

Palladium Books® Presents:

THE

RIFTER®

Your Guide to the Megaverse®

April 2001 Issue

Heroes Unlimited™

Ninjas & Superspies™ Adventure

Rifts® Robots

Rifts® Goodcourt Fadetown

Nightbane® Short Story

Palladium Fantasy® adventure and monsters

Final Chapter of the Lone Star™ comic strip

Fiction, news and more

Breaux

Warning!

Violence and the Supernatural

The fictional worlds of Palladium Books® are violent, deadly and filled with supernatural monsters. Other-dimensional beings, often referred to as “demons,” torment, stalk and prey on humans. Other alien life forms, monsters, gods and demigods, as well as magic, insanity, and war are all elements in these books.

Some parents may find the violence, magic and supernatural elements of the games inappropriate for young readers/players. We suggest parental discretion.

Please note that none of us at Palladium Books® condone or encourage the occult, the practice of magic, the use of drugs, or violence.



The Rifter® Number 14

Your guide to the Palladium Megaverse®!

First Printing — April, 2001

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Palladium Books® Presents:

THE RIFTER® #14

BRANDT -97

Sourcebook and guide to the Palladium Megaverse®

Coordinator & Editor in Chief: **Wayne Smith**

Supervising Coordinator & Typesetting: **Maryann Siembieda**

Contributing Writers:

Wayne Breaux Jr.
James M.G. Cannon
Jeremy Clements
Erik Growen
Shawn Merrow
Anthony Miron
Sonny Rice
Kevin Siembieda
Rodney Stott
Eric Swanson

Proofreader: **Julius Rosenstein**

Cover Illustration: **Wayne Breaux Jr.**

Interior Artists:

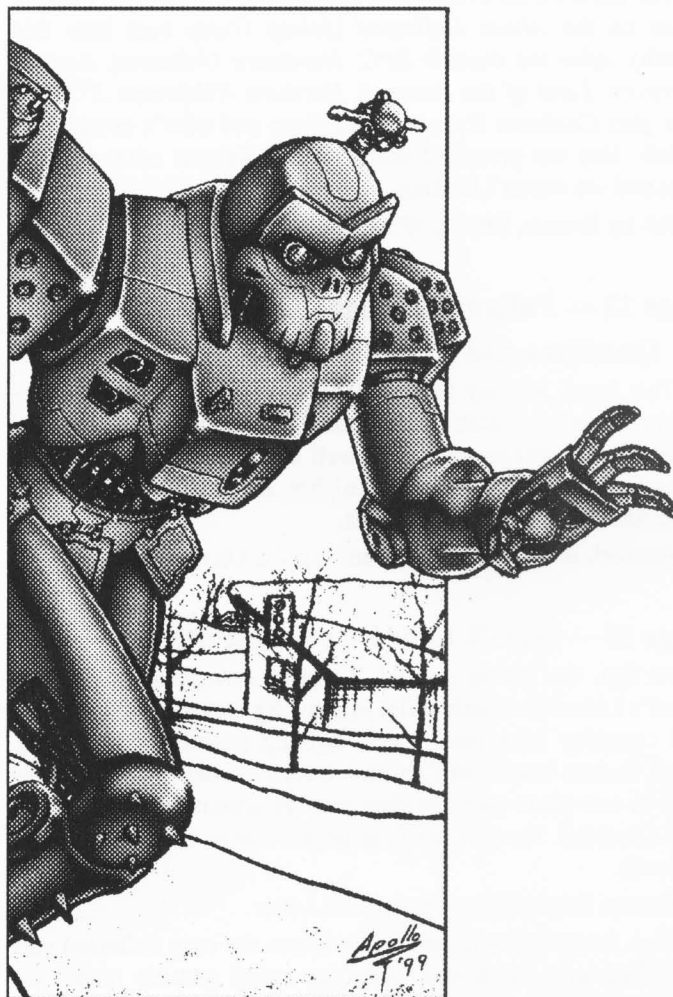
Apollo Okamura
Wayne Breaux Jr.
Freddie Williams II
Michael Wilson
and other Palladium Madmen

Rifts® Comic Strip: **Ramon Perez**

Cover Logo Design: **Steve Edwards**

Credits Page Logo: **Niklas Brandt**

Keylining: **Kevin Siembieda**



Based on the RPG rules, characters,
concepts and Megaverse® created by **Kevin Siembieda**.

Special Thanks to all our contributors, writers and artists. Our apologies to anybody who got accidentally left out or their name misspelled.

Contents — The Rifter #14 — April, 2001

Page 6 — From the Desk

of Kevin Siembieda

The boss man talks about what's coming from Palladium in the next few months, and his plans for the future.

Page 7 — Palladium News

Erick Wujcik is back and has just finished the *After the Bomb® RPG* (read all about it on page 9), convention update, and other news.

Art by Apollo Okamura..

Page 8 — Coming Attractions

The latest on the Precedence Collectable Card Game, the low down on the *Aliens Unlimited Galaxy Guide* (out later this month), *After the Bomb® RPG*, *Hardware Unlimited*, *Eastern Territory*, *Land of the Damned*, *Northern Wilderness 2nd Edition*, plus *Coalition Wars 6: Final Siege* and what's coming for *Rifts®*. Hey we promised more support for our other product lines and we weren't kidding.

Art by Breaux, Burles, Wilson & Perez.

Page 12 — Palladium Megaverse®

Questions and Answers

This issue, Rodney Stott and Shawn Merrow address questions concerning "skills" particularly for *Heroes Unlimited* and its skills and skill programs, as well as O.C.C., R.C.C., experience, hover crafts, and Cyber-Knights. All really helpful material endorsed by Kevin Siembieda.

Artwork is by Mike Wilson and Apollo Okamura.

Page 15 — Rifts® Lone Star Comic Strip

At last, the action packed, 12 page *conclusion* to Ramon Perez's Lone Star comic strip. Johnny, Shakes, Cueball, Moses, and company have their hands fighting genetic horrors, Dog Boys, mutant bears and Coalition troops as they struggle to escape in one piece with the data they've uncovered at the Lone Star Complex. The artwork is as impressive as ever. Well worth the wait.

Ramon Perez: Writer, Artist, and Letter.

Hey, let us know if you'd like to see the strip collected and published as a black and white (or color) graphic novel. Or maybe a combination comic novel and sourcebook with the characters started out after the strip.

Page 27 — Heroes Unlimited™ Second Edition

The Atorian Empire

Wayne Breaux Jr. presents tantalizing insight and source material about the Atorian Empire — a bit of a prelude to his up-coming *Imperial Space Sourcebook* that will follow the re-

lease of the *Aliens Unlimited Galaxy Guide* (on sale the end of April).

Info in this issue includes the structure of the Atorian Empire current state of affairs, and select O.C.C.s common to the Imperial Army. Not to mention Empress De Atoria, power armor.

Artwork by none-other-than Wayne Breaux Jr. himself.

Page 38 — Ninjas & Superspies™

Destiny's Call

An adventure that spans a generation involving an Infernal Demon Overlord. It starts at the end of World War II (1945), continues on into the Indochina War (1954), and may end in Indochina or continue on into the present day.

Includes special skill programs and options, battle field Horror Factor, a variety of weapons, aircraft, and troops, encounter tables, plus a bunch of Hook, Line and Sinker Adventures..

Written by Erik Growen. Illustrated by Freddie Williams II.

Page 57 — Palladium Fantasy

Role-Playing Game®

Beneath the Surface

Sonny Rice gives us a look at life, adventure and combat *under* the Palladium world. Includes new skills, natural dangers, fighting underground, and a host of monsters such as the Heat Worm, Vydoracks, Mataat Carrion People, Sharee Chameleon People, Necro Knights, Dirt Vipers, Murder Fog and others.

Artwork by Mike Wilson.

Page 71 — Rifts®

Goodcourt — Life in a Fadetown

Eric Swanson presents the Fadetown of Goodcourt, along with its most notable features and inhabitants. It is a magical place with Techno-Wizards and High Magi from Dweomer. A handful of new Techno-Wizard items and Adventure ideas round out this article.

Artwork by Apollo Okamura.

Page 87 — Rifts®

Horlock Robots Inc.

Jeremy Clements offers Horlock Robots Inc. one of the Black Market's suppliers of power armor, robotics and knock-off technology. The Zombie Exoskeleton (page 88), Medusa Power Armor (page 89), Harpy Power Armor (page 91) and Fire-Walker Assault Robot (page 93) are among Horlock's latest creations.

Art by Drunken Style Studio

Page 105 — Nightbane®

Asylum

A short story brought to you compliments of Anthony Miron. Don't blame us if you have nightmares after reading this tale of darkness.

Art by Wayne Breaux Jr.

Page 105 – Robotech® Liquidation Sale

After 16 years of mecha adventures, Palladium Books is letting go of its **Robotech®** license (sorry). The good news is buy one book and get another (sometimes TWO) for free! Get 'em while they last (the Zentraedi sourcebook is already sold out). This offer is only good till June 30, 2001, so get those orders in before this famous RPG line is gone forever.

Page — Rifts® Phase World®

Hammer of the Forge

The 14th chapter in James M. G. Cannon's gripping *Phase World™* story.

Artwork by Apollo Okamura.

The theme for issue 14

This issue's theme is *diversity* of adventure, with new material for *Palladium Fantasy®*, *Nightbane®*, *Heroes Unlimited™*, *Ninjas and Superspies™*, as well as *Rifts®*.

Palladium Books plans on more actively supporting all of its game lines, and this issue is part of that venture.

The Cover

The cover to **The Rifter #14** is a painting by Wayne Breaux Jr. It was presented as one of two possible covers for Mr. Breaux' *Aliens Unlimited™ Galaxy Guide*. It depicts a spaceship and sensor drone emerging for a space warp. The cover we chose to use for the actual sourcebook depicts several Raithenor on the prowl.

Optional and Unofficial Rules & Source Material

Please note that most of the material presented in **The Rifter®** is "unofficial" or "optional" rules and source material.

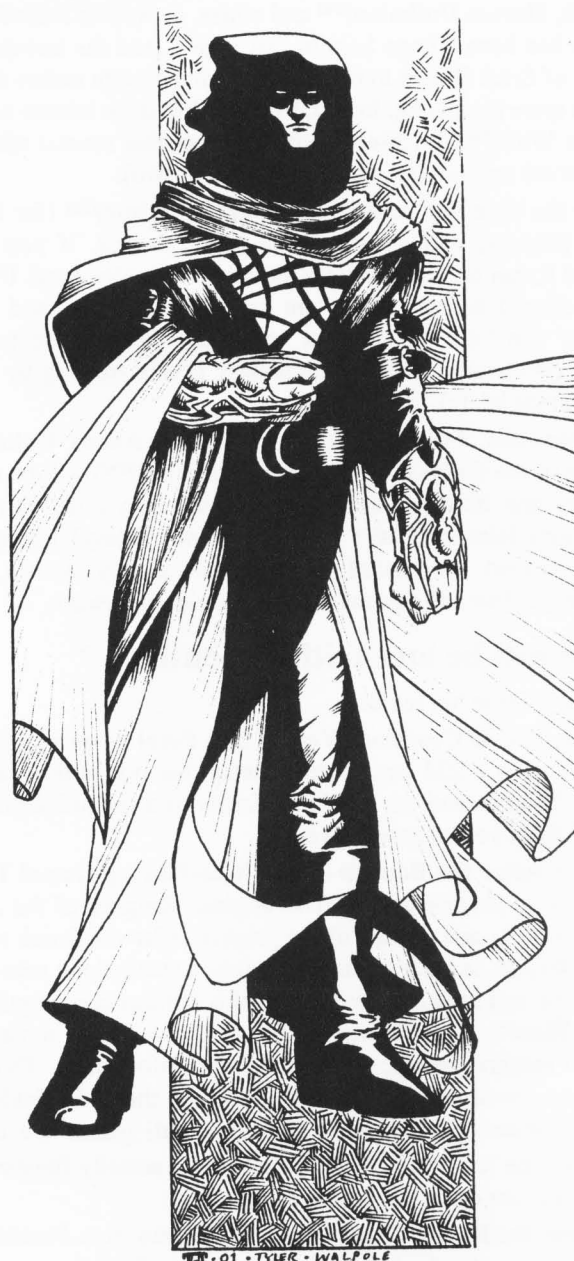
They are alternative ideas, homespun adventures and material mostly created by fellow gamers and fans like you, the reader. Things one can *elect* to include in one's own campaign or simply enjoy reading about. They are not "official" to the main games or world settings.

As for optional tables and adventures, if they sound cool or fun, use them. If they sound funky, too high-powered or inappropriate for your game, modify them or ignore them completely. All the material in **The Rifter®** has been included for two reasons: One, because we thought it was imaginative and fun, and two, we thought it would stimulate your imagination with fun ideas and concepts that the reader can use (if you want to), or which might inspire you to create your own wonders.

Coming Next Issue

The Rifter® #15

- New contributing authors.
- Material for *The Palladium Fantasy RPG®*.
- Material for *Heroes Unlimited™*.
- Material for *Rifts®*.
- The next chapter of the *Hammer of the Forge™*.
- The latest news and developments at Palladium.
- Source material for the entire Palladium Megaverse®.
- New contributors and fun.
- So please join us.



From the Desk of Kevin Siembieda

I'm writing this the day before we leave for **Sim Con** in Rochester, New York. The crazy people who run this small convention seem to like us, and are bringing Maryann and I back as guests (we were there two years ago). We look forward to the event, and I might even run a new adventure based on ideas for the *Wolfen Wars*TM sourcebook. Yes, I keep adding bits and pieces to this long time project. One of the many projects I hope to tackle soon.

As you may recall, last issue I proclaimed I was making it my mission to finally get out a bunch of the books I've talked about for years. I also vowed to support more of the Palladium Books line with new product for **The Palladium Fantasy RPG**®, **Heroes Unlimited**TM and others, as well as **Rifts**®. *Bill Coffin* has been a huge help in that regard, and the unexpected return of *Erick Wujcik* to role-playing game design makes things all the more promising. In fact, I have delayed the release of **Coalition Wars**TM **Six: Final Siege** to insure that several other titles get out on time (give or take a week or two).

By the time you read this, **Eastern Territory**TM (for Palladium Fantasy) will already be on store shelves. If you have missed it, run on out and get it, because it's really good. If your store doesn't have it, make 'em order you a copy – and don't fall for that "it's out of print" malarkey, because we printed plenty (although interest in the fantasy line is growing by leaps and bounds lately).

Meanwhile, by the time you read this, **Aliens Unlimited Guide to the Galaxy**TM (for **Heroes Unlimited**TM) will be at the printers and hitting store shelves around May 15th, with **The Northern Hinterlands**TM (for Palladium Fantasy) hitting the stores around May 20th! Both are completely written, and awaiting a final edit and the arrival of finished artwork.

June will be an exciting month

Why? Three big reasons.

One, **Rifts**® **Coalition Wars**TM **Six: Final Siege** will hit the shelves. It is a 224 page extravaganza that brings the war between Tolkeen and the Coalition States to a definitive conclusion. I think you're gonna love it.

Two, **After the Bomb**® — **the Role-Playing Game!** That's right, "role-playing game." The original designer of the *Ninja Turtle*® *RPG* and creator of the original *After the Bomb* series, *Erick Wujcik*, is back to turn ATB into a stand-alone role-playing game and breathe new life into this famous apocalyptic setting. There's tons of *new* mutant animals, new mutations, animal powers, people, places and world information. Those of you who are sad to see the TMNT *RPG* go, should be tickled by the appearance of this great new (and old) game. We didn't schedule the *RPG* until the manuscript was actually finished, so you can count on this as a firm release date!

Three, the **Rifts**® **Collectable Card Game** from *Precedence Entertainment* (under license from Palladium Books).

What's next?

This is it in rough order of release ...

