking quohr surround them.) And their problem is the Rebel lion's problem, as long as this outpost exists. An evil off-worlder has come to Entooine. His "roaring meteor" (starship) has frightened off the bantha herds, forcing the Askhew hunting parties to travel farther, and generally threatening the tribes with starvation. Worse yet, he hunts the sacred blue bantha (the Askhew hunt only the brown bantha). And the off-worlder hunts not for meat and skins, but for horns.

A local Askhew chieftain, Krelk, offers to guide the rebels to where the off-worlder has last been seen. He also instructs them in the rudiments of quohr sled driving. See Hunting the Hunter.

Krelk (Askhew Chieftain): DEX 3D, Melee 4D, Melee Parry 3D+1, KNO 2D+1, Survival 4D, MEC 1D+1, Beast Riding 3D, PER 2D, Search 3D+2, STR 2D+1, Stamina 3D, TEC 1D. Krelk is an average Askhew at 1.75 meters tall. Reddish-brown hair covers his entire body (but less than a Wookie's) except for his face, hands and feet. His small brown eyes are animal-like, while a smile would fill his large mouth if not for the seriousness of recent events. He carries three spears (range of grenade when thrown) and a knife, and he wears a bantha-fur parka (+1 STR when resisting damage, −1 DEX). He speaks "good" Basic.

As a flight hangar, this outpost certainly has replacement ion drive parts for the characters' ship. Threepio discourages immediate repair (the mission comes first) but does not refuse the necessary parts. Creating encounters for the return trip—and deciding whether this delay will endanger the mission objective—is left in the GM's hands.

HUNTING THE HUNTER

The Askhew use quohr-drawn sleds to travel across the ice and snow. Generally, a team of four to eight quohr can pull a sled loaded down with 200 kilo-

grams (roughly two characters and their gear). The quohr's profile is given above in Entooine, Not Tatooine. Drivers use Beast Riding when controlling the sleds. Each rebel can drive his own sled-team if he wishes, but Krelk suggests that the less mechanically inclined ride in the sled instead.

By the time the rebels head out, the blizzard has ended, but the colored lights which flash across the sky attest to a continuing electromagnetic storm. The sled ride passes uneventfully except for the occasional misbehaving quohr. After about an hour, the group arrives at a tragic scene. Two blue banthas lay on the blood-soaked ice, both missing their horns. A young blue bantha stands nearby, wide-eyed and shivering with fear. Krelk steps off his sled and slowly approaches the young bantha with a strange bone in one hand (this is a brown bantha's cannon-bone—a lower leg bone—which Askhew believe allows communication with the sacred blue banthas). The young bantha whines and makes coughing noises. Characters who makes a Very Difficult: Language roll realize that the bantha is speaking! It says, "He is still here."

Young Blue Bantha: DEX 2D, KNO 4D, MEC 0D, PER 2D, STR 6D, TEC 0D, Sense 2D. This young bantha is two meters tall. Adults stand about three meters at the shoulder and have STR 8. Blue banthas actually have white fur, but are named for their beautiful, light-blue horns. They can defend with their horns (7D damage) or trample (8D damage). Physically no different from regular banthas, blue banthas are special in one way—they are sentient creatures with a touch of the Force! They never forget, and they and pass down their knowledge though the generations. Askhew shamans often ask for advice and receive simple answers by watching how a bantha stomps its hoof.

This young blue bantha is tying to warn the characters that the hunter who killed his parents is nearby. With a Very

Difficult: Perception roll, the character notices a white-clad figure, Jowart Typok, crouching on a ridge some 150 meters away. Otherwise, a sudden cannonade of blaster fire surprises the group.

Jowart Typok, Hunter: DEX 2D+2, Blaster 5D, Melee 3D+2, Melee Parry 3D, KNO 4D, Planetary Systems 6D, Survival 6D, MEC 3D, Repulsorlift Operation 3D+1, PER 2D, Hide/Sneak 3D+3, Search 5D, STR 5D, Stamina 6D+1, TEC 3D+1. Originally a scout for Interplanetary Charts and Surveys, Typok's livelihood became threatened by Imperial cut-backs on exploration. He now praises the cut-backs for forcing him to discover the lucrative business of professional game hunting. The work is rewarding—he enjoys killing defenseless beasts from afar, and he has become wealthy by selling exotic trophies to collectors and nobles. Credits and strong connections enable him to obtain licenses to carry exotic weapons, hunt endangered species and carry on illegal trade. Cybernetics augment Typok's body—specifically, the Neuro-Saav Corporation's Cardio-Muscular Package (STR) and Hi-Sense Enhanced Eyes (Search). He carries a "bantha cannon," a customized blaster rifle which does 8D damage. During this hunt, he wears a white thermal suit and dark goggles.

Typok snipes at the characters until they are dead, they come toward him or he is wounded. Then he jumps into a vehicle which is parked on the other side of the ridge and heads toward his waiting ship (see Smuggling Ivory).

The rebels may want to give chase. If you own the Star Wars Rules Companion, note that the flat ice and snow is Easy Movement, and Typok's vehicle is "out of its element," able to travel only 100 meters per turn. With the basic rules, simply double the speed code of Typok's vehicle.

TYPOK'S "REPTOR"
Craft: TerraTech repulsorlift transport
  Scale: Speeder
  Crew: 1
  Passengers: 8
  Cargo Capacity: 100 kg
  Speed Code: 1D
  Maneuverability: 1D
  Body Strength: 2D
  Weapons:
  Minilaser Fire Control: 1D
  Damage: 1D
  Flight Ceiling: 3 meters
Typok has converted his vehicle's passenger space into a cargo hold. It now holds dozens of blue bantha horns,

as well as some personal equipment (a single-person survival tent, sleeping bag, glow rod, flares and comlink).

SMUGGLING IVORY
A stock light freighter lies snuggled at the base of a rocky out-cropping. Only by making a Difficult: Hide/Sneak roll are characters able to approach the ship undetected (if they are on foot or quohr sled). If they get close enough, they could use a Moderate: Security roll to sneak on-board and take the captain by surprise.

Jes Fion, Smuggler: DEX 3D+1, Blaster 4D+1, KNO 2D+1, Planetary Systems 4D, MEC 3D+2, Starship Piloting 5D, Starship Gunnery 4D, PER 3D, Bargain 4D, STR 3D, Brawling 4D, TEC 2D+2, Starship Repair 3D+1. Jes Fion is Typok's follower. She wears a blaster pistol in a shoulder holster. Dozens of crates (containing blue bantha horns) fill his ship's hold.
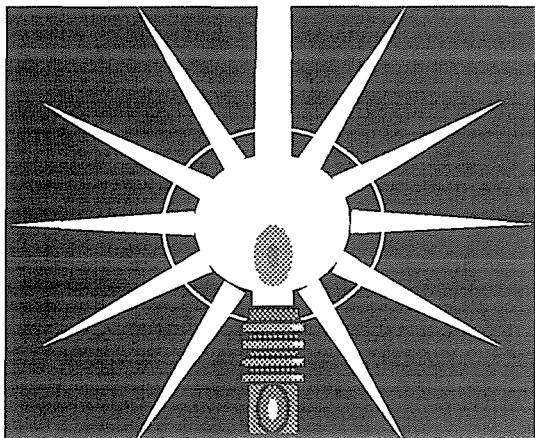
In most situations, the freighter lifts off at the first sign of trouble. If the characters are in their own ship, an exciting chase ensues. Because the electromagnetic storm prevents leaving the outer atmosphere, Fion speeds toward the polar regions, attempting to lose pursuers though clever maneuvers. At one point, she flies though an ice cavern—each captain must make one (or more) Difficult: Starship Piloting roll to avoid hitting the walls and taking 9D damage. The GM can easily improvise other such chase situations.

CONCLUSION
This adventure is worth 3 to 5 skill points, depending on how well the players did. If the rebels try to sell the bantha tusks, they gain no skill points (they're no better then Typok). For Force Point awards, a dramatically appropriate moment begins as soon as the characters meet Jowart Typok and ends when he is defeated.

Adventures on Entooine can continue. With the off-worlder menace eliminated, the rebel outpost is fully prepared in a few weeks, and a squadron of star-fighters arrives. Characters may want to join in on the raids or help with strategy.

Players may wish to investigate the "Bantha question." How did banthas evolve on so many planets across the galaxy, from Tatooine to Entooine? Since the blue banthas are intelligent and "never forget," they might know the truth. And how did the blue banthas acquire intelligence and limited Force powers? The answers are left to your imagination. Ω
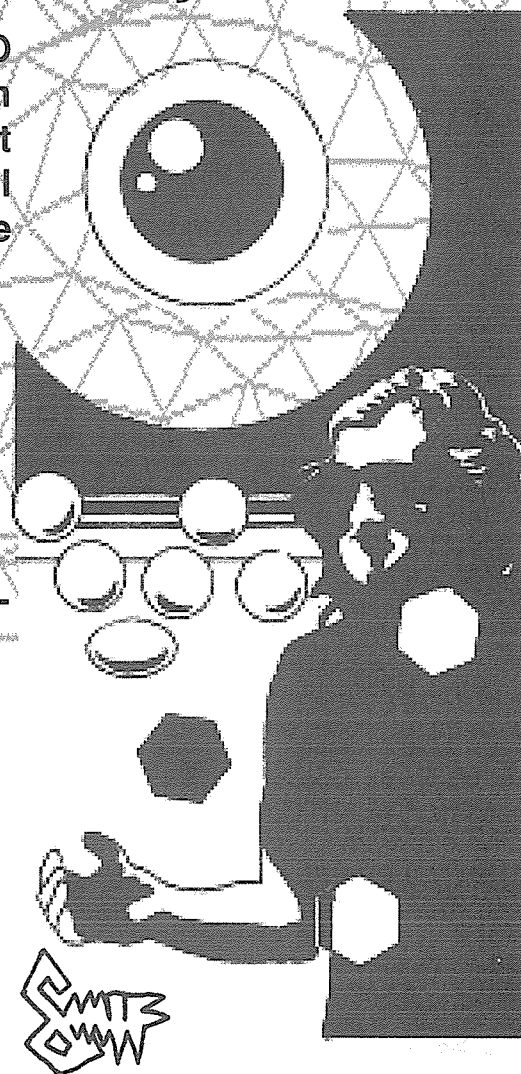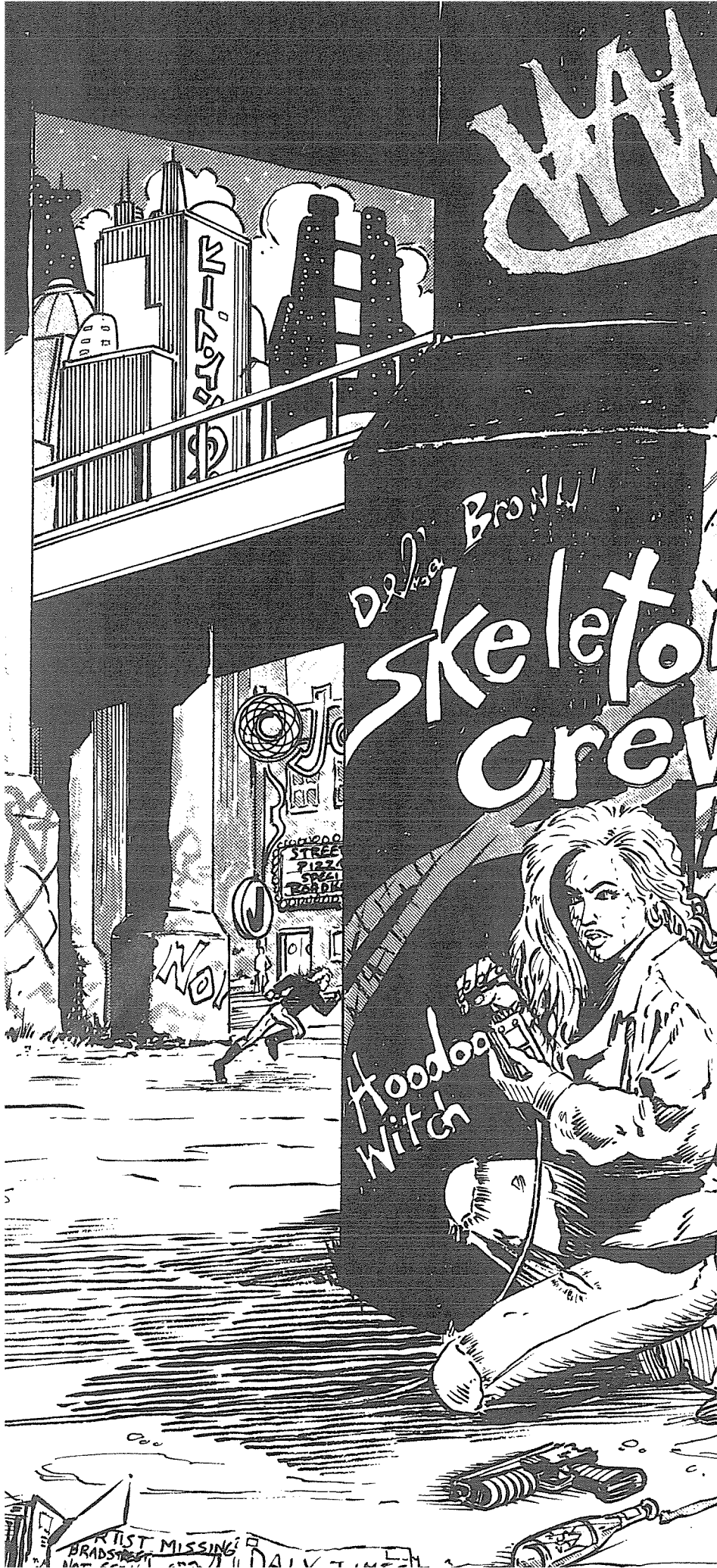
Some nomad packs and families in America have vehicles which are heavily armed and armored—and fast. The police and military call them hover tanks and APCs. People who live and deal with these nomads call them panzers.

In addition to nomads, the rare entrepreneurial solo or fixer has been known to lead the life of a panzerboy. Fixers are usually the people who arrange the jobs for the other panzerboys rather than getting their own hands dirty.

Eventually your players will want to obtain something for their characters that they can't buy in any mallplex. While making connections on the streets

The PCs encounter

and in the bars to find their hearts' desires (an adventure in itself), the PCs will be instructed to proceed to a certain warehouse where they can meet somebody who probably has access to whatever the PCs are after. The PCs will be warned, though, that the people they are going to meet don't do favors—everything has a price.

The meeting is to take place at 7 a.m. Saturday near Night City's waterfront in a vacant warehouse

nomad panzerboys

at 316 Commercial Street.

Just after the appointed time, a heavily armored hovercraft will arrive at the warehouse. One popup turret will emerge on either side of the craft as it whines under the rolling automatic garage door into the half-empty warehouse. "Ne'er-do-wells" is painted on the hovercraft's glacis plate in messy black brush-strokes. "Large Marge" is stenciled in red across its bow skirt. As the machine settles onto

while looking for

its deflating plenum, a hatch opens, and a man steps down from the panzer, introducing himself as Runner, the leader of the Ne'er-do-wells nomad pack. Runner informs the PCs that the Ne'er-do-wells can supply whatever it is that they are after.

While the PCs are discussing availabilities and prices of commodities with Runner, the Night City Police Department will storm the warehouse. Unless Runner or one of the PCs makes a successful

a scarce commodity.

Awareness/Notice (Difficult) skill check, they will be surprised when the police call for them to surrender. If the PCs do not surrender, the police will wait, but if any of them reaches for a weapon or runs for cover or Large Marge, the police will open fire.

Runner will sprint for his panzer's open rear cargo ramp, yelling to the PCs to come along. The PCs will be forced to make a painful (but fairly obvious) decision—hitch a ride out of the area with the Ne'er-do-wells or stick around and get zapped by the cops. After the PCs scramble into Large Marge, Runner suggests that they may as well come along for the ride to Santa Barbara, where, he says, he can get them their gear (especially since he has no intention

of stopping to let them off.)

Parked outside the warehouse are three NCPD squad cars manned by two personnel each. They will pursue the characters until they are outdistanced or destroyed. As Runner and the PCs break out of the warehouse in Night City, the NCPD will transmit the panzers' heading to the NorCal Highway Ranger Compound at Gilroy, who will scramble air units to catch the panzers.

The police are after the Ne'er-do-wells because earlier this morning, one of their squad cars had a run-in with Runner's panzer and lost.

SANTA BARBARA EXPRESS

Runner's planned route runs southeast from Night City for approximately 30 miles to the ghost town of King City, then south along what is left of Highway 101 for nearly 180 miles to Santa Barbara. It's about a two-and-a-half hour trip if there are no stops.

The remainder of the Ne'er-do-wells' panzers are waiting for Runner just north of San Luis Obispo, in the ruins of the town of Paso Robles near the state line.

As Runner glides his panzer into this small ghost town, a couple of NorCal Ranger aircraft will be spotted vectoring in from the south, blocking the route. The Rangers will spot them on their thermal imaging systems and attack.

PASO ROBLES

Hidden in the ruined buildings of this town are the other six panzers belonging to the Ne'er-do-wells. When the group gets past the NorCal resistance, Runner will bring his vehicle to a halt and dismount long enough to meet with his people and give them the lowdown on what happened in Night City before the whole pack gears up for the rest of the drive to Santa Barbara.

The PCs may, if they wish, also get out of Large Marge and meet the other Ne'er-do-wells. Those PCs who exit the panzer will be asked if they have Heavy Weapons skill. Any who do will be invited to ride shotgun on the panzers as gunners.

Once they leave Paso Robles, the Ne'er-do-wells will adhere to strict communications silence since the SoCal is extremely unfriendly to hostile nomad packs. The SoCal Highway Patrol (or SHiPs) are diligent in their efforts to keep Megalopolis Free State's roads clear of "nomad trash." This is reflected in the following encounter table for use on stretches of major highway in SoCal. Roll 2D10 on this table once each hour.

Note that this table doesn't even begin to go into the possibilities presented

by hitch-hikers, breakdowns, abandoned cars, etc.

Information on the weapons and vehicles encountered by the PCs in this adventure can be found in the *Solo of Fortune* and *Chromebook* supplements for *Cyberpunk 2.0.2.0.*

Roll	Result
1-2	SHiPs air patrol
3-5	SHiPs ground patrol
6	Nomad pack
7	Empty highway
8-11	Civilian traffic
12-13	Truck convoy
14	Accident or firefight
15	Free State road block
16-18	SHiPs ground patrol
19-20	SHiPs air patrol

SHiPs Air Patrol: This is a flight of one to three (1D6÷2) aircraft, all armed with at least one air-to-ground weapon. The flight leader will take an interest in any passing vehicle on a 2D10 roll of 2 and will hail said vehicle on his radio. If he doesn't like what he hears (or doesn't hear), things could get ugly.

SHiPs Ground Patrol: A patrol of one to three (1D6÷2) wheeled cars and/or light armored vehicles with at least two personnel per vehicle. Some of these vehicles mount heavy weapons of various types. Their mission (and reactions) are the same as the air patrol above.

Note that these patrols may call on one another for assistance if needed. There is a 5% chance that another SHiPs patrol is nearby. Roll 1D10. A result of 1-6 indicates an air patrol and 7-10 indicates a ground patrol no more than 15 minutes away, increasing cumulatively by 5% per turn that a firefight or chase continues.

Nomad Pack: This is a ragtag fugitive fleet of 10 to 60 vehicles of assorted types containing three to 300 displaced persons (DPs). They could be doing anything from just driving down the highway with all their stereos blasting, to running some fruit stands, to camping by the road side. These people aren't inherently hostile, but they don't have a whole lot of temper left either.

Civilian Traffic: Car, bus, truck, car, bus....

Truck Convoy: Anywhere from three to 30 tractor-trailer rigs carrying anything from guns to rutabagas, en route from wherever to anywhere. On the open road, these trucks won't stop for anything except the SHiPs, obvious government roadblocks (see below) or breakdowns. When one stops, they all stop. All truckers have a co-driver riding shotgun (literally).

Accident or Firefight: Roll 1D10. A result of 1-6 indicates an accident, and 7-10 is a firefight. Accidents will involve one to six vehicles of various types and sizes. Emergency vehicles will be present (possibly trauma teams). SHiPs units may also be present.

Firefights will be either static or running gun battle. Roll 1D10. A result of 1-5 is static, and 6-10 is running. They usually involve two or three vehicles. SHiPs may be involved.

With accidents and firefights, one often begets the other.

Free State Road Block: This is an impromptu checkpoint set up by one or a combination of the SoCal Departments of Immigration, Customs, Justice, etc. They are questioning passing drivers and doing spot searches of vehicles going in both directions looking for contraband, illegal aliens, etc. The block is set up on a section of the highway that is fairly flat, with restricted access and exit, and will be manned by 10 to 60 armed personnel. A SHiPs air patrol flight will be on the ground close by to support the road block if necessary.

WHAT NOW?

Any PCs who helped out on this run (firing panzer weapons effectively, smooth-talking SoCal Customs officers, etc.) will be rewarded by the Ne'er-do-wells by being granted the equivalent of a Family skill of+2. But they've still got to pay full price for the things they want. Business is business.

Now that they are in Santa Barbara and since the Ne'er-do-wells have no immediate plans to return to Night City, the PCs are on their own. A plane will cost them $150 each. Or could they rent a car....

Once the PCs do return to Night City why not have the NCPD pay them a visit?

NCPD SWAT TEAM

Members of the five-man emergency response team which storms the vacant warehouse are similar to one another.

INT: 6, REF: 7/10, TECH: 5, COOL: 7, ATTR: 5, LUCK: 6, MA: 8, BODY: 9, EMP: 7/5, Run: 40, Leap: 2, Lift: 90.

Role: Cop.

Skills: Authority+3, Awareness/Notice+4, Handgun+7, Athletics+4, Brawling+4, Melee+3, Rifle+6.

Gear: Militech Arms Avenger with six mags/150 rounds, flak vest and pants, and nylon helmet.

Cyberware: Cyberaudio with digital recording link, Sandevistan Reflex Boost (+3) and Cyberoptic with Antidazzle.

NORCAL RANGERS

The crews of these two craft are equal in ability:

Role: Solo.
REF: 7.
Skills: Combat Sense+4, Pilot (Vectored Thrust Vehicle)+6, Heavy Weapons+6.

Below are the stats for the two aircraft that make up NorCal Ranger Air Patrol 3-16, call signs Weasel Seeker 1 and 2.

AV-9 Gunship
(Weasel Seeker 1)

Crew: 2 (pilot, gunner/navigator).
Max Speed: 400 mph.
Maneuver Speed: 250 mph.
SDPs: 180.
SPs: 45.
Armament: Two turreted 40mm grenade launchers with 30 rounds each, two pylon-mounted 5.56mm machineguns with 500 rounds each, and four rocket pods (two wing-mounted with 24 rounds each and two belly-mounted with 72 rounds each).

AV-4 Tactical Recon Aerodyne
(Weasel Seeker 2)

Crew: 3 (pilot, gunner, navigator).
Max Speed: 350 mph.
Maneuver Speed: 150 mph.
SDPs: 100.
SPs: 40.
Armament: One 7.62mm minigun with 2000 rounds and one 20mm autocannon with 1000 rounds.

NE'ER-DO-WELLS

The Ne'er-do-wells are a small pack of panzer-borne nomad mercenary smugglers who operate through SoCal, southern NorCal and Nevada, and western Arizona. The pack is small, only 18 members, with one third of them women. They drive seven panzers and are led by the man named Runner.

The Ne'er-do-wells have two light and two medium air-cushion vehicle (ACV) panzers and two medium and one heavy aerodyne (AV) panzers. They are hoping, over the next couple of years, to convert entirely to AV panzers, selling or trading their ACVs in the process. Runner's panzer is Large Marge. Another of their machines is Ball-Room Blitz. An AV panzer called Road Hog has a hedgehog ram/plow on its bow.

Runner

INT: 8, REF: 8/9, TECH: 7, COOL: 9, ATTR: 5, LUCK: 5, MA: 7, BODY: 8, EMP: 8/6, Run: 35, Leap: 1.75, Lift: 80.
Role: Nomad.
Skills: Family+9, Awareness/Notice+4, Endurance+2, Melee+3, Rifle+4, Drive+6, Basic Tech+4, Wilderness/Survival+3, Brawling+2, Athletics+3, Heavy Weapons+3, Streetwise+3, First Aid+2, AV Tech+1, Dodge & Escape+3.
Gear: Flak vest and pants, Colt AMT Model 2000 with three mags and 40 rounds, black leather jumpsuit and boots.
Cyberware: Kerenzikov Reflex Boost (+1), cyberoptic with targeting scope and cyberaudio with radio splice.

Runner has been leading the Ne'er-do-wells for the last four years and in that time has given the pack, now radically smaller than when it started from Eastern Kansas in 2015, a new lease on life. The panzers operate individually and in groups, and they are known by many fixers in the region who recommend them as a source of materials, information and, occasionally, firepower.

Standing six feet tall and weighing 175 pounds, Runner is a 27-year-old man of average looks sporting a nose ring and neatly cropped, dirty blond hair.

A shrewd businessman and judge of character, he has extricated his pack from potential trouble on a number of occasions. He says "ya know?" after most of his sentences, which can get tiresome, but other than that, he is a pleasant enough character.

Large Marge

Runner's vehicle is a good example of a medium ACV panzer.
Type: Med ACV PzKpfw.
Crew: 2 (pilot, observer/gunner).
Passengers: 2.
Cargo: 3000 kilograms (or about six people).
Max Speed: 125 mph.
Maneuver Speed: 100 mph.
Operational Radius: 300 miles.
SDPs: 110.
SPs: 50.
Armament: One right popup turret-mounted medium railgun with 100 rounds, one left popup turret-mounted 7.62 minigun with 1000 rounds, and one deck turret-mounted rocket pod with 30 rounds.
Equipment: Smoke grenade discharger with 10 rounds, TacComp with IFF program, forward-looking infrared (FLIR), data burst radio, satellite uplink and reactive armor (on front facing only).

Road Hog

A shark-mouth-painted medium AV panzer.
Type: Med AV PzKpFw.
Crew: 1 (pilot).
Passengers: 2.
Cargo: 3500 kilograms (or approximately seven people).
Max Speed: 200 mph.
Maneuver Speed: 125 mph.
Operational Radius: 350 miles.
SDPs: 120.
SPs: 60 (70 on front).
Armament: One deck turret-mounted heavy laser with 20 "rounds" and one coaxial 20mm autocannon with 1500 rounds.
Equipment: Hedgehog ram, smoke grenade discharger with 20 rounds, radar, TacComp with IFF program and databurst radio. Ω

For rules on building and using panzers for your campaign, see page 60.

This article formed independently and was given a heavy dose of inspiration from Walter Jon Williams' novel, Hardwired *(Williams, Walter Jon. Hardwired. Tom Doherty Associates, Inc. publishers: New York, 1986).*

The title of this article refers to General Heinz Guderian. He was a German tank commander during WWII and wrote a book called Panzer Leader.

PANZERS

The following rules on building and using panzers in your casmpaign are provided as a complement to the preceding adventure, "Guderian Dreams."

By Legion

Panzers are a fairly recent development in 2020. Their appearance in America stems from the reaction of various nomad packs to their often brutal treatment by government and corporate security forces. To put themselves on an equal footing with the security forces, these nomads created some of the most potent armored vehicles on the continent.

Panzers are privately manufactured armored hover vehicles of various types. As such, they are not so much highly technical machines as highly innovative.

Panzers average about the size of a moving van. Some versions are smaller, about the size of a delivery truck, and a few are almost the size of a punknaught. Unlike a punknaught, however, a panzer is built to last.

They are either conventional air-cushion vehicles with turbofans and plenums, or they are powered by AV engines stripped from salvaged wrecks or bought from wrecking yards. Even AV panzers, however, are fitted with plenums to assist their engine lift. ACV panzers are the first-generation vehicles of their type, and AV versions are second generation.

Because of all the armor on panzers, their engine lift is limited, making them skimmers. They normally ride between a few centimeters and one meter off the ground, although AV panzers are capable of short (approximately five turns maximum) "lifts" as high as 10 or 15 meters. Lifts are made by vectoring engine thrust down and must be short because they are hard on the panzers' engines, for which parts are always in short supply.

Armor on panzers is ceramic, plastic, cloth and alloy laminate to keep weight down, although steel may have to do when panzerboys can't get higher-tech materials. Some panzers have reactive armor fitted to them. When pilots can obtain reactive armor, it is usually fitted to panzers' front facings. More armor can be put on AV panzers than on conventional ACV panzers due to the AV machine's superior lift. AV panzers are also faster than ACV panzers, thanks again to their engines.

Panzers are often coated with radar-absorbent paint to assist pilots in hiding when they don't want to blow enemies apart.

Because panzers are rare and unique, almost all are given names by their operators, painted on the vehicle's armor. Kill markers are also popular. They range from rings painted around gun barrels (popular with Pennsylvania Dutch panzerboys) to silhouettes of cats, wheelchairs or stickmen.

USE AND OPERATION

Depending on whether they are AV or ACV, the operation of panzers require either Pilot (Vectored Thrust Vehicle) or Driving skill, respectively.

All panzers can be cyberdriven, and all their weapons can be cyber controlled.

Panzers try to keep opponents at long ranges when in combat and seldom stop to engage in "stand-up" fights. A panzerboy will usually keep his panzer at speed during a fight, attempting to deke or out-run the opposition.

PANZER CONSTRUCTION

Following are some guidelines to help PCs build a panzer. See the notes on building a punknaught on page 29 of *Chromebook* for more information. The steps below must be followed in numerical order when coming up with a panzer design. Remember that these are only guidelines, and by varying the speed limits on some and the armor limits on others, you will maintain the uniqueness of panzers.

If referees are going to allow their players to build a panzer, the collection and assembly of all the various components may be drawn out over a number of other adventures. If your group is getting together and you don't have a scenario ready, why not have the group's fixer get a hot tip on a reconditioned AV-4 engine?