HU2: Hardware UnlimitedTM (200+ pages; Brent Lein)
Palladium Fantasy: Land of the DamnedTM **One** (200+ pages; Bill Coffin)
Rifts® **Australia 2**
Rifts® **Australia 3**
Palladium Fantasy: Land of the DamnedTM **Two** (200+ pages; Bill Coffin)
Rifts® **Game Master Guide** (300+ pages; Siembieda & Coffin)
HU2: Mutant UndergroundTM (by me, Kevin Siembieda)
Palladium Fantasy: Land of the DamnedTM **Three** (200+ pages; Bill Coffin)
The Rifter® **#15 & #16** (of course)
Rifts® **Dimension Book 5: The Anvil Galaxy**TM

And maybe, **Rifts**® **Africa 2** and a few surprises (as if the **Rifts**® **G.M.'s Guide** isn't surprise enough)

No, your eyes do not deceive you. Yes, there are two more *Heroes Unlimited*TM sourcebooks and three more *Palladium Fantasy RPG*® books (five for the year) coming out this year. Oh, yeah, and the **Rifts**® **G.M.'s Guide**. Hey, you demanded it, so Bill, and I and the rest of the Palladium crew are doing our best to deliver!

Meanwhile, I'm salivating to do **Wolfen Wars**TM for Palladium Fantasy, as well as **Mechanoids**® **Space**, **The Nursery**TM and **Beyond the Supernatural**TM **Second Edition**. With any luck, I'll be able to start tackling them by the end of this year for early release next year, 2002. I'm aching to do all four and have pages of notes for each. When I told Bill Coffin about my plans for **Mechanoids Space**, the poor boy nearly fainted from excitement (you probably think I'm kidding, but I'm not). I wish I could get to them sooner, but my responsibilities as publisher, chief game designer and creative coordinator (among other things) at Palladium mean I will have my hand in every book on the above schedule. I have to get them to press before I can start work on the books I'm itching write. So while you may be disappointed by delays, and rescheduling, it hurts me even more, because as much as you guys and gals are dying to see these books, I'm dying to write them even more! Unfortunately, duty calls, and that means running a business and making money so we can continue to publish the games you love. It's just a little longer now, so hang in there. Maybe, I'll present a **Mechanoids**® **Space** teaser or sneak preview in the October issue of **The Rifter**®.

Check out the news section for more info on what's coming. I gotta get back to work.

— Kevin Siembieda, 2001



Erick Wujcik is back!

After about eight years of exploring the realm of self-publishing, computer game design, going to China and other adventures, *Erick Wujcik* has been bitten by the role-playing game design bug.

His first project for Palladium Books is the **After the Bomb® Role-Playing Game**. With that just completed, Erick is talking about doing **Cascade**, a *Heroes Unlimited* city-book, and a few other ideas. Unfortunately, finally finishing a *Mystic China sourcebook* is not currently in the works, but we'll try to use subliminal persuasion and the promise of fame and money to get him to come around to the idea.

Thanks to the 4500+ people who answered our online survey

Approximately 4500+ people answered Palladium Books' online survey the first 10 days that it was up. The response was so quick and large that we had to pull it down. Maryann and I have gone through about half of them already. It will take a month or so to send out the free "gift" so please, be patient.

The survey was both informative and inspirational. A lot of folks took the time to list comments, constructive criticisms and suggestions that have helped to fire me up. All of us at Palladium Books appreciate your time and comments. It helps us to determine who our fans are, what they want most and what they think of the products. It was nice to see that we are, indeed, ap-

preciated, and I think many of the RPG products we have planned for the next couple of years (*Mechanoids® Space*, *BTS 2nd Edition*, and more support for all our lines) will surprise and please most of you. Thanks for the support and keep your imaginations burning.

Convention Update

Sorry, can't make Marcon 2001. Maryann, Steve and I had planned to exhibit and speak at Marcon this year, but my insane schedule will prevent that. Sorry. Maybe next year.

Not attending Gen Con 2001. Palladium Books will not be attending Gen Con this year. This is NOT a protest or a boycott, we just can't make it. Our schedule is too crazy and the show takes a lot of time to prepare for, do and recover from, so we're skipping it.. We'd rather take that time and get out a new sourcebook. We hope people are not too disappointed, but we'll see ya at Dragon Con.

Dragon Con — Atlanta, Georgia — September. Maryann and I are confirmed guests at Dragon Con this year and hope to see thronging multitudes of our southern fans. *Erick Wujcik* is also a guest at Dragon Con 2001, so come on down and see us! Not to mention join the more than 20,000 other fans of gaming, science fiction, film and comic books who attend the show. We've attended in the past, and this is a fun convention.

For more information contact the convention folks at:

August 30 - September 3, 2001

Dragon+Con
P.O. Box 16459
Atlanta, GA 30321-9998
www.dragoncon.org
(770) 909-0115 tel. (9 am to 5 pm)
(770) 909-0112 fax

Coming Attractions

Rifts® Collectable Card Game By Precedence Entertainment® June

The Rifts® CCG designed, published and distributed by the good folks at *Precedence Entertainment* will be ready to hit the stores in June!

Although Palladium Books is *NOT* making the Rifts® CCG, we have been involved every step of the way, with approval over everything. Precedence has used a bunch of Palladium artists to do some of the illustrations, and Precedence seems to be doing a fantastic job of catching the look and feel of the Rifts RPG setting.

I'm actually getting very excited about the CCG. I have approved around 300 "sketches," and have seen only a few finished paintings at this point, but wow, some of the art is awesome and all of it looks good. Real good! I for one get a blast seeing new renditions of my favorite Rifts characters, magic and machines in action and places like Lazlo, the Lone Star Complex, the Federation of Magic, and Xitcix hives, among others, in dynamic color. It's fun.

Artists include: John Zeleznik, Ramon Perez, Scott Johnson, Freddie Williams, Joachim Gmoser, David Martin, Susan Van Camp, Dennis Calero, Matt Cavetta, Fernando Palina, Slawek Wojtowicz, Steve Snyder, Mark Evens, Ron Lemen, Steve Roberts and a host of others.

The CCG captures the Rifts Setting. From what I have seen, the "look and feel" of Rifts is very well done and seems very loyal to the RPG.

The Game Rules are supposed to be fun, fast playing and easy to learn. I don't know CCGs, and we have not yet received our play test decks (any day now), so I can only tell you what they tell me.

Basic Deck \$9.95 – Booster packs \$2.95 each

In stores June, 2001. Also available from Palladium Books; see our web site for complete ordering information – www.palladiumbooks.com.

For Heroes Unlimited™

Aliens Unlimited™ Guide to the Galaxy

In stores early May

At last, *outer space* Heroes Unlimited™ style! The long awaited rules for space travel, combat and building spaceships. Space skills and skill programs, aliens, fun and adventure. Wayne Breaux Jr. has outdone himself!

- Spaceship construction rules.
- Space travel and combat rules.
- New skills and skill programs.
- New alien races, monsters and menaces.
- More information on the Riathenor.
- More on the Atorian Empire and the TMC.
- Galactic time-line and overview of the galaxy.
- Key people, places and adventure ideas.
- Art by Breaux, Wilson and Burles. Cover by Breaux.
- Written by Wayne Breaux Jr.
- \$20.95 — 200+ pages. In store around May 15th.





After the Bomb® The Role-Playing Game

One of your favorite adventure settings is becoming a hot, new role-playing game. Erick Wujcik has turned **After the Bomb®** into a **role-playing game** of post-apocalyptic mayhem, adventure and weirdness. Mutant animals have inherited a war and plague devastated Earth. They struggle not only to survive, but to build a new civilization.

This is a new look at an old favorite. Shortly after Palladium Books launched the *Ninja Turtles® RPG*, way back when, we came out with a series known as **After the Bomb®** – a world of the future where mutant animals rule a post-apocalyptic earth. In the past, this stand-alone series required the **TMNT®** or **Heroes Unlimited™** rule book to play and was nearly as popular as the *Ninja Turtles®*.

After the Bomb Role-Playing Game will be a complete game in and of itself, with updated and detailed character creation, new and additional rules, more mutants, strange powers, psionics, world information, villains and adventures. Everything you need to play except dice, players and imagination.

Highlights include:

- A ton of mutant animals, some new, some old, all improved.
- New mutant animal psionics.
- New mutant animal powers.
- Human mutation.
- More history and world information.
- More on the Empire of Humanity.
- More opportunity for adventure.
- Art by Ramon Perez, Scott Johnson and others.
- Compatible with *Heroes Unlimited™ 2nd Edition*.
- Complete role-playing game by Erick Wujcik.
- \$16.95 — 160 pages. Ships in June!

After the Bomb® Sourcebooks

The best selling, original sourcebooks (never out of print) are still suitable for the **After the Bomb RPG**, so if you have them, you're ready to play around the world. If you don't, they are available through Palladium Books and fine comic book and game shops everywhere.

Road Hogs: 20 new mutant animals, vehicle combat and creation rules, four adventures. \$7.95 – 48 pages, by Erick Wujcik. A fan favorite.

Mutants Down Under: Nearly 30 new mutant animals from Australia. Plus giant insects, Dream Time magic, psionic powers, airship construction, new villains, and adventures. \$7.95 – 48 pages by Erick Wujcik. Another all time favorite.

Mutants of the Yucatan: Over 20 new mutant animals, more trouble from the Empire of Humanity, and adventures by Erick Wujcik. \$7.95 – 48 pages.

Mutants in Avalon: King Arthur is back, but as a mutant animal! More mutant animals, mutant insects, druids, druid magic, invasion and adventure. \$9.95 – 80 pages.

Mutants in Orbit: Killer satellites, space stations, a moon base, new villains, monstrous insects, adventure ideas and more. Half this book is for *After the Bomb®* and half is for *Rifts®*. \$12.95 – 120 pages.

Coming for Heroes Unlimited™

Hardware Unlimited™ — 200+ pages; Summer release

Mutant Underground™ — Fall release

And maybe a surprise.

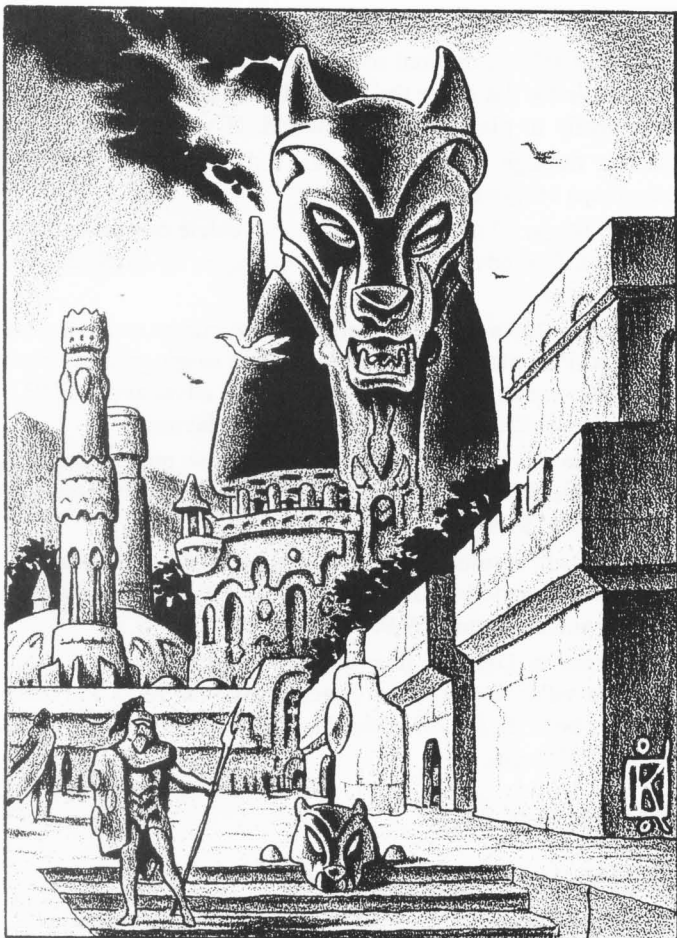
For Palladium Fantasy Role-Playing Game

The Eastern Territory™ For The Palladium Fantasy RPG®

In stores now! A big 224 page fantasy sourcebook packed with towns, cities, notable characters, magic, intrigue, secrets, and adventure in the Eastern Territory. This region of the Palladium World has never been described until now, making it one of the most anticipated books in the Fantasy line. We don't think people will be disappointed.

Much of the region is unexplored forest, inhabited by inhuman races not happy to see "human invaders" ravaging their land like hungry locusts. The boomtowns of the Eastern Territory also attract bandits, bushwhackers, thieves' guilds, assassins, mercenaries and monsters who see the new towns, cities and wilderness colonies as easy pickings, ripe for plunder. Likewise, these new communities represent places for criminals to establish rackets, thieves' and assassins' guilds to set up shop, and opportunity for bold adventurers of every stripe.

The Eastern Territory also holds its share of secrets and treachery, at the hands of both humans and nonhumans alike.



All of this makes for a fertile land of adventure. A place where heroes, adventurers and opportunists (even rogues) can carve out a reputation, become famous and/or build a fortune, maybe even their own kingdom!

- Scores of maps!
- Notable cities and towns, each unique and different.
- New monsters and menaces.
- The Danzi, a new optional race of warriors and shamans.
- Danzi Spirit Tattoos and Elven Mosaic magic.
- Overview of the land and society.
- Key people and places.
- Hints about the impending Wolfen Wars™.
- The haunted Howling Lands, the ruins of the Shattered Mountains, the mystery of the Glade, the vile city of Kaash, and the threat of the Wolfen all await your visit.
- All kinds of avenues of adventure.
- Art by Burles, Breaux, Wilson and Walpole. Dave Dorman cover.
- Written by Steve Edwards; some additional text by Kevin Siembieda.
- \$20.95 — 224 pages. In stores now!

The Northern Hinterlands™ For The Palladium Fantasy RPG®

A 160 page fantasy sourcebook packed with information about the western settlements of the Great Northern Wilderness, Ophid's Grasslands, and other remote regions at the doorstep of the mountains that wall off the Land of the Damned.

- The Shadow Coast of Bizantium. A hotbed of colonial rebellion.
- Kiridin, land of Eternal Autumn and oppression from the Coyle hordes.
- Coyle clans, villains and monsters.
- The Wild Lords — long forgotten gods.
- Information about the Vault of Destiny and Palladium of Desires!
- Key people and places.
- Maps and adventure ideas.
- Art by Breaux, Wilson and Burles. Cover by Mike Sutfin.
- Written by Bill Coffin.
- \$16.95 — 160 pages. In stores around mid-May.

The Land of the Damned™

The Land of the Damned is too large to cover in one book, so it will be presented as a series of three, big, 224 page, "stand-alone" books that will explore and describe the various unexplored regions of this forbidding land. It will also reveal the strange creatures and beings who dominate the land, many extinct elsewhere in the world, as well as the dark powers that rule.

Land of the Damned #1: The Northern Mountains™ — June or July release.

- Key people and places.
- Exotic new O.C.C.s, Monsters, adventure and more.
- Ancient magic and dark secrets.
- Over 20 new monsters and races (some left over from the Age of Chaos).
- Over a dozen new demons.
- Campaign hooks and Hook, Line and Sinker adventures.
- Maps and adventure ideas.
- Art by Burles, Wilson, Breaux, Johnson and others.
- Written by Bill Coffin.
- \$20.95 — 224 pages.

Land of the Damned #2: Eternal Torment™ — August or September release.

- A land of the undead and villainy.
- The enchanted forest known as the Darkest Heart.
- New types of undead and werebeasts.
- Dark magic.
- Campaign hooks and Hook, Line and Sinker adventures.
- Maps and more adventure ideas.

- Art by Burles, Wilson, Breaux, Johnson and others.
- Written by Bill Coffin.
- \$20.95 –224 pages.

Land of the Damned #3: The Bleakness™ – Fall

- Ancient Minotaur races and empires.
- Key people, monsters, and more.
- The Citadel — Fortress of pure chaos magic.
- Maps, adventure ideas and more.
- Art by Burles, Wilson, Breaux, Johnson and others.
- Maps galore.
- Written by Bill Coffin.
- \$20.95 –224 pages.



Northern Wilderness™ Second Edition

Adventures in the Northern Wilderness and Further Adventures in the Northern Wilderness are being combined in one big sourcebook with additional notes and materials.

- New adventures.
- Information on Shadowfall, the Wolfen capital.
- The 12 Wolfen tribes (updated).
- Expanded encounter tables.
- The Northern Elfland, the ancient “Golden City.”
- Art by Burles, Wilson, Breaux, Johnson and others.
- Maps, adventure ideas and hints about the Wolfen War.
- Written by Bill Coffin, Kevin Siembieda and others.
- \$16.95 – 160 pages.