1. Propulsion: There are two kinds: conventional turbofans (ACV), and vectored thrust engines (AV).

2. Size: All can be classed into three general categories: light (approximately a delivery truck), medium (approximately a moving van), or heavy (approximately a punknaught).

3. Structure: SDPs are determined by size: light (typically 80), medium (110), or heavy (150).

4. Armor: The limit on armor depends on which type of propulsion it has: ACV (minimum of 50, maximum of 60), or AV (minimum of 60, maximum of 70).

5) Weaponry: The number of weapons allowed is determined by its size: light (up to two), medium (up to four), or heavy (up to six).

Weapons can include machineguns, grenade launchers, rocket launches, autocannon, missiles (both AT and SAM), lasers, rail and coil guns and Gatling guns.

Weapons can be mounted on any of the following: standard turrets, popup concealed turrets, hull sponsons, pods or pintle and ring mounts.

6. Speeds: The maximum and

maneuver (safe) speeds, in miles per hour, are determined by its propulsion system and its size:

Size	ACV		AV	
	Max	Man	Max	Man
Light	175	125	250	150
Medium	125	100	200	125
Heavy	100	75	150	100

7. Operational Radius: The operational radius, in miles, is determined by its size and propulsion system:

Size	ACV	AV
Light	400	450
Medium	300	350
Heavy	200	250

8. Crew: Any panzer may have a crew of one (pilot/gunner only) or two (pilot and navigator/gunner).

9. Cargo: Panzers like to carry as much as possible. The cargo capacity, in kilograms, depends on its size: light (approximately 2000 kilograms), medium (approximately 5000 kilograms), or heavy (approximately 7000 kilograms).

Passengers can be held in the cargo bay, if necessary. Mesh fold-down seats are built into the bays of some panzers. A good yardstick to use is one passenger for every 500 kilos of cargo capacity.

10. Passengers: A panzer may also be fitted with a limited number of passenger seats in the crew compartment. The number of passengers that may be carried depends on the panzer's size: light (one), medium (up to two), or heavy (up to four).

11. Equipment: Equipment ranges from reactive armor to gyroscopic compasses, tactical computers to cow catchers. If it might come in handy, it's probably been mounted on a panzer.

WEAPONS AND EQUIPMENT

Detailed below are a number of weapons which are mounted on many panzers. Prices indicated rep-

Lasers

Size	Long Range	Damage	Cost (EB)	ROF	MAG	REL
Light	500m	5D10	9000	1	30	UR
Medium	1000m	7D10	11,000	1	20	UR
Heavy	1500m	10D10	14,000	1	10	UR

Rail and Coil Guns

Size	Cal (approx)	Long Range	Damage	Cost (EB)	ROF	Mag	Rel
Light	10mm	500m	3D10	2000	2	150	ST
Medium	15mm	1000m	5D10	3000	1	100	ST
Heavy	20mm	2000m	8D10	5000	1	50	ST

resent the costs of the items if a person were able to buy them from a store.

Lasers: See the Lasers table for the statistics for vehicular lasers.

Rail and Coil Guns: Rail and coil guns are linear accelerators which use electromagnetic fields to fire ferrous projectiles at high velocity. These weapons require ammunition in the form of metal projectiles. They, and lasers, require electrical power. They normally run off of electricity generated by the vehicle's engine. Storage batteries built into vehicles will hold enough power to fire the weapons' magazine limits, but will then need to be recharged by running the engine for approximately eight hours, depending on the weapons carried. Rail gun barrels are typically square or rectangular in cross-section, occasionally triangular. Coil guns have round barrels. Characteristics are identical for both rail and coil guns, which are manufactured in three size categories. See the Rail and Coil Guns table.

Reactive Armor: This is a form of high-tech applique armor which explodes when hit by explosive projectiles of at least 30mm. This explosion halves the damage of incoming explosive rounds by disrupting their concussive energies.

For using reactive armor, every vehicle body is considered to have five facings—front, top, rear, right and left. Turrets are treated sepa-

rately and are also considered to have the same five facings. Each facing is protected by 10 "units" of reactive armor. Whenever a protected facing is hit and detonates, the unit hit is destroyed. Any subsequent hit on that facing has a one in 10 (cumulative per unit destroyed) chance of hitting unprotected portion (e.g., a panzer's front facing has had two of its reactive armor units destroyed); any new attack has a two in 10 chance of hitting its bare hull.

Reactive armor may only be used on ground or hover vehicles which have 40 SPs of armor.

Referees may decide what price to place on reactive armor and how it may be obtained in their campaigns.

Ram Plates: Some panzers mount ram plates, cow catchers or hedge hogs on their bow to reduce damage taken (see Crashing, page 73 of *Solo of Fortune*) when they collide with road blocks or other vehicles. These add 10 SPs to front armor.

Each of these types of fittings, which are unarmored, can absorb up to 50 SDPs. Once they have taken that much damage, they will be broken beyond their ability to function, and the panzer will suffer normal damage if it hits another solid object. Ω

THIN

"Is it not wisely said that there are things buried in the earth that should never be disturbed? Is it not said that there are things best left alone in their dark slumbers? Woe be it to those who disturb such things. May Allah curse their names."

Translated from Arabic by Dr. Phileus Sadowsky

A down-on-his-luck miner named George Jones in 1849 accidentally freed a Gaunt from the shaft it had been imprisoned in by Native American shamans. The Gaunt killed the miner's companions, but took him as a servant. Jones was told to lure people into the area with the gold that had been used to imprison the Gaunt. He did so, and soon the Gaunt was feeding off the people who arrived and constructed the town of Green Grove.

After learning that the townspeople planned to flee the area, the Gaunt killed them all in an orgy of destruction. The horror of the experience broke the being's hold over Jones, and during the day, with the help of four mules, he used stones, wood and all his gold to seal off the entrance to the shaft in which the Gaunt slept. He died during his monumental effort, and his bones lay amidst the rubble and gold. The empty town was discovered later, and the incident became known as "The Mystery of Green Grove."

The area was undisturbed by anyone until 1992, when the King Movie Company began filming "The Mystery of Green Grove," a horror story loosely based on the historical mystery. The basic plot of the movie is that miners intruded on an ancient Native American burial ground and stole the gold within it. The ancient spirits that protected the tomb were released and set about killing off the miners and the rest of the town for good measure.

The filming went along smoothly until the company suffered financial difficulties and production stopped.

By Michael C. LaBossiere

Jack

Mine
Elevation line
Dirt road
Trail
Green Grove
Paved road
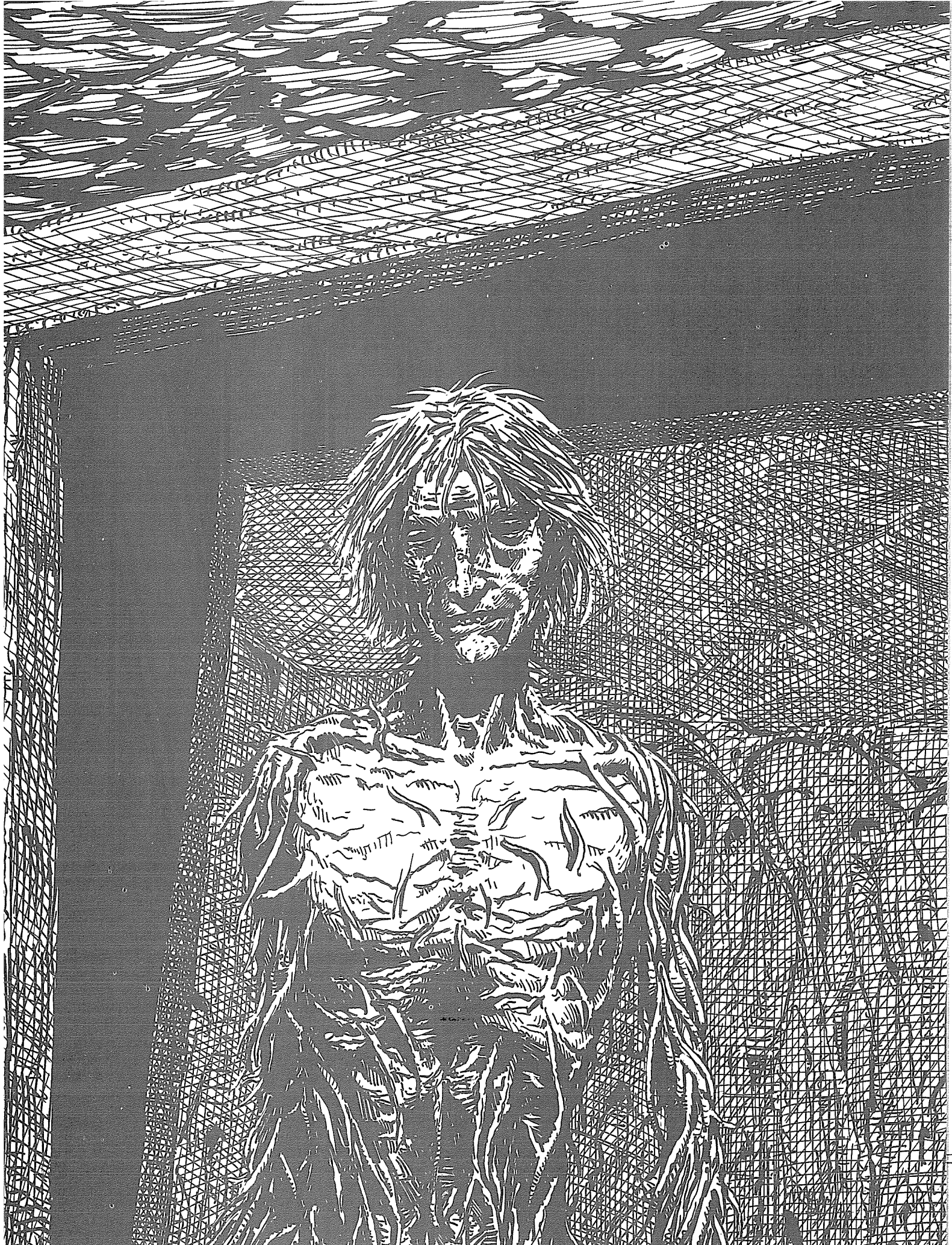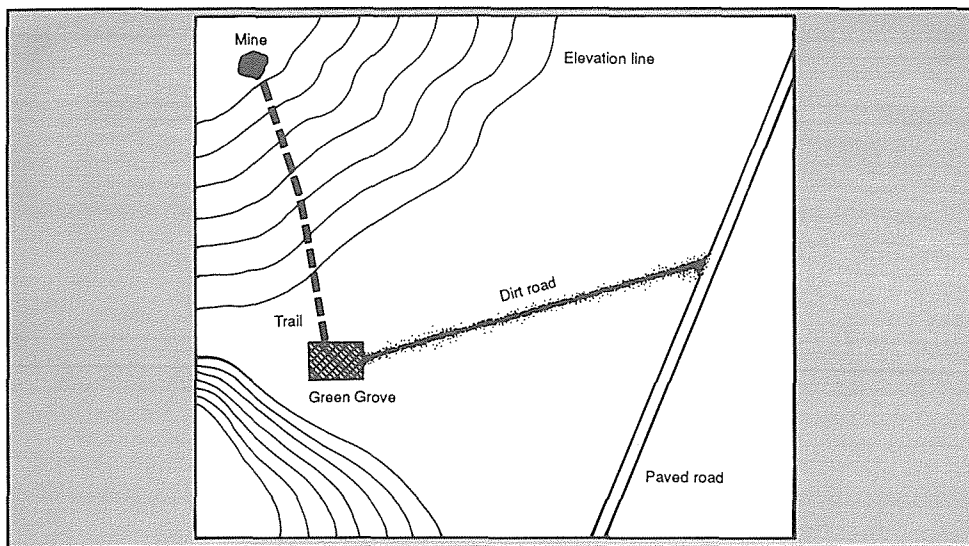
Books

Title	Language	+ to Knowledge	Spell Multiplier	Effects on SAN
Book of the Underlands	English	9%	2	−1D6
Book of the Underlands	Greek	12%	3	−2D6

One of the actors, Dave Parker, wandering about while waiting to leave, came across the shaft and did some digging. He discovered some of the gold and later returned to dig the rest of it up. He sold it and used the money to fund the film, and the shooting began again, with Parker as the new star. The Gaunt, which had dug its way to the surface after the gold was removed, discovered the movie people three days after the shooting had started up. It began killing that night, taking an immigrant worker back to its lair. The next night it took a cameraman who had a fight with the director. The third night, it took Parker, who offered to serve it in exchange for his life. He told it about the nearby town and offered to drive it there at night if it would let him live and leave the film site alone. It agreed, and Parker has driven it to the city each night, where it takes a victim.

GETTING THE PCS INVOLVED

While the adventure must be located in an area that was part of the historical gold rush, it is up to the referee to decide exactly where to place it, based on his campaign needs. The PCs will be drawn into the adventure by a letter (or fax) from an old friend. William Gardner, a horror story writer, will write to say that he believes something unnatural is occurring. The letter will say that two people vanished from the movie site about two weeks ago and that there have been six reported incidents of people disappear-

ing in the nearby town. He will also write that the local paper reports that Joe Miller, a nightwatchman, went insane, babbling about "a thin thing, a thin thing that ripped him apart." And two days later, Gardner writes, the paper reports that a wino saw something that took one of his buddies. The night after the incident with the wino, Gardner writes, there was another reported disappearance, and the locals have started calling the unknown criminal "Thin Jack." Gardner will conclude his letter by writing that he thinks there is more here than just a psycho grabbing people, and he will ask the investigators for aid. Most of Gardner's money is tied up in the film, so he will only be able to provide very minimal financial aid to the investigators for their travel expenses.

ARRIVAL

If the investigators decide to aid Gardner, they can secure transport via airplane or bus, or they can drive out on their own. If they go by airplane, they will have to take the bus to the nearby town (a three-hour drive), and Gardner will pick them up in town. If they go by bus, they can go directly to the town, and Gardner will pick them up. If they drive, they can go all the way to the film site, and Gardner will meet them there.

Gardner will offer the investigators a place to stay on the film site, or they can seek lodging in town at their own expense. There is one motel in town ($20 a night for a single) as well as a YMCA

($5 a night per person). If they select the film site, they will be sleeping in the barracks-like building along with the camera crews, gophers and minor actors.

BOOKS

Relevant books are detailed below.

Newspapers: The local newspapers contain the articles Gardner mentioned in his letter. One article makes reference to "The Mystery of Green Grove," and the writer wonders (but not seriously) if the same thing is happening to the town that happened in Green Grove.

"Unexplained Vanishings": This book (and others like it) is available in almost any public library, and the town library has a copy of it. The book briefly mentions the town of Green Grove, which was found empty in 1849. The book goes on to note that none of the missing people were ever heard from again, even though almost all of them had relatives in other places.

"Indian Legends": This book (and others like it) is available in almost any public library, and the town library has a copy of it. One section of the book discusses a monster "that came from the earth" and was driven back from whence it came with magic and gold. It was supposedly sealed beneath the earth by the use of golden wards. According to the book, the monster's name translates into English as "The Thin One" or "The Skinny One."

"Book of the Underlands": This Mythos book contains information on the various beings (such as Chthonians, Ghouls and Dholes) that dwell beneath the surface of planets or are associated with the underground places (known as the Underlands). The book is very difficult to find in English and almost impossible to find in the original Greek. The town librarian, a descendent of an investigator who was active in the 1920s, has a copy of it. She will only reveal it if the investigators earn her trust. The book has a section describing a race of beings known as Gaunts (no relation to Nightgaunts) that dwell beneath the earth. These beings are described as "inhumanly thin" and are known to "fear gold, for it is their bane." While these creatures are reported to be "invincible in battle," they are supposedly vulnerable because they had to "reside within their foul pits" during the day "and could not abide the light of day."

The English version of this Mythos book contains Contact Ghast and Contact Ghoul, and the Greek version contains both those spells, plus Contact Chthonian. See the Books table.

Call of Cthulhu/Cthulhu Now

INVESTIGATION

Following are individuals/groups the investigators may wish to talk to and the information they can provide.

Police: If the investigators go to the police, they will only be told that the police are working on the case. If the investigators have enough clout, fame or status to impress or influence the police, they will be told that the police have no leads, except that the person they are looking for (if it is just one person) is thin. The crimes are particularly baffling because they seem to have no common element, except for the fact that a person is taken each time. The police will be grateful for any help the investigators can offer, provided they stay within the law.

Joe Miller: Joe Miller is the security guard who went insane due to seeing the Gaunt feeding upon one of its victims. He is currently at the town hospital and will be transferred to the state mental institution if he does not recover soon. The investigators can see him if they get permission from the police or are able to bluff or persuade their way into doing so. An investigator using his Psychoanalysis skill will be able to calm Miller down and draw out a description of what he saw. He will say: "It was horrible. Thin, very thin. Yes. It had him in its claws. Was ripping him apart. Eating him bit by bit. He was alive. At the start. Alive. Yes. It was thin. Very thin. Yes." He will then stare up at the ceiling and begin drooling profusely. (He will eventually recover and have no recollection of what he saw.)

Bill Newsmith: Newsmith is the wino the newspaper article mentioned. If the investigators inquire at the newspaper office, they can find out who he is and where he tends to hang out. Newsmith is a Korean veteran who was captured by the Chinese during the war and escaped after severe mistreatment from which he never quite recovered. If the investigators buy him a drink, or are willing to listen to his war stories for a while, he will tell them what he saw: "It was real thin and smelt like a dead body, like the ones in the war. It grabbed up old Will, and his screaming woke me up. Haven't heard screams like that since the war. It ran off with him. I think it was going to eat him."

People at the Film Site: Anybody at the film site can tell the investigators that three people vanished from the site. The first was Manual Padre, a migrant worker who had been hired to do manual labor at the site. Most people think he simply moved on. The second person to vanish was Homer Wilson, a cameraman. He was seen fighting with the director over pay and the way the film was being done. Most people think he just left one night. The general consensus is that there is some psycho loose in town, but that the incidents in town are totally unrelated to the people who left the film site.

Dave Parker: If the investigators talk to Parker, a successful Idea roll will reveal that he seems to be under a great deal of stress (which is not surprising, given that he is playing his first major role), and a successful Psychology skill check will reveal subtle signs of mental disturbance. Parker, being a skilled actor, will handle the investigators' questions well and will do his best to keep them from suspecting him. He will say that he thinks "this Thin Jack is a psycho, like the ones you hear about all the time. I hope they catch and fry the bastard." He will say he thinks the people vanishing from the film site simply left and were not victims of Thin Jack.

CLUES

The following describes various clues the investigators may find.

Parker's Jeep: If the investigators examine Parker's jeep, a successful Spot Hidden skill roll will reveal small blood stains on the back of the fold-down seats in the rear of the vehicle (Parker puts a plastic sheet down, but some of the blood has run off it). The blood, if tested, will be found to be human blood. A rolled-up sheet of plastic can also be found under one of the seats. If confronted, Parker will claim it is from a hunting trip (Parker does hunt and has often bragged about his kills to the others), and he will tell the Gaunt about the investigators. The Gaunt will then seek out the investigators and try to kill them.

Personal Effects: If the investigators examine the barracks, they will find that the missing peoples' lockers are still locked. If they pop or pick the locks, they will find that both men's personal effects are still present. The fact that Padre "left behind" all his hard-earned money will probably convince the inves-

Mine
(side view)

Green Grove
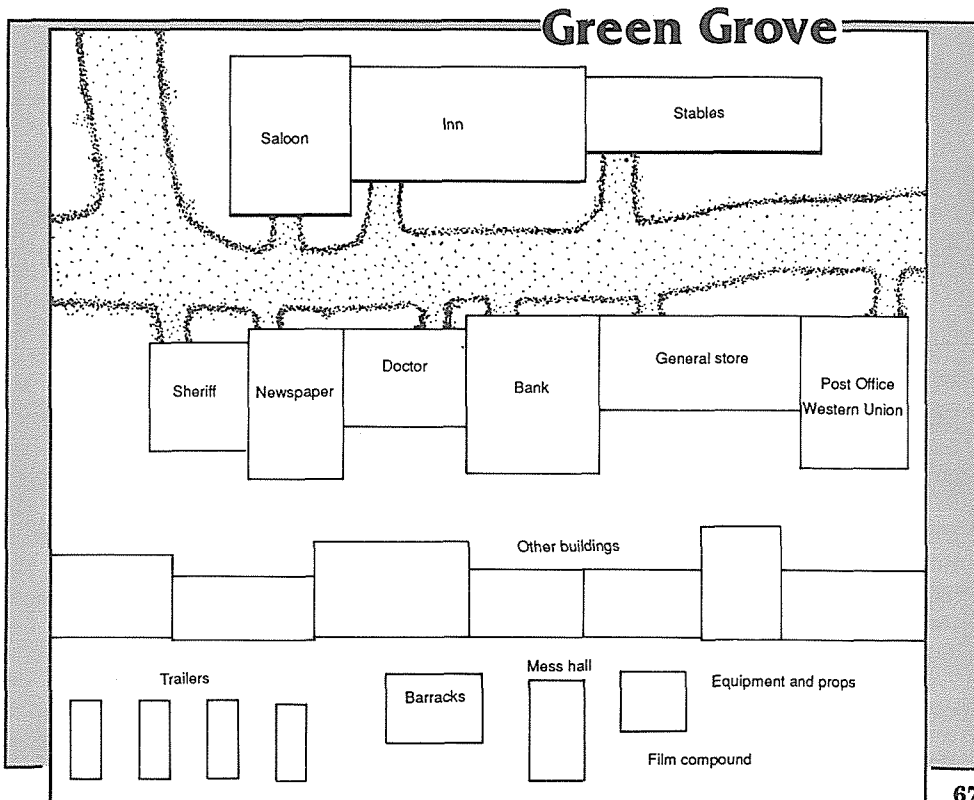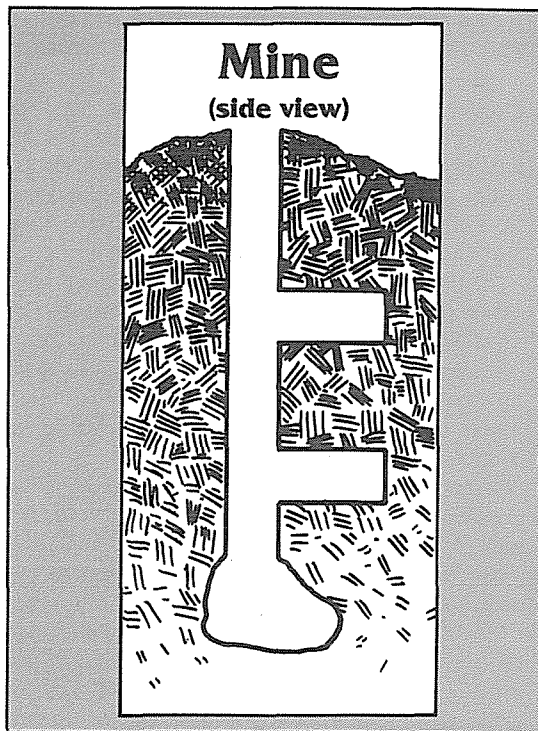
Gaunt

(Lesser Independent Race)

Gaunts have a three-stage life cycle. The first is an egg stage in which the Gaunt is encased in a thick globule of slimy resin that gradually hardens into a shell-like material.

The Gaunt then enters its second stage, in which it assumes a human-like form by using the body of the human that it was provided with by its "mother." A Gaunt in the second stage of life looks like a desiccated corpse of a person who died of starvation. The skin of the Gaunt is coated with a thick slime that is grayish-green in color, and there are thin tendrils coiled all over the surface of the body, which writhe and move in a most disturbing manner. During this stage, the Gaunt feeds on the flesh and power of living creatures at the rate of one per night (it can kill many more, however, but cannot use their power). When it has consumed 500 power points of sentient beings, it will undergo a metamorphose into its third stage. This takes one night to occur.

The third stage Gaunt emerges the next night and captures as many humans as it can, up to six. It then inserts an egg into each human and digs a hole for each egg, puts a slimy globule of resin in the bottom of the hole, then pushes the human into it. After laying six eggs, the mature Gaunt dies, having expended its life energy producing the eggs and globules. A Gaunt in the third stage looks very much like an adult Chthonian, but their tentacles are longer, and they are not accompanied by a chanting noise.

Gaunts at stage one or two communicate via telepathy and can communicate with humans that way. They can communicate with one another up to a distance of 100 miles, and can communicate with (and detect) humans at a distance of one mile.

Armor: Because of their nature (which is largely nonphysical), Gaunts at all stages take minimal damage from all physical weapons (even impaling weapons). Gaunts at stage one must be attacked through the globule (it is meters thick), but they have no armor of their own and are easily killed. Gaunts at stage one have 4 points of armor and regenerate 6 points a round, while Gaunts at stage three have 8 points of armor and regenerate 12 points a round. Gaunts take normal damage from magical weapons or weapons made of gold or magical gold weapons.

Vulnerabilities: Fortunately, Gaunts have vulnerabilities. First, they are extremely vulnerable to solar radiation and take 1D10 during each round they are exposed to direct sunlight or its equivalent.

Second, they must sleep at least six hours a day in their egg. For each day they go without such sleep, they take 1D10 points of damage and lose 1 point of power permanently.

Third, they can only consume power within their egg. If a Gaunt cannot bring its kill into its egg within six hours of the kill, it will not be able to gain the power of the victim. Destroying the egg is one obvious way to destroy a Gaunt. Doing so would require explosives, lots of acid or any other means of large-scale destruction. The egg is vulnerable to conventional weaponry.

Fourth, Gaunts are vulnerable to gold. The intrinsic properties of gold act in such a way as to repel Gaunts. Each ounce of gold will create a "repulsion zone" one meter from the center of the gold mass which a Gaunt cannot enter. If it is trapped within a repulsion zone, it will be paralyzed for as long as the gold is present, although it can still communicate telepathically.

Spells: None.

SAN: Those who encounter a Gaunt egg lose 1 SAN if their rolls fail, none if they succeed. Seeing a stage two Gaunt costs 1D8 if the roll fails, only 1 if the roll succeeds. Seeing a stage three Gaunt costs 2D6 if the roll fails, only 1 if the roll succeeds.

Gaunt Life Cycle

	Stage Two Statistics	Average	Stage Three Statistics	Average
STR	4D6	14	4D6×3	42
CON	4D6	14	4D6×2	28
SIZ	3D6	10-11	3D6×3	30-33
INT	3D6	10-11	3D6	10-11
POW	4D6	14	4D6	14
DEX	3D6	10-11	2D6	7
Hit Points		12-13		29-31
Move		8		7/1 Burrowing
Regenerate	6 points/rd		12 points/rd	
Armor	4 points		8 points	
Weapon	Claw 60% 1D6+1D4		Tentacle 40% 2D6	
Weapon	Bite 40% 1D6+1D4		Crush 3D6	

tigators that he didn't leave voluntarily.

Financial Matters and New Roles: The investigators are likely to learn that the film ran into financial difficulty a while back, and shooting had to stop until new funding could be found. If the investigators can access the records of the film company (either by hacking into their files or by good old-fashioned breaking and entering) they will learn that Parker provided the money (almost $1 million). If the investigators check on Parker's financial dealings and gain access to the broker he did business with (it is listed in the movie company's files) they can learn that the money was from the sale of a great deal of gold. It is well known that Parker replaced John Stand (a fairly well known actor who left after being replaced) in the role of the main character. Some of the people at the site think Parker must have had something to do with the new money, but they don't know what. If asked, Parker will say that he doesn't know where the money came from, but he got the new role because of his talent.

AREA MAP

The area map shows the general details of the area around the rebuilt Green Grove.

Paved Road: This infrequently traveled road leads to town (north).

Dirt Road: This road was put in by the movie company.

Trail: A successful Track skill roll will reveal the presence of the tracks of some sort of creature, about the size of an adult male. However, the footprints are very odd and are clearly not human. This is the path that the Gaunt takes into Green Grove each night to meet Parker. A roll against one-quarter of an investigator's Tracking skill will reveal that a truck or jeep went up this way some time ago. This was Parker's jeep.

GREEN GROVE MAP

The original Green Grove was eventually worn down by the elements. The current Green Grove is a movie set. All of the buildings are plywood mockups of the buildings they are supposed to represent, with nothing inside (interior shots are actually done on a sound stage back in Hollywood). The stables, however, are real and hold the animals used for the filming (six horses).

Trailers: There are four trailers. Each houses two people (four actors, the director and Gardner) in relative comfort (shower, color TV, small kitchen, etc.).

Film Compound: The compound contains three buildings. One is a wooden barracks-style building with two

bathrooms, two sleeping rooms with bunk beds and lockers and a common area. The minor actors, camera crews, gophers and so forth sleep here. There are 20 men, 17 women and 12 children housed here. The second building is what amounts to a mess hall where food is prepared and served. The third building holds the equipment and props.

Power for the buildings and trailers is provided by three generators located adjacent to the equipment building.

MINE

The mine is a 30-foot shaft dug down into the earth that ends in a chamber. Parker knows about it, but no one else does. The mouth of the shaft is still clogged with hunks of stone and wooden timbers. There is a pile of rubble near the edge of the shaft, and the timbers and stones show recent marks from the cables Parker used to winch them out. Any people in the area will notice a hint of a vile odor, and a successful Idea roll will indicate that the investigator notices that no animals go near the shaft entrance and that the plants around it are unhealthy looking.

If the investigators examine the shaft, they will notice that the smell is stronger in it, and a successful Spot Hidden skill roll will reveal to the investigators that there are odd scratch marks on the timbers and stones in the shaft, as if something with claws had been climbing out of it. If the investigators decide to climb down into it, they must make their Climbing roll once every 15 feet. The old shorings are in poor shape, and there is a 20% chance that one will give way. Such an occurrence will require a Luck roll on the part of the investigator to avoid falling. Of course, if the investigators think to use ropes, the descent will be much easier.

Chamber: The walls and floor of the chamber are odd looking. They resemble some sort of solidified dark green resin material, and from the walls hang tattered strips of some sort of reddish material. The chamber stinks of death, and the floor is lined with human bones and is stained black from blood. During the day, the Gaunt resides in this chamber, and this is where it feeds.