Wolfen Wars™

I want to see this book out as badly as anybody, but it will probably slip into a 2002 release.

Rifts® Coalition Wars™ 6: Final Siege – Ships June

This is it. The grand finale! One will win, one will lose. This book has it all.

- The City of Tolkeen mapped and described.
- Tolkeen’s King, Circle of 12 and Warlords described in detail.
- Tolkeen’s newest demonic allies and monsters.
- Tolkeen’s secret weapons!
- The City of Freehold — home of the Dragon Kings.
- The final Siege — who wins, who loses, who survives.
- The Aftermath and loads of adventure and adventure ideas.
- Who wins, who loses, who survives.
- What is the fate of the refugees?
- What happens to the Cyber-Knights?
- How is the region changed?
- Art by Perez, Breaux, Wilson, and others. Wrap-Around cover by Zeleznik.
- Written by Kevin Siembieda and Bill Coffin.
- \$20.95 — 224 pages. June release.

Coming for Rifts®

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Rifts® Dimension Book: Anvil Galaxy

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Questions and Answers

By Rodney Stott and Shawn Merrow

Can you take the same Physical skill twice?

No, you cannot take the same Physical skill twice to receive double the bonuses. Generally the only skills that can be taken twice to give a bonus are Domestic skills.

Are the stats on the Wilderness: Hunting skill in the Rifts RPG® applied one time only or every level?

Since they are bonuses, they are only one time only.

Can the physical S.D.C. bonuses from Physical skills apply to M.D.C. beings?

Generally, no. The bonuses to S.D.C. from Physical skills will remain S.D.C. Those characters who go through some sort of M.D.C. transformation after taking the Physical skills will retain these S.D.C. bonuses as M.D.C., if the transformation converts their total S.D.C.

In Heroes Unlimited™, one of the skill programs listed which a high school graduate can take is the Rogue skill program. What is this program and where can I find it?

The "Rogue" skill program is the Professional Thief skill program.

Are the skill programs listed in Heroes Unlimited™ the only available skill programs?

Not necessarily. The skill programs listed there would be the most common ones, but the G.M. can easily make up new skill programs for the players to select. Most programs will generally have between 4-7 skills, with the majority having 4-5 skills.

For example, if the character wanted to be a professional driver (racing, trucking, etc.), and there is no skill program, the G.M. could easily make one up. Considering the skills a race car driver needs, the following skills will make a reasonable Professional Driver skill program:

Pilot Race Car

Automotive Mechanics

Read Sensory Equipment

Select 2 additional Pilot: Basic skills.

When selecting skill programs in Heroes Unlimited™ 2nd Edition, do you receive all the skills that come under a category as well as the ones from a related category as they are listed? For example, if you select the Basic Military skill program, do you get all the other Military skills in addition to the ones listed under the basic program?

No, you only get what is listed under the program (not all the skills in the category). In most cases, selecting the program again will allow you to pick more skills from the appropriate category.



At what percentage do my skills start if my character is level one?

At the base skill percentage, plus any possible bonuses from I.Q. and occupation/education. This means if you take a skill which is 30%, +5% per level, at level one the skill will be at 30%. At level two it will be 35%, and so forth.

What is the maximum skill percentage?

Generally 98% is the maximum any skill can achieve, though some skills may exceed this (these exceptions will be listed within the skill description).

If I pick Acrobatics, Gymnastics and Tumbling, what will my sense of direction, back flip and climb/rappel skills be at? Do I just pick the highest one, or do I get some bonus for picking all three?

You use the highest skill.

I run a transdimensional campaign, but some of the skills from the various books may have different percentages and base levels, or may not exist in some settings. What should I do when my players want to their characters to learn new skills?

Generally, only the skills of the dimension they are currently in will be available, unless the characters brought with them the material to learn a more advanced skill. Also, the skill's base percentage will be relative to that dimension/book, and not the character's native dimension.

I.e. someone learning Carpentry in Palladium Fantasy will learn it at a Palladium Fantasy tech level, which is roughly medieval. If they learned the skill in a modern trade school or apprenticeship they would learn modern techniques and practices, as well as receiving the base percentage relative to such a setting (such as Heroes Unlimited). Likewise, penalties will apply for a medieval carpenter (or a modern character with medieval carpentry skills) using modern tools and techniques.

The **Rifts® Conversion Book™** gives some suggested skill penalties for using skills that can be considered out-of-date or antiquated compared with modern equivalents.

Can a character learn skills at any time, regardless of O.C.C. and the learning of new skills given through O.C.C. training?

Optionally, yes it is possible, and rules for this can be found in **Heroes Unlimited™ 2nd Edition** under the skills section, page 48.

Do I really get 25 experience points every time I use a skill?

No, you do not. The 25 experience point award for using a skill should generally only apply to meaningful use of a skill, not just any use. This means that driving to work or around the town does not count as using a skill for the experience, but being involved in a high speed pursuit which may require multiple control rolls and driving skill checks counts for experience from skills.

Do I roll for using a skill or does my G.M. do the skill rolls?

Generally, the player will roll for skill use, but the G.M. may wish to roll the skills instead for a variety of reasons. Such reasons may include keeping the outcome secret where the result of the roll is not clear cut or the after-effects will show up at a later time, or to fudge the results of a roll without letting the players know for plot continuity and advancement.

Some optional rules have the G.M. and player rolling both at the same time, with the player rolling for apparent success and the G.M. rolling for actual results. I.e. if the G.M. fails and the player makes it, the character thinks he is successful, but is in fact unsuccessful.

Do I need to roll percentile dice every time I use a skill?

Generally not. In most ordinary circumstances, just possessing a skill will allow you to perform basic tasks without having to roll for success. I.e. with the Pilot Automobile skill you can drive a car under normal conditions without having to roll under the skill. Of course when under stress or performing under difficult circumstances, a skill roll would be needed.

The G.M. should decide when and where a skill roll will be needed for basic tasks.

How are the Pilot and Horsemanship skills to be used? I have ruled that every time a PC starts a vehicle or mounts a horse (or whatever) he must make a successful skill roll to do so. He must then make a roll every time he tries a complicated maneuver (a barrel roll, spinout, steeplechase style jump, etc.). Do you have any suggestions that differ from my system?

Standard things (starting up a vehicle, mounting a horse, etc.) should NOT require a piloting roll; however, complicated maneuvers will require a piloting roll.

What is the purpose behind the skill "RPG Design," and why can it not be selected using Ninjas and Superspies™?

The skill is considered an inside joke, and if you look carefully among all the Palladium books you will find a lot more such jokes buried amidst the text and especially the art, so if you want to find some more of these, have a careful look at all the art and text through the books.

Of course, if you combine **Ninjas and Superspies™** with the other Palladium games, the skill may become available for selection.

I'm having trouble with my players trying to use skills that they don't have. Is there a base skill percentage that should be used in this situation? (The players are trying to perform a logical and reasonable task, i.e. trying to locate a door that a villain had gone through.)

For attempting a task that they are unskilled in, a character should roll percentiles vs an applicable attribute (i.e. I.Q., M.E., P.S., P.E., etc.).

Can my character at later levels learn skills which are not allowed to be selected under his O.C.C. description?

The ability to learn skills at later levels which are not allowed to the character class is ultimately up to the Game Master.

Generally with learning any skill, the character must have the opportunity to be able to pick up the skill, either through practice and study or having a teacher. This means if the character spends years in a desert away from a suitable supply of wood, he probably would not be able to learn carpentry and boat building.

If an R.C.C. can pick an O.C.C., when picking skills, do you get the R.C.C. skills, the O.C.C. skills, or both?

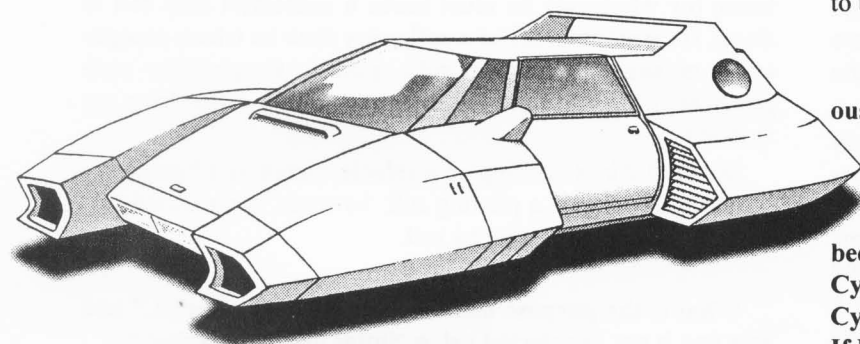
Generally, if a R.C.C. selects a O.C.C., they lose their R.C.C. skills, unless stated otherwise. Certain skills inherent to the race may be retained, like native language, or skills common to all in the race.

How does Total Recall affect skills?

Total Recall may be able to speed up the learning process when learning a skill, but does not give any bonuses towards skill use.

What sort of penalties are there for using skills?

Heroes Unlimited™ does provide some guidelines as to appropriate skill penalties, and if you do not have a copy, here are the basics:



APOLLO 2000

Alien or Super-Advanced Technology -30% to -40%

This is the equivalent of a medieval carpenter using a circular saw to make a table.

Pressure situation, but no big deal -5% to -10%

Rushing to meet a deadline.

Pressure situation, deadly -15% to -30%

Disarming that nuclear bomb which has 30 seconds before it blows up.

Countermeasures, traps and alarms in place -10% to -30%

Difficult Task/Complex or Unfamiliar -10% to -15%

Trying to do something while moving -5% to -40%

Frightened or jumpy -5% to -10%

Seriously wounded (Hit Points down by more than half) -15%

Other penalties can be imposed by the G.M., ranging from around the -10% to the -30% mark.

The G.M. should use his or her discretion and be fair when imposing skill penalties.

Additional penalties may also come from specific skill situations, like stunts and control rolls for piloting skills and some mechanical skills (suggested penalties for these can be found in places like the Hardware section of **Heroes Unlimited™**).

Is there a psychiatrist skill anywhere in your books, and if not, what would the requirements be and the skill proficiency be?

As for the Psychology skill, it can be found in **Beyond the Supernatural™** 1st edition (currently unavailable), and its base percentage is 40%, +5% per level. The skill falls under the Science category for skill selection purposes.

Is there a skill currently for making ancient melee weapons, such as swords, spears and axes?

The Fashion Tools skill, which can be found in **Yin-Sloth Jungles™** on page 45, has a base skill of 25% plus 5% per level of experience. Other weapons can be made using Carpentry for wooden shafts, and General Repair for small, simple metal objects. The Field Armorer skill will allow arrowheads and the like to be made.

What piloting skill is required for CS Sky Cycles of various kinds (they aren't Hover Crafts as such)?

Pilot Jet Fighter.

I have a 5th level Cyber-Knight character that I have been playing for a while now, and I just saw the updated Cyber-Knight O.C.C. in Siege on Tolkeen™ Four: Cyber-Knights. Do I update my character or leave it as it is? If I do update it, what should I do to update the character?

Ultimately the decision as to whether you can update your Cyber-Knight character is up to your individual G.M. At lower levels, fewer changes need to be made to update the character, while at higher levels more changes will need to be made to your existing character.

One change that can be easily made is substituting the Horsemanship: Cyber-Knight skill from **Rifts® New West™** for the standard Horsemanship skill (with no skill bonus; this is already factored into the base percentage).

The Cyber-Knight also receives additional bonuses to Pull Punch, Disarm and Save vs Horror Factor at level one, compared with the old version.

The creation of the second Psi-Sword can easily be added, and can be considered a secret ability of the Cyber-Knights that nobody knows about.

The Cyber-Armor at low levels can be easily changed into the living Cyber-Armor with little effect to the character.

The biggest change to include is the Cyber-Knight's Zen combat training. As for psionics, a non-psionic Cyber-Knight will now have the equivalent of minor psionics and the ability to create a Psi-Shield, and has meditation, which can again be easily added to a character. Those who picked the 3 powers can also pick additional powers from that list at higher levels, so you will need to check to see if additional psionic powers will need to be selected.

Can a Mind Melter or other psionic character create more than one Psi-Sword at a time?

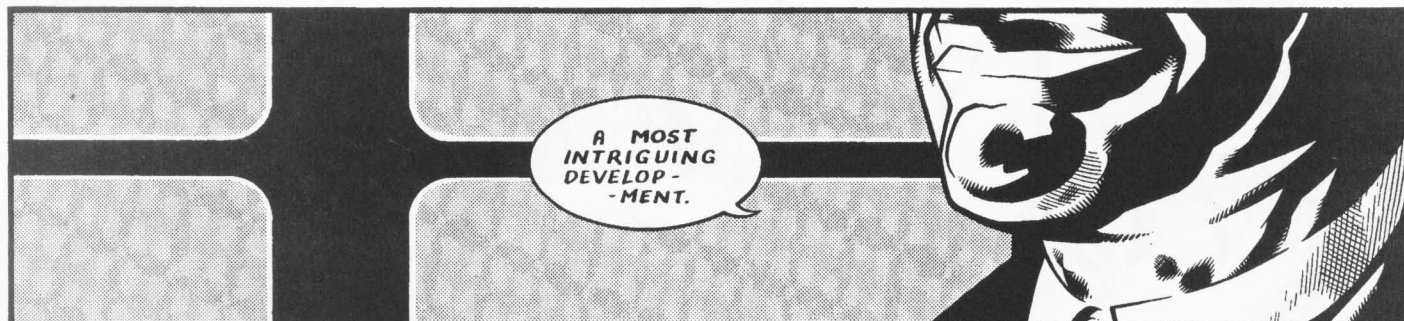
No, the Mind Melter/psionic character can only create a single Psi-Sword/blade at a time. The dual Psi-Sword power is only possessed by the Cyber-Knights, and is due to their specialized training.



c h a p t e r e i g h t

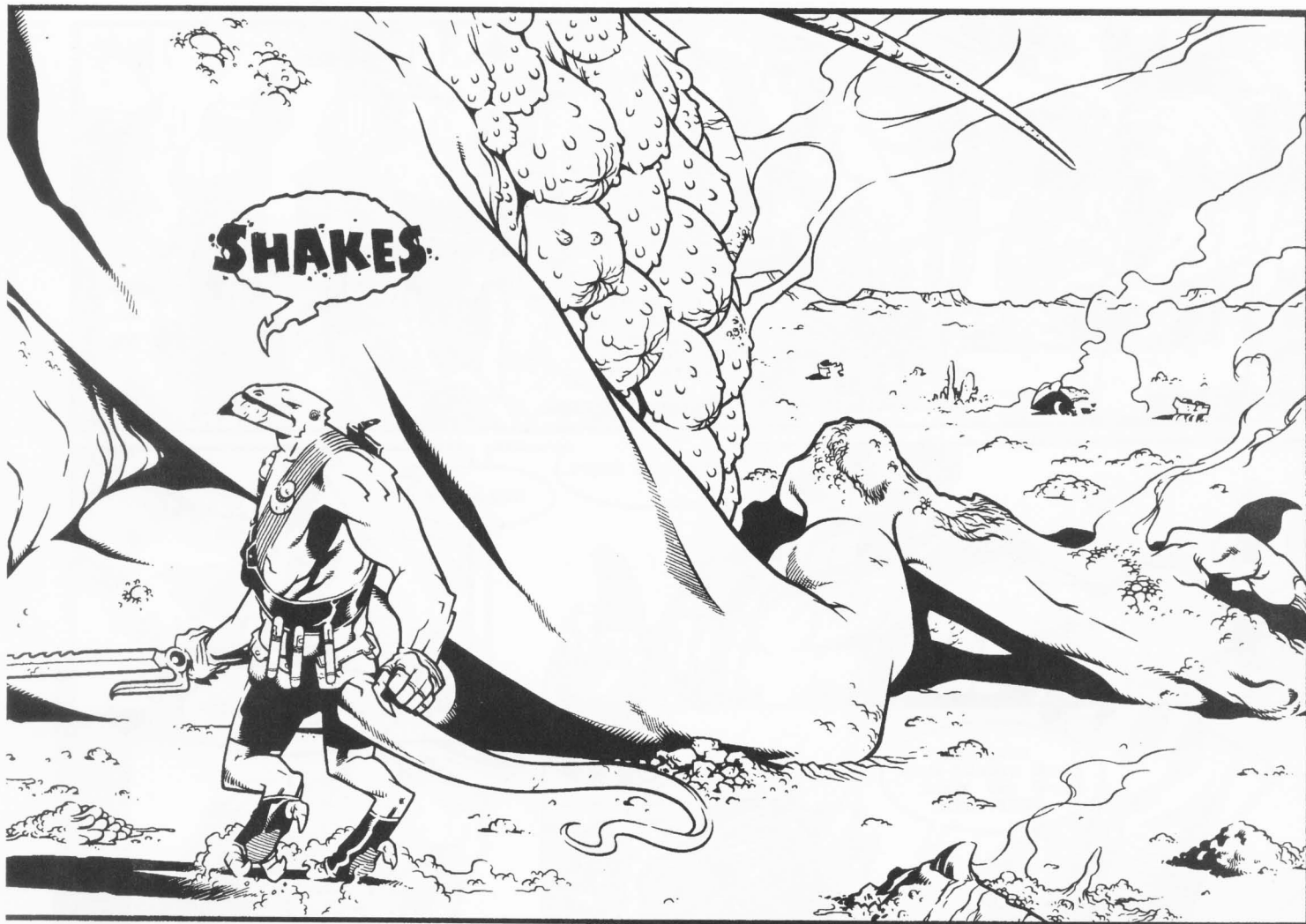


BY RAMÓN PÉREZ



WITHIN MOMENTS...







ON THE PROWL...

KINDA TURNED
ME ON BACK THERE. THE
WAY YOU TOOK CONTROL,
ALL DOMINEERING LIKE
... YUMMY!

STUFF IT
JOHNNY, WE'RE
GETTING CLOSE
TO...



LOOK OUT



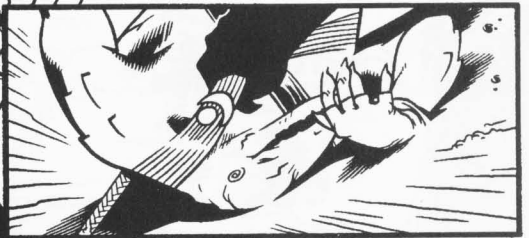
SOMETHING'S
UP, THERE SHOULD
BE FOUR!

YOU'RE
COMPLAINING?

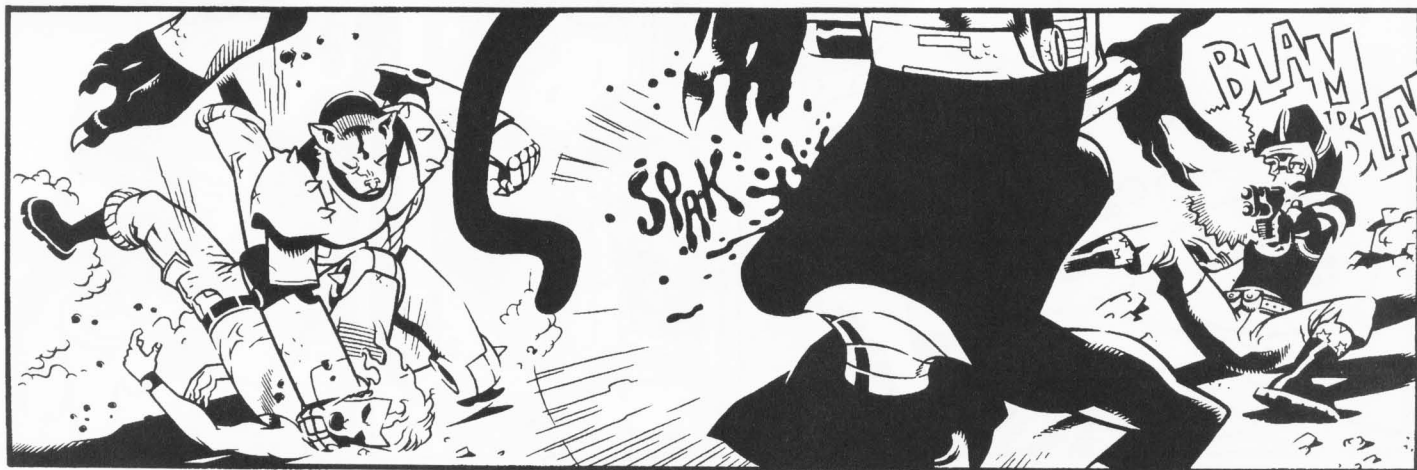


THE FOURTH
WAS A BIG
SUCKER ...









A PSIONIC SUMMONS
INTERUPTS KHOLA...

ABORT
MISSION.
RELEASE
TARGETS.

WHA...

SNOOZE
AND YA' LOSE
POOCHIE!

I RECIEVED
ORDERS ...

... AS DID I.

BOOM

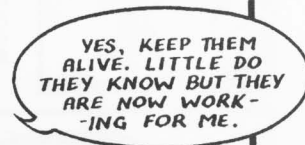
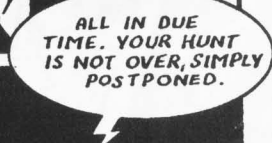
PLAYTIME'S
OVER, TIME
TO GO
HOME.

ALL
ABOARD!

FOOLS,
LET THEM
BELIEVE THAT
THEY HAVE
WON!

EPILIQUE





THE ATORIAN EMPIRE



the most powerful organization within the **Heroes Unlimited™** Milky Way galaxy: superiority. The Atorians have the best technology in the galaxy, and have wasted no time in putting it to its most efficient use. And they have had more than enough time to do it. The thousand year reign of power attributed to them in **Aliens Unlimited™** is just the tip of the proverbial iceberg, and marks the point where the Atorians began hiding things from people. The date given for the closing of the Imperial borders reflects more than the secretive, isolationist image those outside the Empire perceive it to be. It reflects something much darker and more frightening than even the promise of another Atorian expansion. Unfortunately, that dark secret and the hundreds of others hiding behind the ironclad demarcation lines of the Imperial borders will not be revealed in this article. You'll have to wait for the **Heroes Unlimited™ Guide to Imperial Space** for all of that. Yes, this little outing is a teaser of sorts, but it will reveal a few things, like some information on the most feared of the Empresses, stats on some Atorian equipment, and an O.C.C. or two. You think the Atorians are impressive from what you know already? You ain't seen nothin' yet. Read on and enjoy.

The Atorians

Aliens Unlimited™ makes a distinction between Atorians and Fehran. The Fehran are the members of the race from which the Atorian clan originally came. Once the Atorians assumed leadership of their people, all citizens became members of the Atorian clan and referred to themselves as "Atorians." However, after several key incidents and a war or two in their history, the powers that be in the Empire stripped all men of any rank, power, and eventually status, and relegated them to the equivalent of property. Eventually, with the advent of super advanced genetics, the need for male members of the species became negligible and they were all exiled or killed. More than a thousand years later, the Atorians can be considered a new race entirely made up of females. Within the Atorian Empire, Atorians and Fehran are now two different races, and Fehran are often killed on sight as some bad reminder of a more primitive time.

As a result of this negative perception of their own males, the Atorians have a generally less-than-glowing rapport with males of other races. In general they are considered unrefined and often brutish. Those who know this and have no choice but to send male representatives to the Empire will carefully select their most refined and restrained of men for the assignment. Allied races which join the Empire are not required to demote or exile their males, but they are required to place only females in positions of power. Few races that have faced the Atorians and decided to side with them will balk much at this requirement (the alternatives are rather final). The strong bond between the Atorians and both the Thropo and Photin are due in part to the fact that both of the latter societies are naturally matriarchal, and women held the reigns of power even before the Atorians encountered them.



Official Material for **Heroes Unlimited™**
By Wayne Breaux Jr.

Immatu Imperianum Da Nai Atoriat!

"Immatu Imperium da nai Atoriat!" One of the first things a citizen of the Empire is taught in schooling, and the mantra of any Imperial soldier. Literally translated, it means, "Immortal Empire, we are Atorian," or more elegantly, "We are the immortal Atorian Empire." Just a fancy way of saying, "Long live the Empire," but it reflects the one thing that blankets any look at

Without going into too much detail, the Atorians reproduce through genetic technologies, allowing them to produce children asexually (i.e. with only one parent) that have little or no flaws in their physical make-up. Healthier and smarter than most races as a whole, the Atorian children grow quickly and adapt and learn well. Just by their nature, albeit an artificial one in many ways, Atorians have an edge on other races. One side effect of this means of reproduction is that all Atorians resemble each other. To other races, they all tend to look alike, much like a society of mothers and daughters (many twins in appearance), making it difficult to tell them apart. With the vast genetic abilities at their disposal, one would think this could be altered, but it remains for two reasons. First, while all of the members of each clan resemble each other, members of different clans look different. Each clan has a distinctive appearance and thus identity. Secondly, it is the wish of the Empresses that this trend remain as it is, and none would go against the Empresses' wishes. Death is often the easy way out in the Empire, and the fates worse than death can be numerous.

Because of the general resemblance of Atorians, they look alike even to other Atorians, but fortunately, growing up in such an environment the women learn to identify each other through body language, voice tones, and other minute details that most others rarely pick up on until they have known someone a long time. The Atorians can do it within minutes, having honed the skill to a natural talent. This attention to emotion, body language, small inflections and other little giveaway traits make the Atorians very perceptive (+1 to initiative and +10% to social skills; at 4th level they gain another +1 to initiative and +1 to strike; at 8th level a +1 to parry and dodge are also added. Fehran do not gain these bonuses).

In appearance, the Atorians are all tall and graceful, with finely shaped bone structures (but sturdy due to origins in a high gravity world) and elegantly formed features. Fehran are rougher of feature and shorter due to a lack of generations of genetic fine tuning, but overall they are still a handsome race, just not as perfect as the Atorians. The Atorian appearance is somewhat like that of most Elven races, but their beauty is more sculpted in appearance than ethereal; although, each clan does differ and at least one can be said to possess such ethereal beauty. The clans each have their own unique characteristics, including radically different hair or eye colors, size differences, and skin colorations. Clothing tends to be elegant, and even when plain or unadorned it seems to flatter the wearer. If not in reality, then in appearance, the Atorians are a race of royalty. Full details on each of the clans and their traits and stats will be given in the **Guide to Imperial Space**.

The Structure of the Empire

The Structure of the Empire is a pyramidal system, very much like the feudal system of government from Earth's middle ages. The uppermost level of the system is held by the Empresses, of which there are currently six. Below them are the Clan powers numbering 18, and so on. Each level of power is larger than the one above it, but the individuals at that power level are proportionately weaker in temporal power than those above them. There are no distinct differences between social,

political, and military leaders. Each rank of power has its own soldiers and subjects, made up of allied or conquered races on the lower levels of authority, and shifting proportionately to more and more Atorian subjects and warriors as one climbs the pyramid. At the top, the Clan Powers and the Empresses are directly supported by entire planetary systems of Atorian subjects, and their armies are outfitted in the best technology the galaxy can offer. The ranking females, be they baronets or Empresses, are the leaders of their people. They pass laws, give orders, command the armies, approve social events and customs, manage resources, and all other aspects of governing and protecting the people. Just as the Kings of Earth had advisors, so to do the powers of the Empire have lackeys to aid them, but all decision making is in the hands of the nobles, and all nobles answer to the nobles above them.

The military is organized much like any other military, but only within each army. The usual chain of command from the equivalent of privates up to generals exists, but above the generals one doesn't find a government body or committee issuing orders; instead there is a single noble. In times of war or strife within a province, a noble sends her troops in to deal with it. If the noble is high enough in rank, she can call upon the troops of her vassals to supplement her own or even replace them. In this way, larger armies can be built to oppose whatever might threaten the higher ranking nobles. In smaller armies, there may not even be a general and at some levels the general herself is the ranking noble who gained a title by virtue of military skill. Mercenaries and allied races also make up a good portion of the armies of lower ranked nobles, and at the bottom of the pyramid the armies are almost exclusively those of allied races or paid warriors. Only the Empresses and the Clan Powers have huge armies that are entirely Atorian in makeup. As one moves down the ladder, the percentage of actual Atorian soldiers dwindles until the only concentration of Atorian soldiers is within the command structure and small special operations squads, which often lead large units of non-Atorian personnel. This isn't to say that the number of Atorian subjects dwindles, though it does, just not as dramatically as in the armed forces, and one can find plenty of Atorian doctors, lawyers, architects, laborers, and other regular citizens in the domains of even the lowliest of nobles.

There are currently six Empresses. The number is not likely to change any time soon, for there have been six Empresses since the time of the War of Understanding, when the last of the male revolutionaries were defeated thousands of years ago. It has been ordained that six women of the highest power shall rule the galaxy, until the time that a seventh with power greater than that of all the Empresses combined will reveal herself, and lead the Empire into its truest destiny. The Atorians generally believe in this pseudo-prophecy, and many have been waiting for centuries to see it come to pass, especially the Empresses. Each time the Empire expands or makes a quantum leap in its technology, its leaders and many of its citizens watch and wait for some sign that the time is right for the Seventh Empress to show herself, but so far nothing has come to pass. Many speculate that the seventh expansion will be her herald, but none know for sure, and if the current Empresses know anything, they are not sharing.

Seated upon the sextet of Imperial thrones are the Empresses, the Imperial Ladies. They are each a member of a different clan,

but each bears a direct bloodline to the original Atorian Empress, Shree'ain De Atoriat. In order of their power, rank, and influence within the Empire, they are: Shivana De Atoria (The High Warlord, charged with waging war, expanding the Empire and defeating its enemies. She has the largest and best outfitted armies in the galaxy at her disposal. See below for more details.), Philia Dau Atoria (Historian and Lore Keeper for the Empire. She resides on Danude, where the heart of the Imperial historical and educational system throbs. If Philia can not answer a question or find the answer through research, it is likely no one can.), Chi Naei Ke Atrio (Battlemaster and guardian of the spirit of the Empire. She has few duties and responsibilities other than acting as advisor and spiritual leader to the other Empresses. She maintains armies and governs as befits an Empress, but her strengths lie in herself and she is unequaled in personal combat. Like a warrior monk of Earth, she is the calm that can become a storm and is surprisingly accepted by all of her fellow Empresses, despite their general distrust of each other.), Thienae Atoria (Intelligence Director and Propaganda specialist. While Shivana enforces the Imperial image of strength and dominance, Thienae makes it all look good and ensures that the people love it, but those who hate it she leaves to Delmiar.), Delmiar Nok Atoriat (The Imperial Protector. She is charged with securing the Imperial borders, mainly through the use of Shivana's armies, and maintaining stability within the Empire by dealing with uprisings and revolutionaries. Her armies are the KGB and CIA of the Atorian Empire, and are more often than not hidden and secretive. For the things that require a show of force, she calls in Shivana's troops.), and Ceilian Atoria (Though ranked last in overall power, she is perhaps the most influential, for she is the Empress that excels at playing diplomat and has thousands of planets and governments eating from the palm of her delicate little hands. Unfortunately her work is as delicate as the hands, and with her fellow Empresses preferring to make fists, her job can often be difficult.).

The feudal structure of the Empire actually serves to foster its expansionist practices. In order for nobles to expand their holding and thus their power, they must be given more to lord over. This "land" or domain has to come from the holdings of the nobles above them, and is finite without expansion. So for everyone along the chain of authority to benefit, new domains have to come from somewhere. When an expansion is announced, often a century before it will actually occur, every noble is willing to participate and they have plenty of time to negotiate and jockey for their piece of the new domain. Of course these new planets they need so badly have recently been invaded when bequeathed, and turmoil will be the order of the day. Large numbers of troops occupy these places, and each is a test of the skills and tenacity of the nobles that receive them. In this way, up-and-coming nobles can be forced to prove themselves, while older and more established families lay claims on the planets which readily surrender. Such arrangements keep the power structure tilted in favor of the existing nobles but leave openings for the ambitious to earn a place, which is something the Empresses look favorably on, as it encourages even more expansion. Needless to say all of this extensive power building can take generations, but with the Atorians' extended life spans, even a century is not an eternity to wait for plans to bear fruit.