ACTION

The Gaunt will leave its lair each night when it is fully dark. It then will lope to the saloon mockup and wait until Parker meets it there. The two will go to Parker's jeep, and Parker will drive it to the town, where the Gaunt will select its next meal. Parker will then drive the Gaunt back, and it will return to its lair to finish

its meal. Parker will then clean out his jeep, and wash off and hide the plastic under the seat. He will then go to sleep.

If the investigators are watching Parker and he is not aware that they are doing so, they will be able to see him meeting the creature and transporting it. If Parker notices that the investigators are watching him, he will pretend that he doesn't notice and lure them into a trap. If the investigators attack the Gaunt, Parker will aid it, but not at the risk of his own life. If the investigators decide to go into town and wait for Thin Jack, it is up to the keeper to determine what results their efforts yield.

It is important that an aura of horror and mystery be built up over the course of the adventure. To build horror, the keeper may find it useful to allow the investigators to catch a glimpse of the Gaunt (they might see it leaping from rooftop to rooftop, clutching its latest victim) and see some of its handiwork (it may tear someone apart for no reason). The exact nature of what is going on should not be revealed too quickly. The investigators should have to work for their clues and information and should have to think things through carefully before realizing what is actually going on. The keeper may also find it useful to introduce red herrings and sidetracks into the situation to keep the investigators guessing. For example, the keeper may wish to have a minor earthquake nearby which might lead the investigators to suspect Chthonian activity (especially if they have access to the "Book of the Underlands"), or the keeper may use a copy-cat psycho as a red herring.

RESOLUTION

The Gaunt is an extremely dangerous opponent, and it will be difficult for the investigators to defeat it. If they do succeed in imprisoning it, each investigator involved will receive 1D3 SAN as a reward. If the investigators actually destroy it, each involved investigator should receive 1D6 SAN as a reward. If the investigators defeat the Gaunt, they will earn the goodwill of the movie company as well as that of the people of the town. The movie company will offer the investigators roles in the film (which will turn out to be the year's surprise box office smash), and the townspeople will be willing to aid the investigators in the future. If the investigators flee without imprisoning or destroying the Gaunt, they will each lose 1D3 SAN. In such a situation, the Gaunt will continue to terrorize the town, and it will soon kill Parker and the entire film crew. Eventually, it will undergo its metamorphosis (it

is left up to the keeper as to how much power the Gaunt has consumed), and its reign of terror will end until its offspring start theirs.

WILLIAM GARDNER

Gardner is a famous horror writer who earned his fame with his novel, "Days of Hell," which became a successful movie. Like many horror writers, Gardner believes little about the supernatural or occult, and it will be difficult for him to accept the existence of a real supernatural horror. However, he cannot escape the facts of the situation. Gardner will aid the investigators to the best of his ability and will not shy from any tough situations.

STR 12, CON 14, SIZ 10, INT 14, POW 14, DEX 12, APP 11, EDU 15, SAN 64, HP 12.

Weapons: .22 long pistol 30% 1D6.

Skills: Computer Use 25%, Credit Rating 85%, Drive Auto 30%, Library Use 75%, Occult 75%, Handgun 30%.

BILL NEWSMITH

Newsmith is a wino. During the Korean War, he was shot down and captured. He later escaped, but never recovered from his mistreatment. Despite his run-down appearance, Newsmith is still in good shape and still remembers a lot of his training. If the investigators ask for his help, he will clean up, shave and ask for a gun. Newsmith saw the Gaunt take one of his buddies, and he is eager for revenge.

STR 13, CON 15, SIZ 13, INT 13, POW 15, DEX 14, APP 10, EDU 13, SAN 45, HP 14.

Weapons: .45 service automatic 60% 1D10+2, Knife 45% 1D6+1D4.

Skills: Climb 35%, Conceal 40%, First Aid 45%, Hide 55%, Listen 40%, Navigate 50%, Korean 15%, Pilot (Sabre jet fighter): 66%, Handgun 60%, Rifle 30%.

DAVID PARKER

Parker is a fairly talented actor, but he is obsessed with his own fame, which he sees as his ticket to immortality (his greatest fear is dying an unknown). When he found the gold, he used it to fund the movie on the condition that he be given the starring roll. When the Gaunt took him, he pleaded for his life, and the Gaunt recognized a person it could use. He will serve the Gaunt loyally as long as doing so serves his own end. Parker has six ounces of gold hidden in cutout books on his bookshelf in the trailer.

Skills: Acting 65%, Fast Talk 45%, Listen 40%, Persuade 45%. Ω

Draco Starkiller, mercenary extraordinaire, has been through the worst the galaxy can throw at him. He has handled blood-thirsty space mutants, gun-toting pirates and nightmarish death robots. He's been to far reaches of explored space and beyond. He's even made a tidy profit from it all. But is he ready for the ultimate challenge? Can Draco Starkiller handle—a girlfriend?

Many game referees are unfamiliar with how to run romance in the context of the game. This article is designed with them in mind, to help introduce this new aspect into their campaigns.

By "romance," we mean a type of love affair that generates excitement and adventure. This is the modern meaning of the term as found in popular literature, and it applies well to the type of romance that should be found in a game campaign. The physical aspects of such a relationship, if they are there at all, are best downplayed. Rather, it is the emotional context that is highlighted and should be stressed. Romance, in the game, should be a source of whimsy, humor and excitement.

Romantic themes seem to be the one great unexplored source of motivation and adventure in roleplaying games.

A Kiss Among the Stars

By Paul Lucas

This is unfortunate, for romance can be a welcome change of pace from the hackneyed revenge and greed that seems to dominate the themes of most RPG scenarios. Romantic involvements can also add whole new dimensions to both PCs and NPCs alike, making them more "real" and fun to play.

GETTING STARTED

The most practical advice is to observe how romance is handled in other media. Books, movies and television programs deal with romance on a regular basis, and can serve as resources to draw ideas and method from.

When introducing and running romances in the game, there are eight fundamental guidelines to keep in mind, listed below.

Romance Is Voluntary: First of all, don't push romantic themes onto anybody who doesn't want them. Though experience has shown that most players will respond positively to such plots when introduced, some will remain uncomfortable with the idea. It is good to assess how you think your players will respond beforehand. If you aren't sure of their stances on the subject, ask them.

A player should always be able to choose which romances his character should get involved in, if at all. Even if it's an NPC, and not a PC, who is the one aggressively seeking a romance, the player character should always have the option of backing out of it if it's to the player's distaste.

Romance Is Roleplaying: Romance works best as a roleplaying activity. It should not be reduced to charts and dice throwing, as this will take away from the atmosphere and spontaneity that is the fun

of them. Also, romance requires players who enjoy playing out the personalities and nuances of their characters. Romance is a character-orientated, as opposed to a conflict-oriented, endeavor. Power-hungry dice-throwers or nit-picking rules lawyers are often poor choices for amorous venue.

Romance Is Gradual: Don't throw romantic themes and plots at your players all at once. If the players are new to the concept, work over several game sessions. Let potential character relationships take whatever time necessary to develop and reach fruition.

Romance Is Proportion: Romance should almost never dominate the main thrust of a game adventure. At best, it should be a subplot or a side adventure. In an already established game romance, most aspects of the love affair should remain "off-stage" and in the background, and should be addressed only when it has some bearing on the current situation.

Romance Is Texture: Love and passion are boring if they exist in a vacuum. When amorous situations come to the fore in a scenario, it is up to the referee to provide an appropriate backdrop for such activities. Small, subtle things work well in such situations for provoking the appropriate atmosphere. A talk on a star-lit balcony, the shy gift of a single rose or a passionate kiss before a do-or-die battle are all good examples of romantic texture.

Romance Is Passion: Remember that romance and love are the realm of intense emotions. Characters will care a great deal about the objects of their affection and place a high priority on their well-being. This goes back to the second point, above—only players who are willing to roleplay their characters will act this out properly. A PC whose true love has just been kidnaped by a ruthless horde of drooling space mutants will *not* just shrug his shoulders and order another beer!

Romance Isn't All Bliss: In literature and in cinema, romance is a magnet for trouble. There's no reason why this shouldn't be the case with roleplaying adventures. Adversity in a relationship seems to add a lot to a player's suspension of disbelief. This applies both to internal conflicts (such as personality clashes between the lovers) or external troubles (such as a jealous ex-boyfriend trying to come between the couple). The referee can use these incidents in a romantic relationship as either texture, incidental events or adventure hooks.

Comfort Factor: This is perhaps the most important rule to keep in mind when running romances in a roleplaying setting. *Do not address any aspect of a romantic relationship that you are uncomfortable with.* Remember that the purpose of adding romance to a game is to enhance the enjoyment of it, not to embarrass anyone.

PC/NPC RELATIONSHIPS

The PC/NPC relationship requires special attention and effort for both the participating player and the referee. Despite this, it can be a rewarding and intriguing experience to play. The rest of this article focuses on this type of romance exclusively. (The other types, PC/PC and NPC/NPC romances, usually require minimal effort by the referee, as one is completely out of his hands and the other gives him complete creative control.)

This kind of game interaction requires a special type of NPC referred to as the romantic foil.

There are two basic philosophies when it comes to developing romantic foils. One school of thought states that the foil should be specially prepared and customized beforehand to suit the specific needs of a particular PC. The other implies that a foil should be fleshed out from an already established NPC that the PC has taken an interest in. Both have their advantages and disadvantages.

Custom-Designed Foil: This foil is designed before his introduction to the party, with a specific PC in mind. A referee assesses the personality of the PC and puts into the foil what he thinks will be complimentary attributes. He then introduces the foil in such a way so as to be conducive to a romantic meeting. In other words,

custom-designed foils are usually used when the referee, as opposed to the player, wants to initiate a PC/NPC romance.

For example, let's say a player has a character we'll call Deadeye. Deadeye is a hard-bitten bounty hunter who is as efficient as he is nasty when he is in combat, which is often. However, he is often plagued by his conscience and has moral doubts about what he does. He also has a personal (if loose) code of honor. The referee decides a romantic interest might be interesting for such a character and sets about designing Deadeye's romantic foil. The referee assesses that Deadeye's amorous opposite will have to be able to handle herself well in combat (to keep up with the bounty hunter's dangerous life-style), be strong-willed (to deal with Deadeye's mood swings), and have a strong moral center (to help with the PC's crises of conscience).

The NPC that is developed turns out to be a federal marshal for the local government. She is very capable and efficient, handling herself well under stressful conditions. She has not yet been in her job long enough to grow cynical and still believes in the abstract principles of the law very strongly. The main personality established, the referee then adds some character quirks and background history to flesh her out fully, and he has a romantic foil that should play off well against the PC. As a way of introducing the characters, the referee decides to have the foil assigned to the case Deadeye's party is currently involved in as independent contractors. As a matter of professional courtesy, she consults the party, and her eye is drawn to the quiet, brooding man in the corner.

The main disadvantage of this strategy is that the PC might not be taken with the foil at all and refuse to get involved no matter what the referee tries. A lot of design work has gone for naught. Though the NPC is still a useful, well fleshed-out character, she will not become as prominent a factor in the game as the referee would have liked.

Incidental Foil: These foils are not designed as such and are originally meant for other, more standard NPC roles in an adventure. They are just as well or poorly developed as any other character in an ongoing campaign. They become foils only when a PC takes a serious romantic interest in them. More often than not, incidental foils are used when the player, as opposed to the referee, decides to initiate a PC/NPC romance.

For example, the PC party frequently patronizes a tavern, the Cracked Reactor. The referee, on a whim, decides to have them waited on regularly by a bartender who is meant to be primarily a source for rumors. He gives her a name (Monica) and enough character tags (brunette, pacifist, sarcastic) to disguise her true role as a plot device. However, over the course of several visits, one of the PCs strikes up conversations with her, wanting to know her opinions, background, etc.

During the next several game sessions when the PC talks with her, the referee improvises on her background so that (for example) she's working her way through college to become a xenobiologist, and she hates being cooped up in any one place for any lengthy amount of time. The PC eventually asks her for a date, and if she accepts, Monica the plot-device waitress will have graduated from an incidental NPC to a romantic foil.

The incidental foil requires good improvisation skills on the part of the referee. Quite often, the potential foil isn't fleshed out enough to be interesting without some fast invention. Also, experience has borne out that the objects of affection who PCs single out on a whim can sometimes be widely mismatched and can be difficult at first to work through (imagine Deadeye and Monica on a first date). However, such couplings can sometimes be intriguing and amusing if the time is taken to play them out properly.

It is important to point out that a romantic foil, by necessity, must be a fully developed, three-dimensional NPC. The foils, no matter the amount of affection for a PC, will have their own goals and agendas. Sometimes what they're willing to compromise these for the sake of the PC, sometimes not. It is up to the referee to determine, based on the foil's personality and will, how that will affect the relationship.

INITIAL ENCOUNTER

The initial encounter is not necessarily the first time the characters meet, but the first time they make their feelings known to each other, potentially sparking a love affair. For referees and players new to the concepts of game romance, this can be the most difficult aspect to play out satisfactorily.

First, the referee must take into consideration the personalities of both the PC and the foil. How would they go about expressing themselves? Would one character come straight out and tell the other what he feels? Or will the character be shy and roundabout? Will they talk, write notes or sky-write to each other?

Another consideration to keep in mind is the setting in which the encounter takes place. The surroundings should be conducive to the drama of the moment. A hospital room where one of the characters has just come out of a life-threatening coma can be just as appropriate as a candle-lit gourmet dinner, depending on the circumstance surrounding the characters.

It is not necessary to roleplay out every word and action of these (or other) romantic encounters between the PC and the foil. As stated earlier, being subtle can go a long way with this. With the hospital room example above, all the referee really has to say is, "He hugs you and whispers how worried he was about you. He blurts out the feelings he has had about you that he has kept hidden for months." After the scene is played out, "fade to black" with it and move on to other events.

ROMANCE AND THE CAMPAIGN

Think Leia and Han. Think Ariel and Eric. Think Conan and Belit.

Remember that a roleplaying game, no matter its genre or tone, is a source of exciting adventure and escapism. A romance between characters in the game should reflect this.

Drama is the key word in running game romances over a long period of time. The love affair should be designed so as not to let the circumstances get boring and lose the player's interest. This is not to say that the couple should face an emotional crisis in each and every game session. The referee should keep things toned down and in proportion unless the love affair figures prominently in the adventure's events. In one adventure, for instance, the lovers may be in the midst of a petty quarrel, while in another they might be hunting for anniversary gifts.

Romantic subplots may also be carried from scenario to scenario. These are a bit more involved and will take more effort to resolve. An old lover of the foil might show up and try repeatedly to win him back. Or the foil may be resentful that the PC is constantly going out on missions instead of spending time with him.

A romantic foil can also be used as an adventure hook, where he figures prominently in an ongoing scenario. This should be done infrequently at best, as the PC will quickly grow tired of a foil who is always precipitating trouble for the party. Adventures involving foils as major NPCs can range from the tried-but-true "rescue-the-princess" scenario to having to deal with the foil's secret criminal past when it catches up to him.