The State of Affairs

Currently the borders of the Empire are closed very tightly, and they have been for the last thousand years or so. What most people fail to remember is that before the dramatic and official closing of the borders, the Empire was generally rather restricted and much of it was as tightly closed as it is today. Time and the purposeful flourish used by the Empire have erased those little details from the memories of most, helping to cloud the actual history of the Empire. The result is that the information given in **Aliens Unlimited™** and even the updated timeline in the upcoming **Galaxy Guide** is off by thousands of years. These false histories have, of course, been supported and enhanced by the Atorians whenever possible. If the galaxy at large would realize just how old the Empire is and fathom how extensive its planning, they would be frightened indeed. More on these hidden secrets and the actual history of the Empire will be given in the **Guide to Imperial Space**. Until then, consider the Empire's roots to stretch back about ten times what the current information suggest (yes, ten to twenty thousand years).

Very few people get to see the inside of the Empire, for her borders are closed, and those not invited in are destroyed by both active and automated defenses at every known entry point, including gravity wells and gateways. From warships to killer satellites, the Empire has some heavy firepower ensuring its privacy. Now this isn't to say that there aren't any unknown gravity wells or back doors into the Empire. Heck, Diatome finds



them all the time. But it does mean that even if you find one of these it is likely that only a few small craft could get away with sneaking in. An entire armada would be detected before too long, and likely long before it could do significant damage, because the one thing the Atorians have that are as good as their guns, is their sensors. Diplomats are allowed into the Empire, but they are usually escorted there on Imperial craft by Imperial personnel. These visitors normally come from allied planets near the Imperial borders, and their visits are welcomed and amiable (but woe to the diplomat discovered to be spying on the Empire). When their business is done, they may even be allowed to stay or even reside within the borders. Other diplomats, notably those from the FAR and similar organizations that oppose the Empire in one way or another, have much more restricted visits and are rarely allowed to stay for very long. Not surprisingly, these visitors are not allowed to see much of the Empire beyond the impressive array of warships they pass through to get to their destinations.

The Atorians generally give little thought to "The Line" that the Federation of Allied Races has established along a significant stretch of the Imperial borders. This network of warships could certainly slow an Imperial advance, but it could not stop it. The Atorians know this and so does the FAR. Both sides also know that The Line is meant as an early warning and interference measure to give the FAR a chance to prepare a defensive. It is the defensive beyond The Line that the Atorians concern themselves with, although they certainly do watch The Line very carefully. If the Empire were to learn of the defensive coordinates beyond The Line (an event that would not take place until The Line itself was attacked) or even the standby staging areas for that defensive, the FAR would have no hope of stopping any Imperial advance, and the entire Liloqua quadrant would fall to the Atorians (excepting the small quarter or so that is home to the TGE). For this reason, the Atorians make as much of an effort to have access to that information when the time comes, as the FAR makes to keep it from them. At this point in the established time line, the two galactic powers are in a cold war, with the FAR waiting for the Empire to make a move and the Empire planning that next move. It will come within the next fifty years, however, neither The Line, the FAR, nor any other major galactic entity will be threatened by the next Atorian expansion, for it will only extend to the borders of their own quadrant and slightly beyond, nowhere threateningly close to anyone of significance.

Spies of the Empire are littered across the galaxy, from the chambers of the FAR councils, to the halls of the Toogarth Empire and the cell blocks of the TMC. Certainly they aren't everywhere and they can't watch everyone, but the information tendrils of Delmiar Nok Atoriat's spy network are certainly spread evenly. Each major galactic entity has at least someone to report on it, even if it isn't an in-depth infiltration (as is the case with the TMC); however, certain organizations like the TGE and the FAR deserve to be watched as closely as possible and a number of spies have been worked into their ranks on numerous levels. The security council of the FAR even has a number of Atorian spies sitting on it. The Empire certainly has the resources to be well informed, and it puts them to use. Should war come to pass, many of those moles will turn assassin, and a number of key figures on the other side will be removed, and if possible, replaced. The Empire is fond of using shape-changing

infiltrators. On the flip side, spies within the Empire find it difficult to do their job. The Empire certainly isn't spy proof, but getting close enough to the really important people is practically impossible. The specifics on that will be explored in the **Guide to Imperial Space**, but for now assume that anyone trying to infiltrate the ranks of the top 10% of the nobility will be discovered and executed.

Although it is secured and well patrolled by billions of troops and millions of spacecraft, the Empire is not a completely ordered place. It still has its frontiers where law and order prevail, but do not dominate, and it is also made up of a majority of conquered planets, some of which still present resistance and occasional revolts or uprisings after centuries of subjugation. This disorder is only a nuisance and could never disrupt the Empire itself, but on a minute scale within the provinces of specific nobles, it can certainly appear that one is anywhere else but the impressive Atorian Empire. But such chaos is far from common and always isolated. The only truly troubled places within the Empire are generally unknown to the majority of Imperial subjects. The soldiers that fight there die there, leaving their secrets, and those that survive are likely to never make their way back into normal Imperial society. Where these secret holders go and what happens to them is one of the darkest secrets of the Empire, known only to the Imperial Ladies. And for now it will remain a secret, the dark heart of the Atorian Empire which will be revealed along with many other mysteries in, you guessed it, the **Guide to Imperial Space**. Look for it next year.

Thropo Commando O.C.C.

The Thropo are a strong, warlike race of ape-like beings, who have served as a loyal ally race to the Atorian Empire for more than a thousand years. Their matriarchal government and feudal system of power made integration and subservience to the Atorians quite easy, and their racial respect for power and combat skill made such acquiescence natural. With time comes trust, but the Atorians aren't known for such; however, they do respect loyalty and service, and the two amount to the same thing as trust between the Empire and the Thropo. As a result, the apes have been gifted with advanced technologies and the means to produce them (this technology is far superior to that of most races in the galaxy, but also far inferior to that of the Atorians, limiting the potential of having it turned on its masters, while allowing the servant an edge over their enemies). The apes also benefit from genetic advances (again, not as extensive or advanced as that available to the Atorians) and are allowed to expand their numbers through colonies and holdings (always overseen by an Atorian Seneschal, however, but far better than having it enforced by an army, as many ally races must endure).

The Thropo Commando is an elite soldier that has proven his skills and loyalty to the Empire, and earned both rank and access to equipment. This is a general O.C.C. that can be used for skilled and elite, special forces-styled commandos operating in Thropo armies under the command of an Atorian noble of low rank, less skilled commandos working for a higher ranked noble as part of an elite unit or in a mixed unit of Atorian and Thropo soldiers, or finally as foot soldiers in the allied armies of a high ranking noble. Each of these different options reflects not only the skill of the soldier but also the equipment. Allied foot soldiers in a low ranking army will have equipment equivalent to

top quality galactic fare, but not really that exceptional, while the Thropo foot soldiers in the armies of very high ranking Atorian nobles will have better equipment than the Atorians serving in the armies of lower ranked nobles. This O.C.C. represents a typical mid-level allied soldier, outfitted for operations under a noble of moderate rank. When the enemies of the Empire think of Imperial troops, this is the soldier they envision and the equipment they fear, for she is the most common type of warrior Imperial enemies outside the borders of the Empire will face. Her equipment represents the above average tech attributed to the Atorians in both **Aliens Unlimited™** and the **Galaxy Guide**. The Atorian soldier below will give you some idea what the Empire can really put into the field.

See the Thropo entry on pages 74-75 of the **Revised Aliens Unlimited™** for racial statistics and bonuses. The money and equipment listed below replace the armor, equipment and weapons given in the racial entry. The O.C.C. also replaces the normal education determination for Alien characters and the usual money generated in Step 8 of character generation.

Note: The mechanical eye piece on the Thropo in the illustration is not a bionic eye. Even the bionics the Atorians give to their allies are well advanced when compared to those of other races outside the Empire. The item in this case is a multi-optic targeting sight with ultraviolet and sonar mapping capabilities. It also has a micro-camera built into it. The unit negates penalties for darkness, even magical darkness, but not blindness, and provides +1 to strike with ranged weapons (in addition to any other bonuses).

O.C.C. Skills

Military Etiquette (+20%)

Field Armorer (+10%)

Radio: Basic (+15%)

Pilot: One military vehicle of choice (+10%).

W.P. Energy Pistol

W.P. Energy Rifle

W.P. Knife

W.P. Choose one.

Zero Gravity Combat: Basic

Hand to Hand: Expert

Hand to Hand: Expert can be upgraded to Martial Arts at the cost of one other skill.

Other Skills: Choose seven other skills from the following list.

At least three of these must be additional Military skills and one must be a Weapon Proficiency.

Communications: Radio: Scramblers, TV/Video, and Optic Systems only (+10%).

Domestic: Any.

Electrical: Basic Electronics only.

Espionage: Detect Ambush, Detect Concealment, Intelligence, and Sniper only (+10%).

Mechanical: Basic Mechanics, Hover Vehicle Mechanics, and Automotive Mechanics only.

Medical: First Aid and Paramedic only (but the latter counts as two skill selections).



Military: Any (+20%).

Physical: Any (+15% where applicable).

Pilot: Basic: Any (+10%).

Pilot: Advanced: Any.

Pilot Related: Any.

Rogue: None.

Science: Mathematics only.

Technical: Any.

Weapon Proficiencies: Any.

Wilderness: Any (+10%).

Secondary Skills: In addition to the above skills, the character can select four secondary skills from the secondary skill list on page 47 of **Heroes Unlimited™, Second Edition**. As usual, these skills receive none of the bonuses listed above. The character can select three additional secondary skills at levels 3, 6, 9, 12 and 15.

Standard Equipment: Helmet (A.R.: 12, S.D.C.: 40 by itself, or adds +1 to the Armor Rating of the heavy EBA), heavy environmental battle armor (A.R.: 16, S.D.C.: 300, fully environmental, chemical and radiation shielded, thermal insulation, and has a kinetic lining), two sidearms of choice (commonly ion pistols or energy knives; each weapon has 10% larger payload, more damage*, and 10% more range as applicable), two conventional melee weapons of choice (no Vibro-, Kisentite, or energy types, but are +2 to damage and +1 to parry), one energy rifle of choice (has 20% more payload, 10% longer range and more damage* than conventional energy rifles; also comes with an energy bayonet with stats of an energy knife that has the damage bonus*), one heavy weapon (choose either grenade launcher, twin mini-missile launcher, particle beam rifle, or TGE Riproar; same bonuses to range, damage, and payload as the energy rifle above apply to this weapon), water and rations for three weeks, collapsible tent (folds to the size of a laptop computer and comes with weather proofing and a heating/AC unit the size of a lunch box), multi-optics visor for helmet (looks like a normal faceplate with no visible optical lenses or protrusions), 1D4 land mines (3D6x10 damage, but only set off by pressure from weights of 500 lbs/225 kg or greater), field kit (first aid materials, wrenches and other tools, small electronics kit, scalpel, flashlight, etc.), and military styled armored clothes (camouflaged and reversible with two different patterns on each; worn under armor but does not add to the armor effects — use the better of the two; A.R.: 10, S.D.C.: 40).

Though the average soldier is not likely to own a spacecraft, he will certainly own some kind of conventional vehicle capable of negotiating most terrain. ATVs are common, but hover vehicles are usually the norm. Given the combat nature of this O.C.C. and the fact that the vehicle is likely to serve him in that capacity, the Game Master should consider allowing it to have light armor and a light weapon or two.

Optional Cybernetics: Two optic systems (infrared and thermal are common), one weapon (large blades and small forearm guns are common), and radio receiver/transmitter. The Atorians have also allowed the Thropo to develop a large, collapsible blade implant that emulates the katana-like blades they are so fond of. This implant replaces the forearm, since the collapsing blade needs all the mechanical space it can get, but when extended it forms a full-sized katana blade that

does 3D6 damage plus the user's P.S. damage bonus. This extensive system would be the character's only cybernetics if the G.M. would allow it (includes a bionic forearm which has 70 S.D.C. and can be used to parry weapons like a shield).

Average Salary: 2400 credits per month on average. Higher ranked Thropo or those in service to wealthier nobles can make 3000 to as much as 5000 credits a month. Some generals earn almost a quarter million credits, but "earn" is the key word, for the Empire tolerates mistakes and incompetence about as well as it tolerates male authority figures: not at all.

* Damage bonus is based on the number of dice the weapon does for damage. Each die gains a +1 to damage. For example, a 4D6 weapon would be +4 to damage, and a 1D4 weapon +1. The size of the dice used for damage doesn't affect the bonus. Rifles double this bonus.

Atorian Infantry Soldier O.C.C.

Atorian infantry soldiers are the mainstay of the elite Imperial armies. Each of them goes through rigorous military training, the equivalent to that of Earth officers, but such training doesn't mean they won't see action in the trenches or on the battlefield. It does mean that the armies composed of Atorian soldiers are the best trained troops in the galaxy. Stack that on top of the technology at their disposal and you have a formula for power that has not only endured, but dominated a large part of the galaxy for a thousand years. Many of these well trained soldiers will indeed become officers, most commanding armies or units of allied troops. However, most of them will serve as foot soldiers and front line warriors in the elite Imperial battalions that serve the Empresses, Clan Powers, and other highest ranking nobles. Such normally lowly assignments are rarely disdained, for such duty brings great prestige, great pay, and the absolute best equipment a soldier could ask for or desire.

Part leader, part special forces soldier, and part martial artist, the Atorian who actually makes it through the academies is a soldier's soldier. The process is rigorous and many do not make it, doomed to service in lower ranked armies or to return to a civilian way of life. Even if one makes it, there are numerous options for diversity and advancement, including bionics (extremely advanced, and indistinguishable from flesh and blood by most inspectors), super powers, advanced combat training, piloting, further leadership training, and special services (including bodyguard training, assassination skills, magic, psionic training, and others). The standard Atorian soldier fully outfitted for battle is a force to be reckoned with, even without augmentations like bionics, super abilities, and magic or psionics. The equipment detailed below is only a snippet of the advanced technology at their disposal, and the way the Empire applies all that tech can be frightening and often unsettling. There's no room in this article to discuss the capabilities of Atorian technology beyond these small examples, but rest assured the **Guide to Imperial Space** will present tons of it.

O.C.C. Skills

Detect Ambush (+20%)

Intelligence (+10%)

Climbing (+20%)



Prowl (+15%)

Read Sensory Equipment (+10%)

One Pilot Skill of choice.

Military Etiquette (+20%)

Languages: Select two (in addition to Atorian at 98% and the local trade tongue at +10%).

Zero Gravity Combat: Elite

W.P. Energy Rifle

W.P. Energy Pistol

W.P. Knife

W.P. Blunt

Hand to Hand: Martial Arts

Other Skills: Choose five other skills from the following list. At least one of these must be an additional Espionage skill and one must be a Military skill. If the character has super abilities, psionics, magic, bionics or robotics, then no additional skills are selected except for secondary skills.

Communications: Optic Systems and Radio: Basic only.

Domestic: Any.

Electrical: Basic Electronics only.

Espionage: Any (+15%).

Mechanical: Automotive and Basic Mechanics only.

Medical: First Aid and Paramedic only.

Military: Any (+15%).

Physical: Any (+10% where applicable).

Pilot: Basic: Any (+10%).

Pilot: Advanced: Any.

Pilot Related: Any.

Rogue: None.

Science: Mathematics only.

Technical: Any.

Weapon Proficiencies: Any.

Wilderness: Any (+10%).

Secondary Skills: In addition to the above skills, the character can select four secondary skills from the secondary skill list on page 47 of **Heroes Unlimited™, Second Edition**. As usual, these skills receive none of the bonuses listed above. The character can select three additional secondary skills at levels 3, 6, 9, 12 and 15.

Standard Equipment: Short range radio "throatset" (A band the thickness of cardstock sewn into the close fitting neck of the uniform, it can pick up the user's whispers clearly and transmit them to a range of 6 miles/9.6 km; has built in scrambler and can be boosted to ten times range with a hip pack about the size of a pack of cigarettes. A thin wire coils around the back of the ear and vibrates to relay received sounds clearly to the user, even in noisy surroundings.), refrigerated canteen (thermal plastic and very light, with filter system built in), dehydrated ration pills or injections (1 month's worth, but could be stretched to three with the right survival skills), energy knife (a tool, but still does 2D6+4 damage), camouflaging gear (a transmitter identical in size to the booster for the radio activates color changes across the battle armor and other equipment, providing local camouflage), electric "hot box" stove built into the palm of the battle armor for heating food or warming exposed extremities, UV protected contact lenses with built in nightvision and flash compensating shut off technologies (range: 800 feet/244 m), and 2D6 grenades if the demolitions skill is known (3D4x10 damage to a 20 foot/6 m area).

Atorian Standard Issue Battle Armor Suit: The standard issue battle armor suit, or SIBAS, is a close-fitting armored body suit designed not to hinder the soldier, to provide comfort and environmental protection, and to minimize purchase points for an enemy trying to grapple with the wearer. Except for the hip, shoulder, forearm and boot plates, the suit looks nothing like armor, and could be worn under any clothing or other armor if the plates were removed. This aspect adds a psychological weapon to the Atorian's arsenal, as the enemy blasts at the Imperial soldiers who have little or no obvious armor, and watch as their beams do damage to the targets who ignore it or get back up after a particularly nasty shot knocks them down. The throatset and camouflage of the armor are mentioned above, plus it has a number of other features, including cold and heat insulation, environmental system, force field generator (over the head in place of a helmet, for environmental seal as well as protection; 75 S.D.C. and perfectly clear/transparent), radiation shielding, magnetic boots, and a built-in kinetic suit lining (all these features are presented on pages 189 to 192 of **Revised Aliens Unlimited™**). One of the armored gauntlets has a mini-computer built in that would put our personal computers to shame, while the other has a micro-translator and target verification system (detailed in the **Galaxy Guide**). A compact backpack holds the rest of the soldier's equipment. Hidden beneath and within the armored gauntlets there are also two concealed weapons which emit visible beams of energy when fired, but are otherwise unnoticeable, giving the impression that the beams come from the hands of the soldier, and providing another psychological edge to the Empire. One weapon is a pulse laser (range: 1000 feet/305 m, damage: 2D6 or 6D6 for triple pulse, payload: 120 shots per hour, rate of fire: single shot or triple pulse) and the other is an ion beam (range: 500 feet/152 m, damage: 5D6, payload: 50 shots per hour, rate of fire: single shot). Special kinetic weaves in the gloves of the armor cause them to stiffen with impact to roughly the consistency of steel, providing the soldier with convenient, effective melee weapons (damage for punches is 2D6 +P.S. damage bonus; the gauntlets can be used like shields to parry weapons in combat, even energy weapons, but their small size imposes a penalty of -2 to parry with them). The armor itself is as durable as the heaviest composites found outside the Empire, but as noted it is no heavier or more bulky than an insulated body suit: A.R.: 17, S.D.C.: 200.

Side arms are usually left up to the individual soldier, but laser pistols are common (range: 1200 feet/366 m, damage: 2D6+3 or 6D6+10 for a triple pulse, payload: 30 shot e-clip, rate of fire: single shot or triple pulse). Each soldier is also issued a "heavy" combat rifle. The rifle consists of a high powered ion beam (range: 2000 feet/610 m, damage: 1D4x10, payload: 20 shot e-clip, rate of fire: single shot) and a primitive but situationally effective slug spitting shotgun (range: 500 feet/152 m from rocket assisted rounds, damage: 7D6+6 for advanced armor piercing slugs, payload: 8 shot clip, rate of fire: single shot with self ejecting mechanism) in an over-under configuration. An energy bayonet can also project from the ion barrel (which prevents that barrel from firing while it is active) that has the stats of an energy sword. The rifle is the size of the typical energy rifle despite its statistics, which are closer to that of the heavy ion rifle presented in

Aliens Unlimited™. It definitely packs a bigger punch than its appearance would indicate. All weapons, both built into the armor and hand-held, are +1 to strike.

Optional Cybernetics: One arm (matches character's stats in P.S. and P.P. and looks completely organic; has 80 S.D.C.), two optic systems (ultraviolet and nightvision are common), radio receiver/transmitter, and one hand weapon (a single finger gun or a chemical spray is common).

Average Salary: 2000 credits per month for the lowliest of Atorian soldiers, but the average salary falls closer to 3000, with officers making 5000 and those in higher positions or with titles of nobility making fifty to a hundred times that much (250,000 to 500,000 credits).



Shivana De Atoria, Empress and High Warlord

Each of the six Empresses is charged with a specific sphere of Imperial influence based on her natural talents and skills, as noted briefly in the above text. Shivana is the eldest of the Imperial Ladies in experience if not age, having been on her throne the longest of them all. She is the High Warlord, and commands all of the firepower of the entire Empire should it become necessary, but even outside of times of crisis, her own personal armies and space fleets are the largest, most diverse, and most

powerful of all her fellow Empresses. If any of the six Imperial Ladies can be said to wield the most power and influence over her fellows, it is Shivana. Individually she may not be the most powerful, especially when compared to the bionics, magic, psionics, and melee skills of some of her fellow Imperial Ladies, but properly outfitted in her power armor and personal weapons, she could quite possibly best all her fellows at the same time. Very few individuals in the galaxy have the skill and experience that Shivana De Atoria possesses.

Shivana is the Empire's tactician and general. It is her task to plan and execute the coming expansion as well as prepare for the next one to come, whether or not she will actually be around to supervise it. Without her skills, the Imperial expansion could proceed too quickly, prematurely or unevenly, and some of its fronts would collapse, diminishing its effectiveness. The Empire would not totally collapse as a result, but the weakness could be exploited by any number of enemies, and might actually result in some significant loss of power for the Empire. Shivana and her troops are also directly responsible for the security for all of the Throneworlds, and when allowed, personal security for the other Empresses. Delmar oversees and plans this security, both planetary and personal, but it is Shivana's troops that perform the duties. Each Empress has her own personal armies for protection, and the others usually do not want that much of Shivana's firepower surrounding them, just in case their fellow Empress gets any unsavory ideas about taking control, but it is tradition that the Warlord safeguard her fellows. It is also tradition that the Warlord be held responsible should something happen to one of the other Empresses, thus reining in much of the temptation to take advantage of such a situation. On occasion, Shivana herself has been known to act as personal escort for one of the other Empresses, but this kind of body-guarding is rare, since running a sixth of the largest Empire in the Milky Way takes up a great deal of Shivana's time.

Despite the dangers, Shivana is thrilled by combat, and all too often puts herself in the thick of combat on battlefields alongside her elite troops and amid the thick of the enemy. One look at the armor and weapons at her disposal and one can see why the risk is less than would normally be thought, but regardless, her fellow Imperial Ladies are constantly surprised that she has not yet gotten herself killed. Each battle seems to strengthen the Warlord, and when the time comes for the next expansion it is almost assured that she will be in the thick of it at the vanguard, dealing out the wrath and will of the Atorian Empire.

Shivana De Atoria

Alignment: Miscreant

Attributes: I.Q.: 18, M.E.: 24, M.A.: 19 (natural military leader), P.S.: 30, P.P.: 19, P.E.: 25, P.B.: 17, Spd.: 50. All of the Warlord's stats have been augmented with genetics, bionics, or other advanced technologies so advanced that it is not really necessary to delineate the source of each bonus. Basically, consider these to be her natural stats because for all intents and purposes they are; likewise, Hit Points, S.D.C. and other attributes or bonuses may derive from similar sources and will be artificially elevated.

Level of Experience: 20th level Military Specialist and Robot/Power Armor Pilot.

Hit Points: 150

S.D.C.: 245

A.R.: None naturally, but see armor below.

Height: 6 feet, 2 inches (1.88 m).

Weight: 195 lbs (87.75 kg).

Life Span: Appears to be in her middle to late twenties, which is approximately 150 years old by Atorian life spans; however, genetic treatments have likely prolonged her youth, so she is probably at least twice that age.

Major Super Abilities: None

Minor Super Abilities: None

Psionic Abilities: None.

Magical Abilities: None.

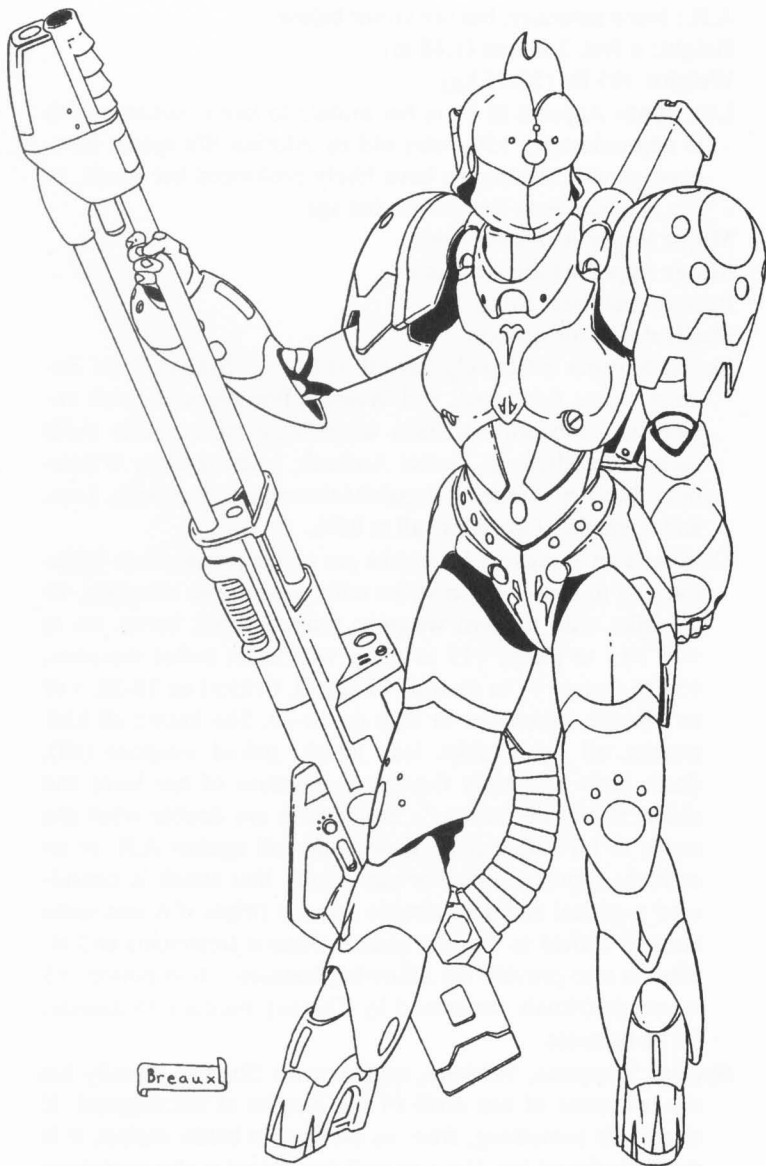
Skills: Shivana effectively has all Military, Physical, Pilot Related, Pilot: Advanced, and Weapon Proficiencies (both ancient and modern), at 98% where applicable. Other skills include Intelligence, Detect Ambush, Interrogation, Wilderness Survival, General Repair/Maintenance, Research, Law, and Computer Operation, all at 85%.

Combat and Bonuses: 10 attacks per melee round, +3 to initiative, +5 to strike, +9 to strike with most melee weapons, +9 to strike with modern weapons (aimed shots; bursts are at +7), +11 to parry, +15 to parry with most melee weapons, +11 to dodge, +7 to disarm, +9 to roll, Critical on 18-20, +19 to damage, knock out or stun on 18-20. She knows all kick attacks, all jump kicks, leap attack, paired weapons (all), death blow and body flip/throw. Because of her level and skills, if any of Shivana's attack rolls are double what she needs to hit (whether an unopposed roll against A.R. or an actively opposed dodge or parry roll), that attack is considered a critical and does double damage (triple if it was some kind of critical in the first place). Genetic treatments and attributes also provide the following bonuses: +6 vs poison, +5 vs magic (rituals performed by Thinae), immune to disease, +2 vs Psionics.

Special Weapons, Vehicles, and Armor: Shivana literally has the resources of one sixth of the Empire at her disposal. If she needs something, from an e-clip to a battle cruiser, it is there for the taking. Her personal equipment is also numerous and impressive. In order to conserve space in this article, only her power armor and its weaponry will be presented in detail. The only other item of note along these lines is her personal body armor, which she almost always wears. It is identical to the Atorian standard issue battle armor suit, except that is made of a metal mesh weave that is treated with the Atorian diamond armor process, making it very durable (use vehicle and robot armor rules instead of normal body armor rules; A.R.: 15, S.D.C.: 150). All other features and weapons are the same, but increase ranges of weapons and sensors by 25%, and instead of the night vision contact lenses, Shivana has completely realistic bionic optics (ultraviolet, infrared, and night vision with flash protection).

Shivana's Personal Power Armor

At the pinnacle of robot technology in the Milky Way galaxy are the automatons and war machines of the Atorian Empire, and at the cutting edge of those systems is Shivana's glorious chariot. Built of super advanced composites and alloys, layered with and coated by the legendary Atorian diamond armor technology, this war suit is unequalled in durability and structural strength. Couple that with some of the deadliest weaponry known to civilization and you have a frightening package, lim-



ited only by the fact that it is only a single unit and is too expensive for mass production. But rest assured, Shivana has found the money for a number of similar suits to be issued to trusted personal guards and elite commanders (all significantly less powerful than her own model, but impressive nonetheless). With the armor and weapons of a giant battlefield robot compacted into a single suit of powered armor, Shivana's battle suit is the closest thing to M.D.C. you will find in this S.D.C. game (and if you take it to **Rifts**®, it will certainly be an M.D.C. structure).

Name: Imperial Personal Warfare Battle Dress

Model Type: Imperial PWBD-02 (the 01 model was crippled in the battle of Yen Maut, ten years ago)

Class: Human-sized Combat Powered Armor

Crew: One; the medical computer in the armor has voice recognition programs that can not be fooled, and will administer lethal doses of toxins based on the physiology of any unauthorized user who attempts to operate the armor (the computer has an AI and can not be controlled by Telemechanics or Mechano-Link, nor can it be hacked, but cyberjack combat is possible, with the unit functioning as a 15th level robotic cyberjack with 98% skills; see **The Rifter™ #2** for cyberjacking rules).

Armor Rating: 17 (robotic); however, the armor is so advanced that not only does it use the robotic A.R. rules, but any weapon that is not vehicle classed (that is anything doing less than 7D6 damage with a single shot) can not damage the armor. Such small arms fire simply bounces off the heavy armor plating harmlessly. Even bursts from these weapons that do hundreds of points of damage will ricochet off, as each individual round or beam can not do enough damage to remove S.D.C. Larger weapons do not ignore the armor, but they do use the normal robotic A.R. rules for determining hits and damage.

Damage Capacity by location:

* Total Damage Capacity — 2000

** Helmet — 100

Gun Pod — 150

Main Thrusters (2) — 95 each

Shoulder Missile Pods (2) — 120 each

Rear Missile Pylons (2) — 100 each

**Forearm Weapon Pods (2) — 100 each

*** Main Body — 450

Legs (2) — 250 each

Arms (2) — 100 each

*The total damage capacity is listed for **Heroes Unlimited™** use, while the specific location capacities are mainly intended for use in **Rifts®** (in which case, convert all numbers directly to M.D.C.). Because of the A.R. system used in **Heroes Unlimited™**, if the G.M. is using called shots and specific location damage capacities in this game, the actual die roll on a called shot for a location, with no modifiers, should be used to determine if an attack defeats the A.R. rating. This way an attack may hit the desired location (with bonuses), but may not actually penetrate the armor (the die roll). Depleting the total S.D.C. completely destroys the robot.

** These targets are small or difficult to hit, and require a called shot at -3 to strike.

*** Depleting the damage capacity of the Main Body will shut the unit down completely.

Speed

Running: 200 mph (320 km) maximum.

Flying: The suit has full flight capabilities, with the large, main thrusters actually being able to collapse and fold upon themselves, making them virtually undetectable when not in use. Flight speed in an atmosphere is Mach 6 maximum, allowing escape velocity. The armor is trans-atmospheric and can enter and leave planetary gravity and atmosphere. In space, the armor can actually reach factor speed (it is the only known robot of its size that can do this), breaking the light barrier, but little more.

Statistical Data

Height: 7 feet (2.1 m).

Width: 3 feet (.9 m).

Weight: 400 lbs (180 kg) fully loaded.

Physical Strength: 25 (Supernatural; yes, it has the equivalent of Supernatural P.S. for lifting and damage purposes).