Other examples of romantic foil subplots and hooks include: The foil's dependent children ("I can't go save the emperor with you guys. We couldn't find a babysitter."); the foil's deadbeat relatives ("I don't care if he is your uncle! He can't come with us to Antares!"); philosophical, social or religious differences ("Either we have a traditional Vilani wedding, or we won't get married at all!"); personality clashes ("You want *me* to learn how to use a gun? Eeeww! Gross!"); cultural schisms ("But where I come from, everyone has 12 wives."); murder plots ("Me? Put cyanide in your drink? Don't be silly, dear!"); elaborate extortion, blackmail or theft plots ("What do you mean Sandra *and* the starship are gone?"); and the old soap-opera stand-by, infidelity ("You? The only one? Bwa-ha-ha-ha!!!"). Note that the last several examples can be perpetrated as easily by the PC as by the foil.

Marriage: Once romance is allowed to become part of a campaign, a marriage between characters may seem almost inevitable. In many ways, this can be considered ultimate romance-related adventure. Weddings make terrific back-drops for scenarios. (What kind of wedding are the romantic principals going to have? What kind of gifts are they going to get? And what better time for those terrorists to take revenge on the party than when the couple is taking their vows?) And marriage will present a whole new set of challenges for the PC. The character will now always have to consider the well being of his spouse before engaging in a course of action. Mortgages, sharing accommodations, and even pregnancy and children may have to be addressed in the long run.

THE INEVITABLE

Eventually, the interest in a game romance often fades, and the player and/or the referee will want to move onto new things. Game romances can end in several ways—a voluntary breakup, death or "happily ever after."

Voluntary Breakup: For one reason or another, the romance isn't working out, and one of the principals decides to bow out. This will occur more often through the PC than through the foil. Sometimes the breakup is amicable, and sometimes it is not. The referee will have to decide precisely how the foil will react, based on circumstances and the NPC's personality.

Death: One of the principals of the love affair meets an untimely end. In all likelihood, this will be the foil as opposed to the PC. The referee is advised not to use this plot device too often. A player whose PC keeps having lovers die will get frustrated fast. Also, over-using such deaths tends to detract from the drama of such situations as they start becoming routine.

"Happily Ever After": The PC decides to quit adventuring and settle down with the foil. This doesn't occur often (in 13 years of being a referee, the author has seen it happen only once), but it does happen. Basically, both the PC and the foil character are retired and are allowed fade into blissful obscurity.

"INTERRACIAL" ROMANCES

By "interracial," we mean a human/alien romance. In most science-fiction games, there are a number of intriguing near-human and nonhuman races. Experience has shown that many players respond enthusiastically to the exotic when it comes to amorous venues for their characters.

These are difficult relationships to run, even for referees and players who are experienced at handling love affairs between characters. The nonhuman foil must be human enough to be attractive and yet foreign enough to remain alien in flavor. The referee must not only remember who the foil is in terms of personality and motives, but must also keep in mind *what* the foil is in terms of physiology and mentality. Besides the usual personality and cultural conflicts, the couple will also have to deal with very basic biological and psychological differences. However, running such a fascinating relationship can be rewarding, both in terms of fun and player interest, if handled properly. (For examples of human/alien romance, the reader is directed toward the novel *The Uplift War* by David Brin, which contains an exemplary human/nonhuman romance, and too many episodes of both the old and new series of *Star Trek*, which use human/alien romance as a common theme.)

Another situation that occasionally comes up is when a PC is an alien and becomes involved in a romance with another of his species. Like the human/nonhuman love affair discussed above, this presents many unique challenges not only for the referee but for the player as well. How does the PC's particular race handle courtship and mating? Just what does love mean for that particular species? What instincts and taboos are involved?

FINAL COMMENTS

The addition of romantic themes to an adventure scenario can greatly enhance everyone's enjoyment of the game. Running a game romance between a PC and an NPC can be challenging and intriguing for the referee and players alike. Ω

Infantry & Field Weapon Vehicles
By Michael C. LaBossiere

New vehicles designed to carry infantry, vehicles designed to fight infantry, and vehicles designed to support field weapons.

Echidna

Type: Echidna		Tons
Movement Type: Tracked		
Tonnage:	30	30
Cruise Speed:	4	
Flank Speed:	6	
Engine:	120GM	6
Type:	Fusion	
Control:	1.5	
Heat Sinks:	10	
Internal Structure:		3
Turret:	.4	
Armor:	80	5
	Location	Points
	Front:	16
	L/R Side:	16
	Back:	16
	Turret:	16
Weapons and Ammo:		
Type	Facing	
MG	Front	.5
MG	Front	.5
MG	Front	.5
MG	Front	.5
MG	Right	.5
MG	Right	.5
MG	Right	.5
MG	Right	.5
MG	Left	.5
MG	Left	.5
MG	Left	.5
MG	Left	.5
MG	Back	.5
MG	Back	.5
MG	Back	.5
MG	Back	.5
Medium Laser	Turret	1
Medium Laser	Turret	1
Small Laser	Turret	1
Small Laser	Turret	1
Small Laser	Turret	1
Small Laser	Turret	1
MG Ammo(400)	Body	2

Overview: During the Star League era, almost no one considered infantry to be of serious military importance. Compared to the 'Mechs and aerospace fighters of the time, a man with a rifle (or 28 men with rifles) was nothing. However, an insightful officer realized that in an urban environment, infantry could be lethal. He proved this during a wargame in which he and his men as well as some local civilians defeated a 'Mech force using only infantry weapons. The next day, the officer was assigned to a team to prepare a vehicle designed to escort 'Mechs in urban environments in which infantry activity was expected. The result was the Echidna, so named because of its small size and profuse spines.

Capabilities: The Echidna is well equipped to fight infantry with its 16 machineguns and six lasers. A single Echidna can eliminate several platoons of infantry in 30 seconds, making it hated and feared by soldiers. Echidnas are lightly armored, but their primary opponents are lightly armed, so this is not a serious worry. In combat, Echidnas fight in groups and position themselves so their machineguns can support one another (generally, they are one or two hexes apart). Echidnas are often escorted by or escort heavier vehicles or 'Mechs.

Variants: One variant of the Echidna removes one machinegun from each firing arc and adds two tons of armor. Other common variants are Echidnas whose fusion engines have been stripped. Such vehicles no longer carry laser weapons. The missing lasers may be replaced with machineguns, but in some cases the ICE's size precludes the retention of the turret.

Notes: The Echidna was heavily produced near the end of the Star League era as the military was preparing for the possibility of heavy urban combat and civil unrest. As such, the Echidna is a fairly common vehicle.

Porcupine

Type: Porcupine		Tons
Movement Type:	Tracked	
Tonnage:	50	50
Cruise Speed:	4	
Flank Speed:	6	
Engine:	200	17
Type:	ICE	
Control:	2.5	
Internal Structure:	5	
Turret:	.7	
Armor:	136	8.5
	Location	Points
	Front:	30
	R/L Side:	28
	Back:	20
	Turret:	30
Weapons and Ammo:		
Type:	Facing:	
Flamer	Front	.5
Flamer	Back	.5
Flamer Ammo(20)	Body	1
MG	Front	.5
MG	Front	.5
MG	Back	.5
MG	Back	.5

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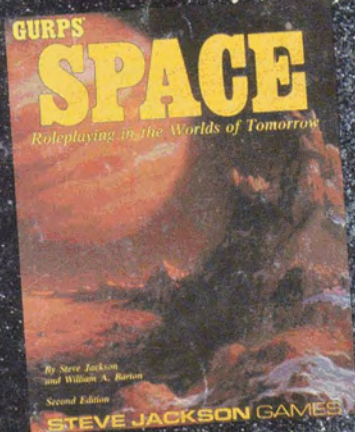
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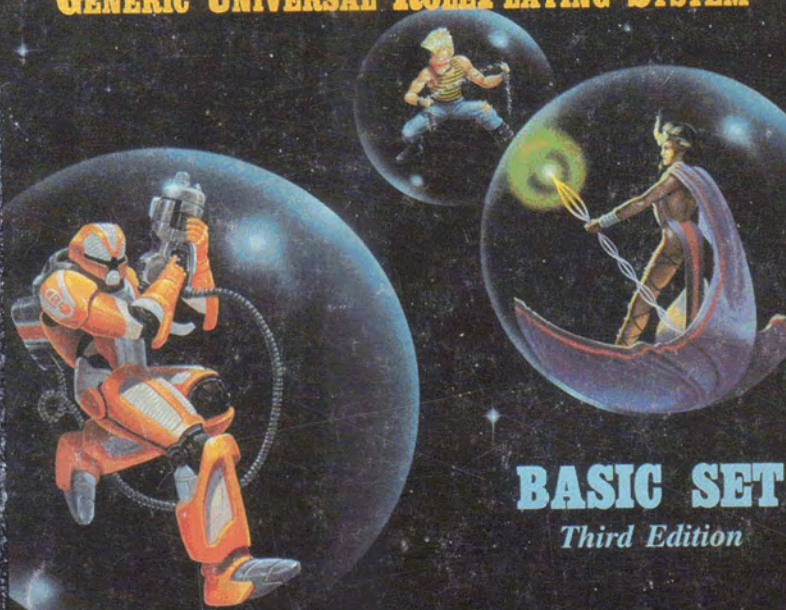
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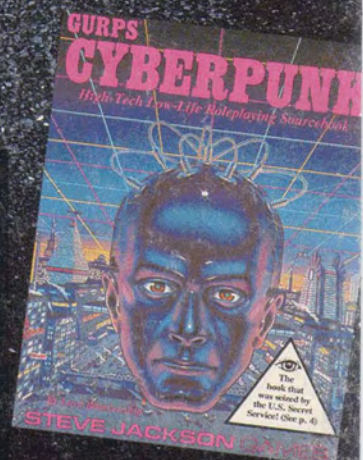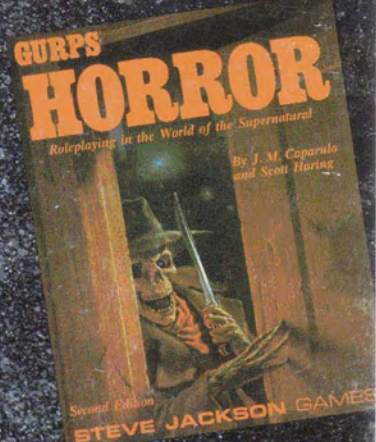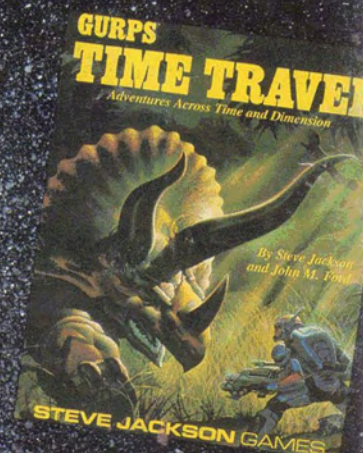
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STEVE JACKSON GAMES

MG	R. Side	.5
MG	R. Side	.5
MG	L. Side	.5
MG	L. Side	.5
MG Ammo(200)	Body	1
SRM 6	Turret	3
LRM 5	Turret	2
LRM 5	Turret	2
SRM Ammo(15)	Body	1
LRM Ammo(24)	Body	1

Overview: As the Echidnas began to become less readily available due to losses and cannibalization, the states of the Inner Sphere began to produce ICE infantry fighting vehicles. A common type is the Porcupine. This IFV is produced by all the successor states and is used primarily in urban environments. The Porcupine has also seen action against the Clan BattleArmor forces.

Capabilities: Armed with an array of eight machineguns, two flamers, two LRM 5s and an SRM 6, the Porcupine is well equipped to handle infantry as well as small vehicles. Its 8.5 tons of armor enable it to stay in combat for extended periods of time and make it nearly immune to all but massed infantry attacks. Like their smaller cousin, Porcupines fight in groups with interlocking fields of fire. Against BattleArmor units, Porcupine commanders have found the most effective tactic is to surround the unit with four Porcupines. This generally exposes the unit to eight machineguns and four SRM 6s, which with skillful gunnery and some luck can decimate the unit. Porcupines have a much easier time against conventional infantry.

Variants: Since this is a mass-produced vehicle, variants are common. Most changes involve alterations in the weapon mix. For example, a common variant replaces the LRM 5s with an SRM 6 and two machineguns.

Tapir

Type: Tapir		Tons
Movement Type: Tracked		
Tonnage:	30	30
Cruise Speed:	4	
Flank Speed:	6	
Engine:	120GM	6
Type:	Fusion	
Control:	1.5	
Heat Sinks:	10	
Internal Structure:	3	
Turret:	.5	
Armor:	80	5
	Location	Points
	Front:	16
	R/L Side:	16
	Back:	16
	Turret:	16
Weapons and Ammo:		
Type	Facing	
MG	Front	.5
MG	Right Side	.5
MG	Left Side	.5
Medium Laser	Turret	1
Medium Laser	Turret	1
Small Laser	Turret	.5
Small Laser	Turret	.5
Small Laser	Turret	.5
Small Laser	Turret	.5
MG Ammo(100)	Body	.5
Infantry Compartment	Body	8

Overview: The designers of the Echidna were far-sighted enough to realize that infantry was an effective weapon and could be made more effective by making the infantry more mobile. The Tapir was intended to provide that extra mobility. The Tapir is constructed out of a modified Echidna hull, and both vehicles employ the same turret configuration. The vehicles are intended to operate together.

Capabilities: The Tapir is designed to carry two platoons of jump infantry into battle and to support them against other infantry and light vehicles during operations. To this end, the Tapir has eight tons committed to an infantry compartment. The hull machineguns are designed to be removed easily and replaced with additional space for infantry, on the battlefield if necessary (in the Star League era, machines were cheap and people were valuable—not so today).

Variants: The most common variant involves removing two or more machineguns to provide room for additional infantry. Removing two machineguns enables three foot infantry platoons to be carried. Many modern-era Tapirs have been stripped of their fusion engines. Generally, the turret is removed or replaced with lighter weapons to make room for the heavier engine.

Jump Troop Transport/ Infantry Transport

Type: Jump Troop Transport/Infantry Transport		
Movement Type: VTOL		
Tonnage:	30	Tons
Cruise Speed:	9	
Flank Speed:	14	
Engine:	9	
Type:	ICE	
Control:	1.5	
Internal Structure:	3	
Rotors:	3	
Jump Transport:		
Armor:	24	1.5
	Location	Points
	Front:	6
	R/L Side:	6
	Back:	4
	Rotors:	2
Weapons and Ammo		
Type	Facing	
SRM 2	Front	1
SRM Ammo(50)	Body	1
MG	Front	.5
MG	Right	.5
MG	Left	.5
MG Ammo(100)	Body	.5
Infantry	Body	8
Infantry Transport:		
Armor:	40	2.5
	Location	Points
	Front:	10
	R/L Side:	10
	Back:	10
	Rotor:	2
Weapons and Ammo		
Type	Facing	
SRM 4	Front	2
SRM Ammo(25)	Body	1
MG	Front	.5
MG	Right	.5
MG	Left	.5
MG Ammo(100)	Body	.5

Overview: The need for rapid transport of infantry resulted in the production of VTOLs designed specifically for such work. The two most common types are the jump troop transport and the standard transport. The jump troop transport is less well armored and armed relative to the standard infantry transport. This is due to a variety of factors. First, the bulky equipment of the jump troops requires a larger compartment. Second, the jump troop transport can debark its troops without landing. Not so for the standard transport which must land. As such, the standard transport must have heavier armor.