Power System: Super efficiency anti-matter battery system with a 16 year life span.

Development Cost/Black Market Cost: Yeah, right.

Weapon Systems

1. Atorian Micro-Missile Launchers (2 in shoulders): Cutting edge explosives and propellant technologies allow the armor to be outfitted with micro-missiles the size of "D" batteries that pack the punch of mini-missiles with the same range. The small size means that dozens of these missiles can be packed into the shoulder plates, where only a handful of normal mini-missiles would normally fit. Shivana uses these little gems for anti-personnel purposes, often to clear masses of foot soldiers from her immediate vicinity, thus armor piercing missiles, with their small blast radius and heavy punch, are preferred.

Primary Purpose: Anti-personnel

Secondary Purpose: Anti-Armor

Damage: 1D4x10 damage per micro-missile, with a blast radius of 3 feet (.9 m).

Rate of Fire: Single missile or in volleys of six per shoulder. Two, six missile volleys can be fired as a single action, one from each shoulder.

Maximum Range: 1 mile (1.6 km).

Payload: Each launcher holds 24 micro-missiles, for a total payload of 48 missiles.

2. Short Range Missile Pylons (2 on back): The two pylons that rise from the back of the armor are short range missile launchers. The missiles use advanced Atorian technologies to increase the punch of these smaller than standard short range missiles, making them comparable to the larger, standard short range missiles. They are used by Shivana for longer range, anti-armor purposes, making the larger blast radius and heavy damage of high explosive missiles more practical.

Primary Purpose: Anti-Armor

Secondary Purpose: Assault

Damage: 2D6x10 per missile, with a 15 foot (4.6 m) blast radius.

Rate of Fire: Single missile or in volleys of 2, 3 or 4 when both launchers fire simultaneously (counts as a single action).

Effective Range: 5 miles (8 km).

Payload: Each pylon holds six short range missiles, for a total payload of 12 missiles.

3. B-AGP07 Heavy Gun Pod: This oversized gun pod is one of Shivana's trademarks, and rightly so. Anyone who has faced it can attest to its destructive capabilities. Consisting of an over-under configured rail gun and particle beam, the large rifle packs quite a wallop. The straight line upper barrel is the rail gun, which fires kisentite slugs (stamped on each end with the Imperial seal and Shivana's own coat of arms). No known armor can stand up to the projectiles for long, even most vehicle armor; fortunately, the gun does not fire in bursts. The particle beam is one of the most powerful of its size in the galaxy, and can burn through just about anything (even doing half damage to invulnerable characters; those that are immune to energy attacks will be shot by the rail gun instead, once Shivana notes their protection). The gun pod also has a particle beam bayonet, but to activate it there must be at least two shots left in the e-clip. Every 2 minutes of use will drain 2 shots from the e-clip.

Primary Purpose: Assault

Secondary Purpose: Anti-Armor

Damage: Rail Gun: 3D4x10+10 per round, and effectively lowers any A.R. of the target by 4 points. Particle Beam: 3D6x10

per shot. The particle beam bayonet does 1D6x10+10 damage per hit.

Rate of Fire: Single shot or twin blast only.

Effective Range: In an atmosphere, the weapon ranges are 6,000 feet (1829 m) for the rail gun and 8000 feet (2438 m) for the particle beam.

Payload: 400 rounds per belt for the rail gun, with an emergency clip of 25 usually in the gun pod. The particle beam uses a long, super e-clip (actually the tube that appears to be the under barrel) that provides 40 shots. Two extra e-clips are normally carried on the back of the armor. Remember that this armor is designed to be able to engage in prolonged battlefield combat, and is outfitted with enough ammunition to do just that. Shivana will also rarely waste ammunition, and always applies it with practicality (which isn't to say she doesn't lay it on liberally when the situation dictates).

Bonuses: In addition to any other bonuses from the armor, the gun pod has its own high-tech sensor package that provides it with +2 to strike. The sensors also duplicate all of those found in the armor, thus providing a backup for the user, should either be destroyed.

4. Forearm Weapon Clusters (2): The two bulbous units on the lower forearms above the hands are each a compact cluster of smaller weapons, used as back-ups should the suit's heavier weapons be disabled, or they can be used for special applications. Each cluster has four barrels, three of which can extend to provide better range to the cold, heat, and laser weapons they contain, and the fourth which produces a high powered particle whip. The two weapon clusters can be fired independently, or simultaneously at the same target for double damage. Different weapons can fire or be active in the two units at the same time, but only the particle whips can function while any other weapon in the same cluster is fired. (The whip can be active, but each use counts as a melee attack. It can not be used in the same *action* as any of the ranged weapons.)

Primary Purpose: Anti-Personnel

Secondary Purpose: Assault

Damage: Particle Whip: 6D6 (1D6x10+10 for paired strikes).

Plasma Ejector: 4D6+10 (6D6+20 to frozen world aliens).

Pulse Laser: 3D6 single shot (1D6x10 triple pulse).

Dense Ice Gun: 5D6 per round (7D6 to thermal world aliens).

Rate of Fire: Particle Whip: Equal to Shivana's number of attacks per melee.

Plasma Ejector: Single shot only; equal to Shivana's number of attacks per melee.

Pulse Laser: Single shot or triple pulse only; equal to Shivana's number of attacks per melee.

Dense Ice Gun: Single Shot only; equal to Shivana's number of attacks per melee.

Effective Range: Particle Whip: 18 feet (5.4 m).

Plasma Ejector: 1,200 feet (366 m).

Pulse Laser: 4,000 feet (1200 m).

Dense Ice Gun: 750 feet (225 m).

Payload: Particle Whip: Unlimited.

Plasma Ejector: 10 shots per unit (20 total).

Pulse Laser: 24 shots per unit (48 total; a triple pulse uses three charges).

Dense Ice Gun: 20 shots per unit (40 total).

5. Hand to Hand Combat: The armor has a number of melee weapons built into it, giving it more than ample combat abilities in up-close battles. Damages include or reflect the Supernatural P.S. of the armor.

Number of Attacks: 4 (these are bonus attacks, added to Shivana's total number of attacks when she uses the armor).

Normal Punch: 3D6+10

Power Punch: 6D6+10 (counts as two attacks).

Kick: 4D6+12

Head Butt with Helmet Vibro-Blade Vane: 6D6

Retractable Foot Vibro-Blades: 5D6+15 (includes kicking damage).

Particle Whips (see #4 for details): 6D6 (1D6x10+10 for paired attacks).

Bonuses: (for the armor systems only; add to Shivana's bonuses

when using the armor) +12 to initiative (yes, +12), +4 to strike, +7 to strike with distance weapons (on aimed or single shots; no P.P. bonuses, but W.P. bonuses will add to this), +4 to parry, +3 to dodge, +6 to dodge in flight, and +5 to roll. Because of her level and skills, if any of Shivana's attack rolls are double what she needs to hit (whether an unopposed roll against A.R. or an actively opposed dodge or parry roll), that attack is considered a critical and does double damage (triple if it was some kind of critical in the first place, such as the case of a natural 20).

6. Other Robot Systems: If it's in the book, it's in the armor.

Shivana's battle suit is packed with every sensor and system imaginable, all miniaturized and integrated into the finest combat armor around. Boost the range of all sensors by 20+1D4x10%, and multiply the range of the radar and the number of targets tracked and identified by ten.

Ninjas & Superspies™

DESTINY'S CALL

An Adventure Campaign for Ninjas and Superspies™ and Mystic China™

By Erik Growen

Preamble and Basic Overview

Destiny's Call begins at the end of April, 1945. Germany is being soundly defeated by the combined Allied forces pressing in from the east and the west, and Japan's once sprawling Empire is falling island by island to the advancing Allies. The war is still a deadly one, and there is a lot of fighting to be done before Germany lies in ruins to a land invasion, and Japan surrenders after being hit with two atomic bombs. The O.S.S. (Office of Strategic Services, forerunner to the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency) operates within this still chaotic global situation. With the shift in emphasis from Germany to Japan by the U.S., the O.S.S. shifts its focus as well. One area of concern is Indochina.

The Player Characters, either O.S.S. agents themselves, or mercenaries, are selected/hired by the O.S.S. for this particular operation for their various skills and expertise. Their initial mission is to arm and train Viet Minh guerillas for their continuing struggle against the Japanese occupiers. The training proceeds and the team (known as Deer Team 2) begins to run small scale raids against the local Japanese forces. On one of these raids they discover the location of a secret Japanese Headquarters establishment which is responsible for the area in which they are operating. The Players mount an attack against the Headquarters (H.Q.), and find themselves up against a Chinese Infernal



Demon Overlord masquerading as a Japanese Colonel. A foe they have little, to no defense against, inevitably defeats the team soundly. They are saved during the chaos of the battle by an unknown ally.

The second phase of the campaign runs for nine years. This will allow for the Player Characters to be trained in new forms of martial arts and philosophies by a sect of monks who have dedicated themselves to the destruction of the Infernal Demon Overlord. They are tested to see if they can operate as an effective team before they are finally sent back into Indochina to hunt down their nemesis.

The third phase begins with Deer Team 2 hooking up with some French troops in a remote village near the Laotian border called Dien Bien Phu. They discover that the people they trained are fighting the French, whom the U.S. now supports. They dig around the village during the epic battle that heralds the end of French colonial rule in Indochina. Discovering the trail of the Overlord's right hand man, they track him down to a camp in Laos. They confront and defeat him and find out the location of the Overlord. He is in a Nationalist Chinese redoubt in the Himalayas in southern China.

The Players then head to the Himalayas for a final confrontation with the Overlord. To get there they have to travel through now Communist China unseen, get through the Nationalist Chinese defenses, and finally attack the monastery in the mountains. What ensues can be the culmination of the campaign, or just the beginning of further adventures against the Overlord, should he manage to escape.

About this Campaign

Destiny's Call has been structured as a campaign setting that can be used irrespective of the Hook, Line & Sinker adventure threads presented here. Game Masters should feel free to add or discard any of the elements they wish. Although *Destiny's Call* can be run through with its coherent plot line, plenty of room exists for expansion within each of the major phases of the campaign.

Destiny's Call is set up to run in three distinct phases. Each phase has a number of Hook, Line & Sinker adventures as well as set major encounters. The first phase takes place in 1945 and acts as the setup for the extended plot line. The second runs from 1945 to 1954 and presents a chance for the Player Characters to get training and assistance in their ongoing battle, as well as presenting a valuable ally. The third, and final, phase takes place in 1954 and culminates in a major showdown. As the campaign runs through a period of time not covered in *Ninjas & Superspies*TM or *Mystic China*TM, a section on conversions for the time period 1945-1954 has been included that covers weapons, aircraft, O.C.C. options, and skill modifications. I hope you enjoy running the campaign as much as I have enjoyed presenting it.

Player Character Options

The Player Characters start off the campaign as O.S.S. agents, or mercenaries recruited by the O.S.S. for this operation. This means the Player Characters are limited to the following O.C.C.s: Academy Officer, Veteran Grunt, Commando Mercenary, Operative Agent, Wandering Free Agent, Dreamer

Gizmoteer or Tinker Gizmoteer (bearing in mind the technology of the mid-1940s to mid-1950s).

Skill & Skill Program Restrictions

Skills Not Allowed in this Campaign:

Laser Communications
Microwave Communications
Microfilm/Microfiche/Microdot Technology
Radio: Satellite Relay
Computer Networks
Computer Operation
Computer Programming
Supercomputers
Computer Repair
Helicopter Mechanics
Jet Aircraft Mechanics
Pilot: Basic Helicopter
Pilot: Combat Helicopter
Pilot: Jet
Pilot: Fighter Jet
Orbital & Interplanetary Navigation
Astrophysics
W.P. Energy Weapons
W.P. Grenade Launcher
W.P. Infantry Missiles

Skill Programs Not Allowed in this Campaign:

Electronic Communication Gizmo
Telephone Hacking
Computer Hacking
Microchip Technology
Gizmoteer Cybernetics
Medical Cybernetics
Information Gathering
Helicopter Aviation

Note: Although rudimentary helicopters existed at this time, they were not employed in this theater of operations. If the G.M. so wishes, a Gizmoteer might have the helicopter skills that may come in useful in future adventures.

Other Skill Program Modifications:

Spy Network Administration — remove Computer Operation, Laser Communications & Microwave Communications, and add Language, Military Intelligence & Basic Electronics.
Security Specialist — remove Computer Operation and add Basic Electronics.
Electronic Warfare — remove Laser Communications and add Telephone Networks.
Intelligence — remove Microfilm/Microfiche/Microdot Technology and add Language.
Combat Aircraft — remove Jet Aircraft Mechanics and add Aircraft Mechanics.
Journalist — remove Computer Operation and T.V./Video and add Language.
Communication — remove T.V./Video and add Telephone Networks.
Science — remove Computer Operation and add 1 Science skill at +10%.

The rest of the Skill Programs may be used as presented in *Ninjas & Superspies*TM.

All O.S.S. agents must take the Basic: Cultural Skill Program with the following skills:

Wilderness Survival, Mountaineering, Fishing, Language: French and 1 skill of choice. Mercenaries working for the O.S.S. also have the option of taking this Skill Program, but they are not forced to do so.

Rules Additions

Battlefield Horror Factor (Morale)

This is derived from the Shell-Shock rules presented in *Rifts® World Book 11: Coalition War Campaign™*.

All Mystical creatures have a Horror Factor. This represents either the creature's appearance or their aura of evil and power, or a combination of the two. When confronted with such a creature, humans must roll 1D20 to see if they are momentarily stunned by the sheer horror of the thing. This roll is only made for the first melee of the encounter.

The battlefield has its own share of horrors that can shake a human's senses. Being caught in an ambush, having a close friend killed in front of you, etcetera. A save against battlefield horrors is made the same as a standard Horror Factor save. Roll 1D20 against the Horror Factor. To save, one must roll equal to or greater than the number. A successful save indicates that the individual is unaffected by the situation and may carry on without any modifiers. If failed the first time in a single battle, the individual loses 1 attack per melee and is -2 on initiative for the first round of combat only. If they subsequently fail a second save during the same battle, they lose all attacks per melee until they escape from facing the object/situation.

If the individual is faced with an imminent attack or a situation where he must overcome his fears (such as saving himself or his comrades), the individual can roll again to save. If successful, the individual can act but with only half of his attacks per melee, and all other combat bonuses are halved as well. A failed roll means no change.

Examples of Battlefield Horror Factors:

Battle or the sound of battle: H.F. 14

Bombardment by artillery or aircraft: H.F. 14

Outnumbered 3:1 or greater: H.F. 14

To initiate close combat: H.F. 15

Ambushed: H.F. 15

Commanding Officer hit: H.F. 16

Player or friend hit: H.F. 16

Torture or threat of torture: H.F. 17

World War II (1945) & Indochina War (1954) Weapons and Equipment World War II (circa 1945)

Weapons

.45 Colt Automatic 1911A1 Pistol

Country: U.S., **Cartridge:** .45 cal, **Feed:** 7 round box mag, **Weight:** 1.19 kg, **Length:** 21.9 cm, **Muzzle Velocity:** 250 mps, **Approx. Effective Range:** 50 m, **Damage:** 4D6.

P14 Nambu 8mm Pistol

Country: Japan, **Cartridge:** 8x21mm, **Feed:** 8 round box

mag, **Weight:** .907 kg, **Length:** 22.8 cm, **Muzzle Velocity:** 324.9 mps, **Approx. Effective Range:** 15 m, **Damage:** 1D8.

.45 Thompson M1 SMG

Country: U.S., **Cartridge:** .45 cal, **Feed:** 20 or 30 round box mag, **Weight:** 4.8 kg, **Length:** 85.2 cm, **Muzzle Velocity:** 282 mps, **Approx. Effective Range:** 200 m, **Damage:** 4D6.

O.S.S. M3 Silenced SMG

Country: U.S., **Cartridge:** .45 cal, **Feed:** 30 round box mag, **Weight:** 4.3 kg, **Length:** 91.7 cm, **Muzzle Velocity:** 234.1 mps, **Approx. Effective Range:** 150 m, **Damage:** 4D6.

M3A1 'Greasegun' SMG

Country: U.S., **Cartridge:** .45 cal, **Feed:** 30 round box mag, **Weight:** 3.47 kg, **Length:** 75.7 cm, **Muzzle Velocity:** 279.8 mps, **Approx. Effective Range:** 200 m, **Damage:** 4D6.