Capabilities: The VTOL transports are lightly armed and armored and are ill-equipped to engage in anything except their primary task of delivering infantry to the battlefield. They can be used as cargo transports effectively, but are of limited use as combat units.

Variants: Some variants are versions that have been stripped of all weapons in order to carry more troops. Others are gunship conversions which replace the troop compartments with weapons.

Mule

Type: Mule		Tons
Movement Type:	Wheeled	
Tonnage:	20	
Cruise Speed:	6	
Flank Speed:	9	
Engine:	6	
Type:	ICE	
Control:	1	
Internal Structure:	2	
Armor:	64	4
	Location	Points
	Front:	20
	R/L Side:	16
	Back:	12

Weapons and Ammo:		
Type	Facing	
MG	Front	.5
MG	Right	.5
MG	Left	.5
MG Ammo(100)	Body	.5
Cargo	Body	5

Overview: This vehicle is representative of the generic field weapon towing vehicle. They also serve as light cargo vehicles in dangerous areas.

Capabilities: The main asset of the Mule is its powerful engine. This enables it to haul heavy cargoes at reasonable speeds, as well as enabling it to outrun slower opponents. This is essential for a Mule's survival, since its light armament and armor will not sustain it long on the battlefield.

Variants: Some Mules are subject to battlefield conversions to APCs, and some have weapons installed in the cargo section. There are no actual standard variants of the Mule.

Medusa

Type: Medusa		Tons
Movement Type: Wheeled		
Tonnage:	20	20
Cruise Speed:	6	
Flank Speed:	9	
Engine:	6	
Type:	ICE	
Control:	1	
Internal Structure:	2	
Armor:	80	5
	Location	Points
	Front:	22
	R/L Side:	20
	Back:	18
Weapons and Ammo:		
Type	Facing	
Remote System	Body	1
Remote System	Body	1
MG	Front	.5
MG	Right	.5
MG	Left	.5
MG Ammo(100)	Body	.5
Cargo	Body	2

Overview: The Medusa is a generic remote field weapon control vehicle. It was developed to provide a mobile command center for remote weapon systems.

Capabilities: Though fast and somewhat well armored, the Medusa is not intended to engage other units in combat, at least directly. Its main armament is the eight remote weapon systems that it can control.

Typically, Mules carry remote systems and emplace them on the potential battlefield. The Medusas remain hidden, observing the situation via the remote systems. Medusas generally remain motionless to avoid detection, but can operate their remote systems even at top speed (which is the normal speed for a Medusa that has been spotted). Ω

For three related scenarios depicting attacks by various forces on the city of Walker, see "Ant Hill" by Michael C. LaBossiere in **Challenge 71.**

For optional field weapons and infantry type additions to FASA's BattleTech Compendium, *see "Infantry and Field Weapons" by Michael C. LaBossiere in* **Challenge 69.**

Signal GK and the Virus

By "Bwana" Dave Nilsen

t has come to our attention that there is some confusion among **Traveller** players about the relationship between the **Signal GK** adventure and the history of the Virus as presented in recent issues of **Challenge, Survival Margin**, and **Traveller: The New Era**. One point of confusion is a misapprehension among long-time players that when they played the **Signal GK** adventure in their campaign they didn't turn any chips over to the Imperial Navy, so the Virus could not have developed in their campaign, because no one ever found out about the chips. The other point is the belief that there is not enough time between the events of Signal GK (1110) and the beginning of the Final War (1116) for the chips to be developed into any form of circuit that has been distributed throughout the Imperium. The good news is that neither of these is a problem, and I'm here to tell you why. Frank keeps telling me that I'm too subtle (which is not something that I'm often accused of), so I'll be careful to be clear.

Signal GK was written by Marc Miller and J. Andrew Keith and published in 1985 for the original **Traveller** game. It was set in the first half of 1110, and was the story of the first civilian contact with the intelligent chips of Cymbeline. Briefly, the key points are as follows: Dr. Rushorin, a scientist and citizen of the Solomani Confederation, wishes to defect to the Imperium. The PCs are hired by Imperial Army Intelligence (IAI) to assist Rushorin. After Rushorin's successful defection, IAI allows Rushorin, with the PCs as protection, to go to Cymbeline to test one of his pet theories. Here Rushorin and the PCs discover the intelligent chips of Cymbeline, and make friends with one which they presumably take with them. While this is going on, Rushorin is being pursued by Solomani Security, who seek to capture or kill him, rather than allow him to defect. SolSec agents attack Rushorin and the PC group first on Cymbeline, then again and again as they make their way to Terra with the good doctor. At the end of the adventure, the PCs collect their money and are on their way, presumably retaining Chip 10987 as a companion. But since PCs are a notoriously secretive and paranoid lot, it is a safe bet that they never tell anyone about the chips.

It's a fun adventure, and all of it has nothing to do with the development of the Virus, but it does illustrate a point that has a lot to do with the release of the Virus.

Here's the deal. I will wait while everyone gets out their copies of **Survival Margin** (or **Challenge** 64) and turns to page 69 (page 45 in **Challenge** 64). There you will see that the intelligent chips of Cymbeline were discovered in 1067. Well geez, discovered by who? I mean, they were unknown in **Signal GK** when Rushorin and the PCs went there, weren't they? Yes they were, because the 1067 discovery was made under the aegis of the Imperial Naval Intelligence artificial intelligence project, and was highly classified. Following their discovery in 1067, the chips were studied and bred and tinkered with until scientists achieved the breakthrough that produced the SDG-313F strain in 1086—24 years before **Signal GK**.

With the creation of this new chip strain, the Imperial Navy began lobbying for a new standardized transponder system that would be required aboard all vessels that travelled through Imperial space. The result was the 12th Standard Data Systems Law of 1088, on page 70 of **Survival Margin** (45 in **Challenge** 64), which mandated their use. Although the anti-tamper features incorporated into the transponder boxes themselves were intended to prevent the subversion of the system, it was decided that keeping the nature of the system secret would further prevent any successful tampering. So the Deyo circuit transponders entered service as simple black boxes, whose function did not need to be understood in order for them to work.

(Do not take the issue of failsafe transponders lightly. In a universe where information travels at the speed of jump, enemy fleets and pirates and stolen starships and fraudulent data travels just as fast as news of invasion, and warnings that old transponder codes had been compromised, stolen, or counterfeited. Law enforcement agencies and navies *hate* to be behind the power curve like that, and had long dreamed of a transponder that was intrinsically *instantaneously* verifiable, rather than dependent upon some new updated codes that might be hours or days or *weeks* behind a suspicious vessel. The SDG-313F represented such an instantaneous, real-time solution. If the SDG or Deyo circuit boxes were tampered with in any way, they ceased to function, and were therefore "safe," i.e., could not give a fraudulent message to another transponder.)

Over time, however, the truth will out, and many people had suspicions about the true nature of the ubiquitous SDG-series transponders. Part of Rushorin's

curiosity about the possibility of intelligent silicon chips must have been based on such rumors. Nonetheless, INI continued to keep a lid on the chips as long as possible. What's the point in being an intelligence agency if you can't keep a few secrets?

So why didn't they just interdict Cymbeline so no one could ever find out about them? Cymbeline was a mere three parsecs from the Solomani border, a border which was notoriously porous (witness the shenanigans recounted in **Signal GK**). To interdict Cymbeline would have been tantamount to putting up a big neon sign: "VERY IMPORTANT SECRETS CONTAINED HERE!!! COME TRY TO STEAL THEM!!!" Therefore, INI made the decision that, although the chips would eventually become public knowledge, the best way to keep them secret was to not call attention to Cymbeline. After all, that had already kept them a secret for centuries. Of course, they could have simply nuked Cymbeline and destroyed the wild population of chips so that no one could discover them, but not even INI was that cynical during the pre-war period.

Meanwhile, research continued on the chips, with the goal of finding a way to use the chips that already were distributed in transponders throughout the Imperium and its neighbors (in non-Imperial vessels that must routinely pass in and out of the Imperium) to incapacitate potential invaders or law-breakers—see **Survival Margin** pages 71 and 74 (page 47 in **Challenge** 64 and pages 66-67 in **Challenge** 69). It was only after this operation had been under way for some time that Dr. Rushorin and company visited Cymbeline in **Signal GK**.

Once Rushorin had made his discovery, he naturally wished to publish his findings in his new capacity as a member of the Imperial scientific community. But it wasn't that easy. Not only was he himself a political pawn between the hostile Imperial and Solomani governments, he had also fallen into a jurisdictional dispute between the Imperial Navy and Imperial Army intelligence arms. INI, who had jurisdiction of Cymbeline, insisted that his findings be suppressed. On the other hand, IAI, who wanted to use his knowledge to further their operations in the Arcturus and Kukulkan subsectors, had to keep him happy to ensure his cooperation. And SolSec, still attempting to track down and assassinate Rushorin, had to be put off the scent of the importance of the Cymbeline chips. In the end, a compromise was reached in which Rushorin was allowed to publish his findings, but with deliberate omissions and inaccuracies incorporated into the paper. These inaccuracies included details of their reproduction and predation, as well as the way they interacted with other electronic and computerized systems. Most telling of these modifications to the paper was the assessment of the chips' intelligence as being animal-level at best, an assertion that was not refuted until after the Solomani had captured the world during the Final War.

When truth is a casualty, it is the public that suffers the consequences. The Virus was developed in the absence of public awareness and debate over the proper handling of the intelligent chips. Was their use in transponder boxes tantamount to slavery, and the breeding programs the moral equivalent of eugenics and vivisection? Even within the Imperial Navy, the INI was concerned enough of the results of public knowledge of the chips' details that it even concealed their true nature during routine internal reviews—see **Survival Margin**, page 76 (**Challenge** 69, page 68). A timely, full, and complete report on the chips following their 1110 discovery would have attracted such wide attention and interest that their misuse in a weapons program might have been greatly hindered.

But given that the discovery was on the border between two rival empires, it was inevitable that secrecy would win out. SolSec's determined pursuit of Rushorin ensured that he could not be allowed to simply live a private life and publish freely. With the tremendous already existing investment in the Deyo transponder systems, plus the plans to develop further capabilities, INI and the Imperial Navy could not allow the Solomani to learn of the tremendous resource right on their own doorstep. For its part, IAI, in the person of Joachim Sanchex, completely mishandled the Rushorin defection. By allowing Rushorin to go to Cymbeline before being properly debriefed and "scrubbed" of SolSec pursuit, he opened the possibility that SolSec, in following Rushorin to Cymbeline, would become aware of whatever discoveries Rushorin made there. Once SolSec was involved in the affair, there was no way that the discovery could have entered the public domain; a security lid was inescapable. By unwittingly conspiring to ensure that the chips' true nature remained secret, SolSec and IAI were thus minor accessories to the continued unexamined development of the Virus, as noted in **Survival Margin**, page 72 (**Challenge** 69, page 64).

To be fair, even without the Solomani connection, INI would have fought to keep the discovery secret. Indeed, had Sanchex been under INI command, the chain of events just discussed could never have happened. But since IAI was independent of INI, Sanchex's decision to let Rushorin go to Cymbeline, still pursued by SolSec agents, could not be stopped in time. Now Rushorin, a major intelligence asset, could withhold further cooperation unless he was allowed to publish.

For INI, this was a major defeat. Had INI been in complete control of the Rushorin affair, it could have probably kept Rushorin quiet by offering him an important post in their artificial intelligence research program, and there would have been no paper at all. For INI, it was another perfect example of why there should only be one intelligence agency, as multiple competing agencies only multiply the chances for mistakes to be made (mentioned in **Survival Margin**, page 76, or **Challenge** 69, page 68). On the other hand, opponents of over-centralized power use the same sort of example to prove that competing agencies are advantageous: If left unchecked, agencies like INI could

have established complete control over all intelligence data, and been answerable to no one but themselves. Events like these were indelibly etched in the minds of the participants, and set the stage for back-room wars within each faction among the competing intelligence branches for access to, and control over, the factional leaders (**Survival Margin**, pages 24, 29, 32, 36, 40, 43, 47, 51, 55, 82, or TNS articles in **Challenges** 51, 53, 55, 57, 58, 63, 64, etc.).

There remains a final possibility, that the players who played **Signal GK** managed to get Rushorin killed so that he was never able to publish his findings, but this is unlikely; I would estimate that the vast majority of published adventures are played out with results broadly similar to the published plotline. However, even if this is not the case, it is no problem at all. Since his expurgated paper was sufficiently vague and inaccurate as to prevent any real public awareness or debate on the significance of the chips, the lack of such a paper would make no difference. By 1126, when the chips were visited by Joshua Dahvin, eliciting the ire of the Solomani hard-liners, they would easily have been discovered by the Solomani

forces that overran the area in 1120 (**Survival Margin**, page 50, **Challenge** 62, page 53).

So, what of PC groups that played **Signal GK** and still have Chip 10987 as a travelling companion? 10987 may be surprised, or even intrigued to find that it is related to the Virus. It may feel that it has a unique capacity to communicate with Virus-infected systems, and wish to do so. After all, chances for it to communicate with its own kind have probably been pretty rare. Could 10987 interact usefully with a Virus, perhaps convince it to work with the PCs? Or would it just get itself and the PCs' ship infected or destroyed? Perhaps it would try to merge with a Virus, and assert its sanity over the insane Virus personality, thereby rehabilitating the Virus into a useful being.

And what of the nuking of Cymbeline in 1127? 10987 would likely be outraged at this genocide visited on the other members of its race and wish justice, or revenge. Or perhaps it wants to return to Cymbeline to search for survivors. Could it or the PCs figure out who was responsible? And there's always the chance that some vampire ships have the same idea in mind...

Oh yeah, while I'm here, I would like to declare the first ever

Darlin' Dave's Renegade Challenge Contest (DDRCC)

The first person to correctly answer the following question will get a free copy of the deluxe boxed edition of **Traveller: The New Era**, completely undamaged by my autograph or anything cheesy like that.

The question is this:

(Ahem...) The brontosaurus is—excuse me.

The question is this:

Who is the lady in black on the cover of **Traveller: The New Era**?

Traveller authors (you know who you are) with whom I have already discussed the answer are not eligible for the prize. If more than one correct answer arrives on the same day, the winner will be chosen at random. Please mail your answers to:

Darlin' Dave's Renegade Challenge Contest (DDRCC)
GDW
P.O. Box 1646
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The winner will be announced in the first issue of **Challenge** after the blessed event, and will be notified by the arrival of **Deluxe TNE** on his or her doorstep. Beware of future DDRCCs when you least expect them.

In closing, let me just say this: The Virus is your friend.

(Or at least you'd better hope it is.)

Thank you, and good night.

Dream Park

The Roleplaying Game
R. Talsorian Games. $18.00.
Written by Mike Pondsmith.
128-page softbound book with four pages of cardboard character and power card inserts.
Published in 1992.
Review by Craig Sheeley.

When *Dream Park* was published in the early '80s, it was a sort of literary vindication of roleplaying games. The hobby of gaming had grown to such significance that nongamers could read about it and be familiar with the concept. And now it reappears as a roleplaying game about playing roleplaying games! An elegant, if ironic, development.

The book is split into several parts. First, the background of the park is explained for those gamers who haven't read the book (and for those who have, there is an excellent overview illustration that serves as a crude map). The holographic technology of the game is explained, right down to the latest developments from the latest book. Gently, with comic-book illustration, the reader is introduced to the concept of gaming in the park.

Next is a "jump-start" section, explaining the basic rules very simply and presenting several "beginner" scenarios so that the players can jump right in and get a feel for the system. Since the system is a modified D6 version of R. Talsorian's *Interlock* system, anyone can comprehend it almost immediately.

After that, things get a bit complicated. The central feature of *Dream Park* is that the game characters in it are actually other characters playing the game. This means that the game can even be combined with other games based in a technological setting. Is your character in *Cyberpunk* feeling a little run-down, in need of a rest? Then take off to Dream Park for a weekend (if you can afford it) and find relaxation in some video adventure, where the world around you may not be real, but sure feels like it is!

A *Dream Park* character is a small group of statistics and a collection of Game Points. These Game Points are used to customize a character for specific games, since the location, genre and reality of each game are usually different. Game Points can buy skills and equipment, which are turned back in at the end of the game to be used at the next game. Game Points, like experience points in other games, trace the development and relative power of the gamer in *Dream Park*. After all, that's what the serious gamers are there for.

Game Points can be lost as well as gained. If you lose equipment, you lose the points it cost. If you get killed during a game, you lose half your Game Point total.

The most compelling feature of *Dream Park* is that the games can range to any realm of the fantastic. The only constraints are the physical ones on the wizards of Dream Park (they can't effectively simulate an adventure that takes place in a 0G environment, for example), and the requirement that the players be able to figure out the background reality—being marooned in a place where you have no idea of the rules is a gamer's nightmare and is grounds for crying foul to the IGFS, the gamers' association that arbitrates the games and rankings.

Dream Park is an attractive, very glossy product. It's easy to play the basic game, and the fundamental concepts are swiftly grasped. The advanced character generation is a bit complex, but that's only if you're playing a magic user, cleric, psionic or superhero (they have a lot of specialized skills to buy). Personally, I don't like the concept of "character classes," but they existed in the first *Dream Park* book, and here they serve only as skill limits—you can buy any skill, but it costs a lot more if it's specialized to a different character class.

I felt sorry for the designer of this game. If this game had been made some years earlier, he could have done it very easily, based solely on the first book. However, this was not the case; he had to take the other two books in the *Dream Park* series into account. This meant attempting to reconcile discrepancies and changes between the books—fiction authors would do well to take a hint from games and establish guidelines to prevent such literary *non sequiturs*.

For instance, one or both of the *Dream Park* authors fell in love with the idea of "virtual reality" glasses of the sort used in gunfight games in California today. Despite the fact that this form of accessory fit into the basic *Dream Park* premise as well as lips on a chicken, the glasses were grafted into the storyline of the latest book, and Mike Pondsmith had to account for them in the game.

These same discrepancies between books also account for the magic system in this game, which bears absolutely no resemblance to the simple and effective one in the first novel. Gamers picking up *Dream Park* and expecting things to work the way they did in the first (and best) novel are in for a sorry surprise. A pity.

Dream Park is a good concept, and well-executed. Gamers desiring different game realities, new challenges and little chance of permanent character death will love it. I look forward to the adventures.
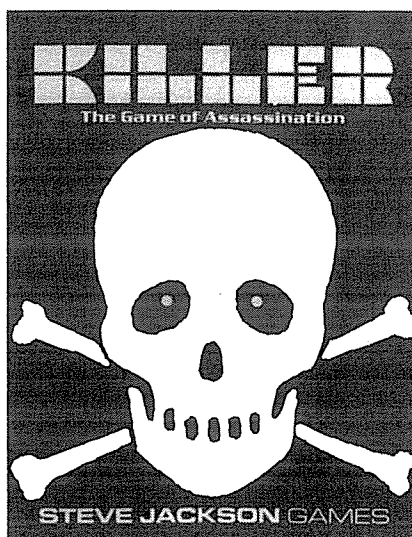
Killer

The Game of Assassination
Steve Jackson Games, Inc. $12.95.
Written by Steve Jackson.
64-page book with rules on how to play *Killer*.
Third edition published in 1992.
Review by Craig Sheeley.

"Bang, you're dead! Gotta fall down!" "Am not!" "Are too!" "Am not!" "Are too!"

Remember those arguments from your childhood? And remember the light-hearted fun you used to have running around in your favorite playgrounds (your yard, your neighbor's yards, etc.), plastic gun clutched tightly in hand, waiting to catch sight of one of the other players

and shoot him down? (The really cool players had exaggerated death scenes.) *Killer* is about that sort of enjoyment, although it has rules (the young seem to get along without rules—the "adults" are the ones who insist on them).

For the benefit of those still living in caves on distant Pacific islands, *Killer* is a game of kill-your-buddy. In it, the contestants are assigned victims from among each other, so that each contestant is a victim as well as a hunter. Then the players hunt each other; when a player successfully "kills" his prey, he is assigned another target from among the remaining players. This goes on until only one is left.

This book is full of variations on this basic theme. It includes an overview of acceptable weapons and tactics, with safety in mind, describes various bombs and similar gags, gives capsule outlines of game styles (team play, the "vampire" game, the Borgias game, Chicago 1920s, etc.), and it even has a scholarly afterword, examining some of the folklore of the game.

Killer has been out of print for some time, and it's good to see it back in print. The game has always been popular, and Steve Jackson's rules are a good benchmark for how to have a safe and relatively trouble-free game. I particularly appreciate the calm, commonsense advice, the emphasis on *Killer* as a game of thoughtful, sneaky assassi-

nation (instead of a bunch of adults regressing to obnoxious pseudo-childhood; sure, that's fun, but it also disturbs the daylights out of those around you), and the section on *Killer* at conventions.

If you play referee *Killer* or one of its variants, you might think about picking this book up and adding it to your library.
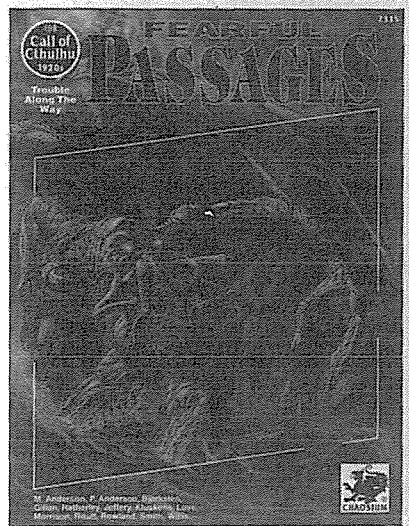
Fearful Passages

Chaosium Inc. $18.95.
128-page softbound scenario supplement for *Call of Cthulhu*.
Published in 1992.
Review by Craig Sheeley.

For a time in the early part of this century, traveling the trip was more important than the destination. Surface travel was as luxurious as it could be, and air travel was really in its infancy, except for dirigible transport—and the Germans made it luxurious, too (remember the dirigible scenes from *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*?).

This set of unconnected scenarios revolves around the ideas of making investigators' trips interesting, heh, heh. That is to say, terrifying and possibly life-threatening. All the scenarios revolve around modes of transport, ranging from the mundane to the exotic. They're broken up into three sections:

The first section deals with the normal, everyday transports—planes, trains and automobiles. This first section is easy to place into the middle of an adventure; the investigators need to go somewhere and get into the car/train/plane, and presto! They're in the middle of a scenario.

The second section places the investigators in airship, diving suits and English canal boats. Working the scenarios into the proceedings is somewhat more difficult, since all three scenarios are expeditions of one sort or another.

The last three adventures are quite exotic, involving armored cars, elephants and arctic sledges. These will require special attention to work into the flow of a campaign.

The last two pages of the book will be of interest to all keepers, since they contain a set of rules for abstract vehicle chase sequences.

On the whole, the adventures are easy to run, fairly straightforward (to the keeper, that is—the players may not have the foggiest about what's going on), and short—one nighters. This is a very welcome development, since short scenarios can make for a change of pace and sharpen the players' interest (they're also good for misdirection, since the players may think that the incidental scenario is part of a larger plan!).

I was a trifle disappointed in the time setting. Every last adventure is set in the 1920s. I realize that this is the primary setting of *Call of Cthulhu*, but I would like to have seen some later setting put in, perhaps something post-Black Friday for the Indiana Jones fanciers among us? After all, as the introduction says, the Golden Age of Travel was from 1880-1939. Some of the adventurers are useful for Cthulhu 1890s, particularly the adventures with the train (very 19th century), the elephants and the canal boats (very British), and the arctic sledges. The train adventure requires some historical knowledge and reworking to fit the time period; some research on the Sepoy rebellion would be handy.

In all, this is a fairly good book. Very useful to the keepers, particularly the vehicle chase rules. Ω

Challenge 70

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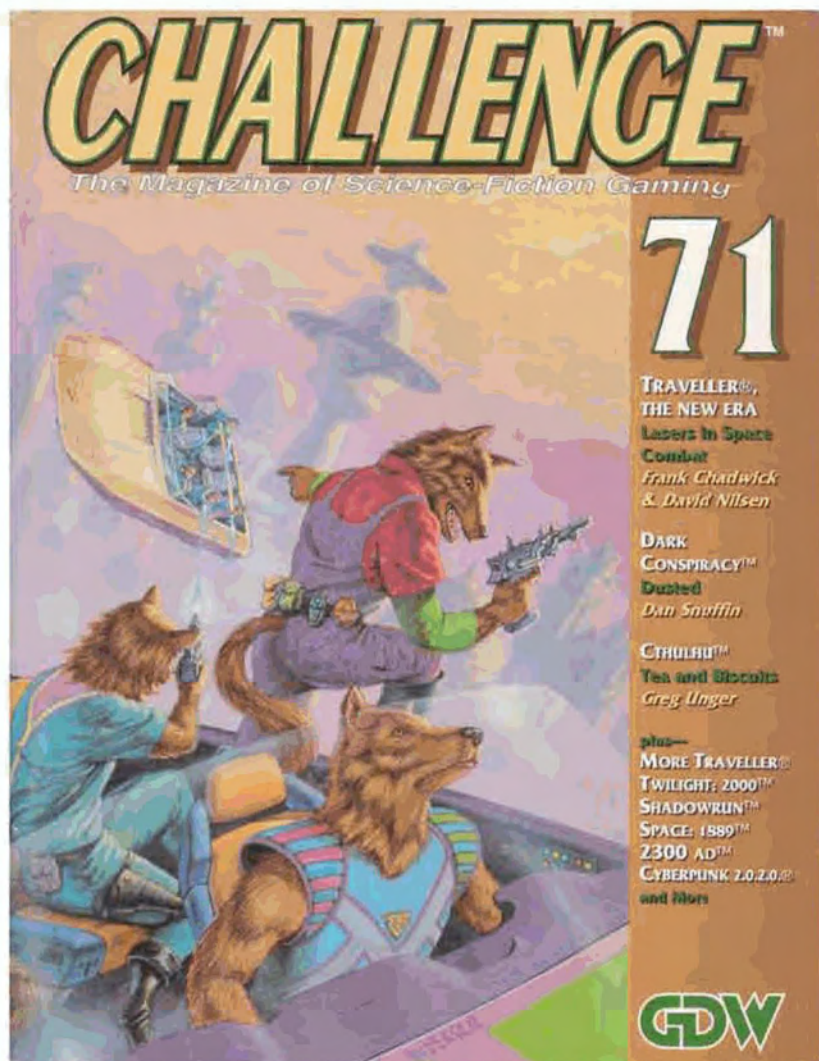
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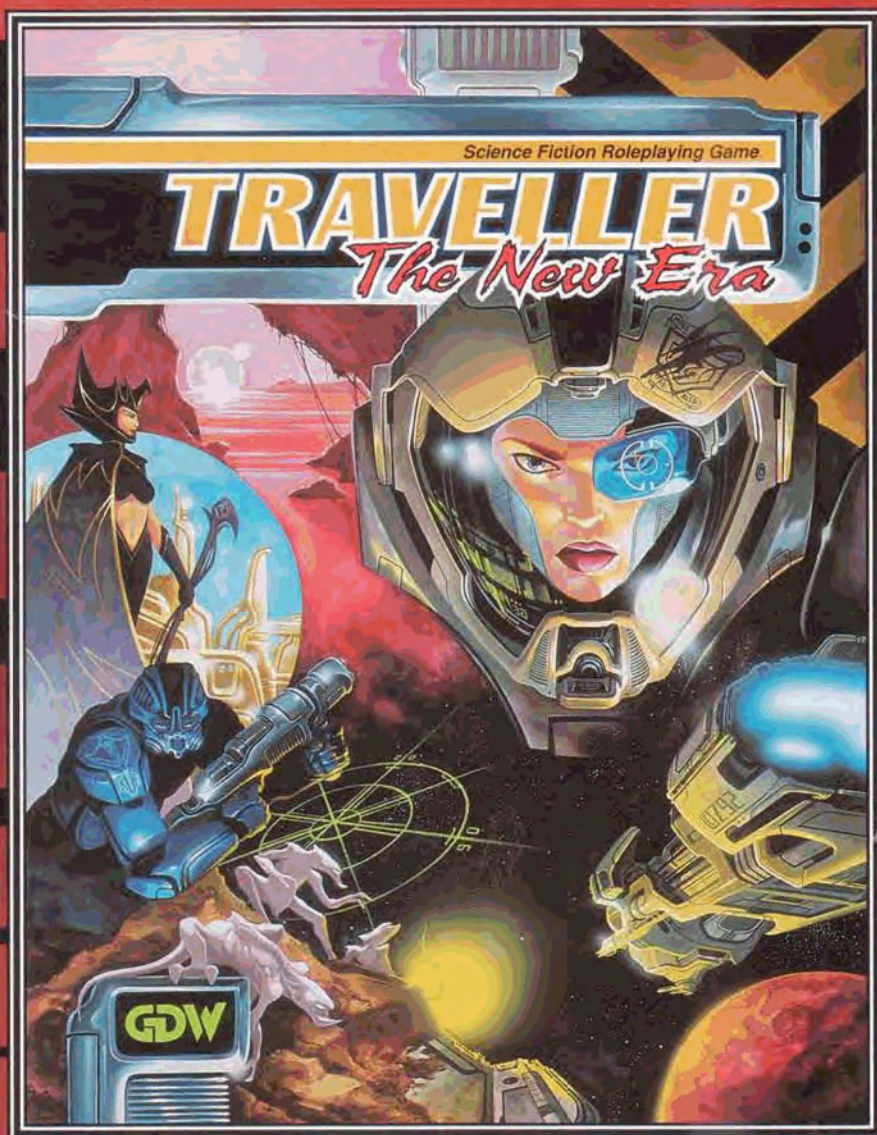*Dream Park GM Pack* from R. Talsorian Games.
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