Arisaka Mod. 99 Rifle

Country: Japan, **Cartridge:** 7.7x56mmR, **Feed:** 5 round clip, **Weight:** 3.99 kg, **Length:** 111.7 cm, **Muzzle Velocity:** 682.4 mps, **Approx. Effective Range:** 550 m, **Damage:** 3D6.

M1 Carbine

Country: U.S., **Cartridge:** .30 cal, **Feed:** 15 or 30 round box mag, **Weight:** 2.286 kg, **Length:** 90.4 cm, **Muzzle Velocity:** 600.2 mps, **Approx. Effective Range:** 300 m, **Damage:** 3D6.

M1 Garand Rifle

Country: U.S., **Cartridge:** 7.62x63mm, **Feed:** 8 round clip, **Weight:** 4.3 kg, **Length:** 110.6 cm, **Muzzle Velocity:** 855 mps, **Approx. Effective Range:** 600 m, **Damage:** 4D6.

Browning M1919A4 Machine Gun

Country: U.S., **Cartridge:** 7.62x63mm, **Feed:** 250 round belt, **Weight:** 14.06 kg, **Length:** 104.4 cm, **Muzzle Velocity:** 853.4 mps, **Approx. Effective Range:** 1000 m, **Damage:** 4D6.

Browning M2 .50 cal Machine Gun

Country: U.S., **Cartridge:** 12.7x99mm, **Feed:** 105 round belt, **Weight:** 39.1 kg, **Length:** 165.3 cm, **Muzzle Velocity:** 810 mps, **Approx. Effective Range:** 6000 m, **Damage:** 1D6x10+10.

Type 99 Machine Gun

Country: Japan, **Cartridge:** 7.7x56mmR, **Feed:** 30 round box mag, **Weight:** 10.5 kg, **Length:** 118.7 cm, **Muzzle Velocity:** 677.8 mps, **Approx. Effective Range:** 700 m, **Damage:** 3D6.

60mm M19 Mortar

Country: U.S., **Weight:** 19.1 kg, **Length:** 81.9 m, **Effective Range:** 1790 m, **Damage:** 6D6x10, **Blast Radius:** 20 m.

MK II Pineapple Grenade

Country: U.S., **Weight:** .596 kg, **Effective Casualty Radius:** 10 m, **Effective Range:** 30 m, **Damage:** 1D6x10.

Mod 91 Grenade

Country: Japan, **Weight:** .533 kg, **Effective Casualty Radius:** 10 m, **Effective Range:** 40 m, **Damage:** 1D6x10.

Airplanes

Mitsubishi A6M Zero-sen "Zeke"

Country: Japan

A.R. 4, **S.D.C.** 250.

Span: 39 feet 4 1/2 inches (12 m), **Length:** 29 feet 8 3/4 inches (9.1 m).

Engine: 940 h.p. Nakajima Sakae 12 radial, **Speed:** 332 mph (614.8 kph), **Range:** 1162 miles (1870 km), **Operational Ceiling:** 32,180 feet (9808.5 m), **Speed Class:** 19, **T.M.F.:** 7.

Weapons:

2x 7.7mm type 97 machine guns in upper front fuselage.

Effective Range: 2296 feet (700 m), **Damage:** 3D6 each.

1x 20mm type 99 cannon in each wing.

Effective Range: 3280 feet (999.7 m), **Damage:** 1D8x10+10 each.

Could carry 1x 132 pound (60 kg) bomb under each wing.

Blast Radius: 30 feet (9.1 m), **Damage:** 1D4x100.

Curtiss P-40 Warhawk

Country: U.S.

A.R. 4, **S.D.C.** 300.

Span: 37 feet 4 inches (11.38 m), **Length:** 33 feet 4 inches (10.16 m).

Engine: 1360 hp Allison V-1710-81, **Speed:** 378 mph (609 kph), **Range:** 240 miles (386 km), **Operational Ceiling:** 38,000 feet (11,580 m), **Speed Class:** 20, **T.M.F.:** 6.

Weapons:

3x Browning .50 cal machine guns in each wing.

Effective Range: 2460 feet (749.8 m), **Damage:** 1D6x10+10 each.

Could carry 3x 500 pound AN-M64 (226.8 kg) bombs.

Blast Radius: 45 feet (13.7 m), **Damage:** 1D6x100.

North American P-51 Mustang

Country: U.S.

A.R. 4, **S.D.C.** 300.

Span: 37 feet 1/4 inches (11.28 m), **Length:** 32 feet 3 3/4 inches (9.85 m).

Engine: 1490 hp Packard Rolls-Royce Merlin V-1650-7, **Speed:** 437 mph (704 kph), **Range:** 2080 miles (3347 km), **Operational Ceiling:** 41,900 feet (12,770 m), **Speed Class:** 22, **T.M.F.:** 7.

Weapons:

3x Browning .50 cal machine guns in each wing.

Effective Range: 2460 feet (749.8 m), **Damage:** 1D6x10+10 each.

Could carry 2x 1000 pound AN-M65 (453.6 kg) bombs.

Blast Radius: 90 feet (27.4 m), **Damage:** 1D10x100.

Douglas C-47 Skytrain/Dakota (DC-3)

Country: U.S.

A.R. 5, **S.D.C.** 500.

Span: 95 feet (29 m), **Length:** 64 feet 2 inches (19.6 m).

Engine: 2x Pratt & Whitney R-1830-90B Twin Wasp, **Speed:** 229 mph (424.1 kph), **Range:** 2125 miles (3419.8 km), **Operational Ceiling:** 23,200 feet (7070 m), **Speed Class:** 15, **T.M.F.:** 4.

Weapons: None.

Note: Could carry up to 28 troops.

Average Troop Statistics

Average Japanese Soldier (Veteran Grunt)

Hit Points: 15, **S.D.C.:** 25, **Chi:** 15.

Attacks per Melee: 2

Martial Arts Form: Basic Hand to Hand (Agent).

Armed with: Arisaka Mod. 99 Rifle.

Average Viet Minh Guerilla (Veteran Grunt)

Hit Points: 15, **S.D.C.:** 20, **Chi:** 15.

Attacks per Melee: 2

Martial Arts Form: Basic Hand to Hand (Agent).

Armed with: M1 Garand, Arisaka Mod. 99 Rifle or MAS 36 Rifle.

Average OSS Deer Team Member (Operative Agent)

Hit Points: 15, **S.D.C.:** 15, **Chi:** 15.

Attacks per Melee: 3

Martial Arts Form: Expert Hand to Hand Commando (Agent).

Armed with: OSS M3 silenced SMG.

Indochina War (circa 1954)

Weapons

Note: The Viet Minh used Japanese, U.S., and French weapons from WW II, plus more modern captured French weapons, as well as Soviet small arms supplied through Chinese supply routes. Both the Chinese troops and the Viet Minh used weapons from the U.S.S.R.

Tokarev M1933 Pistol

Country: U.S.S.R., **Cartridge:** 7.62x25mm, **Feed:** 8 round box mag, **Weight:** .769 kg, **Length:** 19.5 cm, **Muzzle Velocity:** 420 mps, **Approx. Effective Range:** 50 m, **Damage:** 1D8.

MAS Model 1950 Pistol

Country: France, **Cartridge:** 9x19mm, **Feed:** 9 round box mag, **Weight:** .86 kg, **Length:** 21.9 cm, **Muzzle Velocity:** 354 mps, **Approx. Effective Range:** 50 m, **Damage:** 3D6.

PPsh-41 SMG

Country: U.S.S.R., **Cartridge:** 7.62x25mm, **Feed:** 35 round box mag or 71 round drum, **Weight:** 3.5 kg, **Length:** 84.2 cm, **Muzzle Velocity:** 487.7 mps, **Approx. Effective Range:** 200 m, **Damage:** 1D8.

MAT-49 SMG

Country: France, **Cartridge:** 9x19mm, **Feed:** 32 round box mag, **Weight:** 4.14 kg, **Length:** 71 cm, **Muzzle Velocity:** 353.9 mps, **Approx. Effective Range:** 200 m, **Damage:** 3D6.

MAS Model 38 SMG

Country: France, **Cartridge:** 7.65x17mm, **Feed:** 32 round box mag, **Weight:** 2.87 kg, **Length:** 73.4 cm, **Muzzle Velocity:** 351 mps, **Approx. Effective Range:** 200 m, **Damage:** 2D6.

SKS Rifle

Country: U.S.S.R., **Cartridge:** 7.62x39mm, **Feed:** 10 round clip, **Weight:** 3.85 kg, **Length:** 102.1 cm, **Muzzle Velocity:** 734.9 mps, **Approx. Effective Range:** 400 m, **Damage:** 4D6.

MAS 36 Rifle

Country: France, **Cartridge:** 7.5x54mm, **Feed:** 5 round box mag, **Weight:** 3.67 kg, **Length:** 101.9 cm, **Muzzle Velocity:** 823 mps, **Approx. Effective Range:** 500 m, **Damage:** 5D6.

MAS 49 Rifle

Country: France, **Cartridge:** 7.5x54mm, **Feed:** 10 round box mag, **Weight:** 4.7 kg, **Length:** 110 cm, **Muzzle Velocity:** 823 mps, **Approx. Effective Range:** 600 m, **Damage:** 5D6.

MAS 49/56 Rifle

Country: France, **Cartridge:** 7.5x54mm, **Feed:** 10 round box mag, **Weight:** 3.9 kg, **Length:** 102 cm, **Muzzle Velocity:** 817 mps, **Approx. Effective Range:** 600 m, **Damage:** 5D6.

DP Machine Gun

Country: U.S.S.R., **Cartridge:** 7.62x54mmR, **Feed:** 47 round pan, **Weight:** 9.12 kg, **Length:** 129 cm, **Muzzle Velocity:** 841.2 mps, **Approx. Effective Range:** 800 m, **Damage:** 4D6.

Model 24/29 Machine Gun

Country: France, **Cartridge:** 7.5x54mm, **Feed:** 25 round box mag, **Weight:** 9.24 kg, **Length:** 108.2 cm, **Muzzle Velocity:** 850.1 mps, **Approx. Effective Range:** 800 m, **Damage:** 5D6.

Aircraft

Grumman F8F-2 Bearcat

Country: U.S./France.

A.R. 5, **S.D.C.** 300.

Span: 35 feet 10 inches (10.9 m), **Length:** 27 feet 10 inches (8.5 m).

Engine: 2250 h.p. Pratt & Whitney R-2800-30W, **Speed:** 447 mph (827.8 kph), **Range:** 2200 miles (3540.1 km), **Operational Ceiling:** 42,000 feet (12,801.6 m), **Speed Class:** 23, **T.M.F.:** 6.

Weapons:

2x Browning .50 cal machine guns in each wing.

Effective Range: 2460 feet (749.8 m), **Damage:** 1D6x10+10 each.

Could carry 2000 pounds (907.2 kg) of bomb under the wings on pylons.

AN-M57 250 pound (113.4 kg) bomb.

Blast Radius: 40 feet (12.2 m), **Damage:** 1D4x100.

AN-M64 500 pound (226.8 kg) bomb.

Blast Radius: 45 feet (13.7 m), **Damage:** 1D6x100.

Martin B-26B Marauder

Country: U.S./ France.

A.R. 6, **S.D.C.** 500.

Span: 65 feet (19.8 m), **Length:** 58 feet 3 inches (17.8 m).

Engine: 2x 2000 h.p. Pratt & Whitney Twin Wasp R-2800-41,

Speed: 311 mph (575.9 kph), **Range:** 1000 miles (1609.3 km), **Operational Ceiling:** 21,000 feet (6400 m), **Speed Class:** 18, **T.M.F.:** 5.

Weapons:

1x Browning .50 cal flexible nose gun.

2x Browning .50 cal guns in dorsal turret.

1x Browning .50 cal guns in ventral position.

2x Browning .50 cal guns in tail turret.

Effective Range: 2460 feet (749.8 m), **Damage:** 1D6x10+10 each.

Could carry 8000 pounds (3628.7 kg) of bombs in internal bomb bay (standard load was only 4000 pounds/1814.4 kg).

AN-M65 1000 pound (453.6 kg) bomb.

Blast Radius: 90 feet (27.4 m), **Damage:** 1D10x100.

AN-M64 500 pound (226.8 kg) bomb.

Blast Radius: 45 feet (13.7 m), **Damage:** 1D6x100.

AN-M57 250 pound (113.4 kg) bomb.

Blast Radius: 40 feet (12.2 m), **Damage:** 1D4x100.

Average Troop Statistics

Average French Soldier (Veteran Grunt)

Hit Points: 15, **S.D.C.:** 25, **Chi:** 15.

Attacks per Melee: 2

Martial Arts Form: Basic Hand to Hand (Agent).

Armed with: MAS 49 Rifle.

Average French Foreign Legion Soldier (Veteran Grunt)

Hit Points: 15, **S.D.C.:** 25, **Chi:** 15.

Attacks per Melee: 3

Martial Arts Form: Expert Hand to Hand Commando (Agent).

Armed with: MAS 49/56 Rifle.

Average Nationalist Chinese Soldier (Veteran Grunt)

Hit Points: 15, **S.D.C.:** 25, **Chi:** 15.

Attacks per Melee: 2

Martial Arts Form: Basic Hand to Hand (Agent).

Armed with: M1 Garand Rifle.

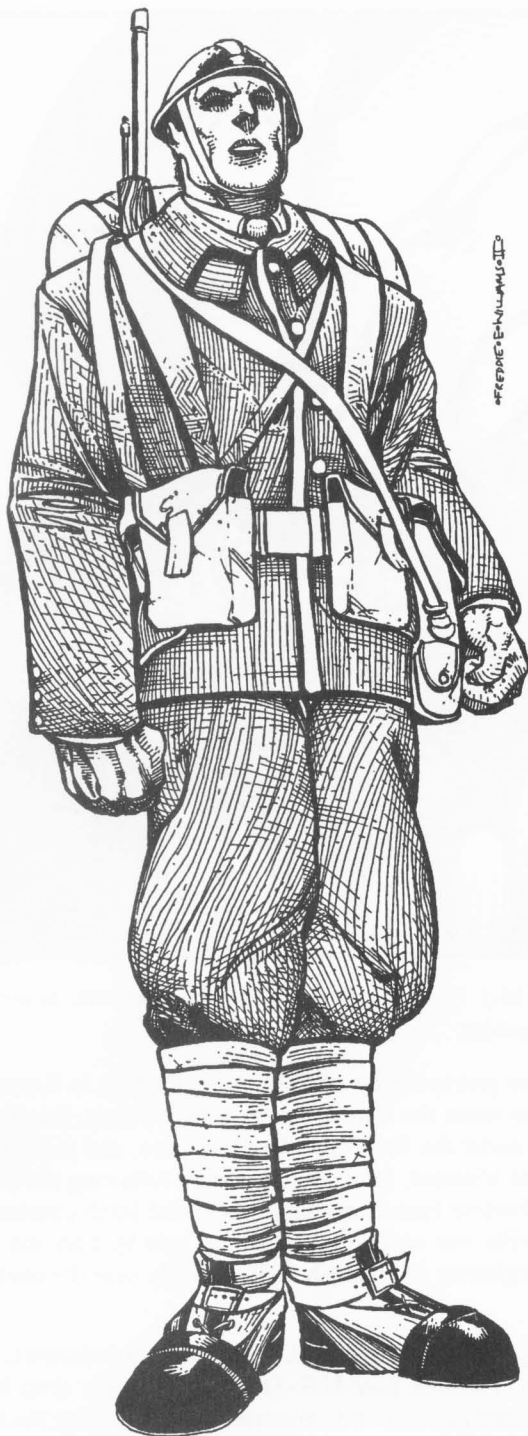
Kit:

Binoculars & Telescopes (no IR, UV, Night Vision or Thermal Imagers)

Field Radio

Basic Lock Pick Set

Superior Lock Pick Set



Campaign Background

Behind the scenes plans and motivations

The Infernal Demon Overlord, I Gui ("Righteous Demon")/Japanese Colonel Zenji Orita's Story: I Gui works for the Yama King Yen Lo Wang, King of the Fifth Hell and foremost watcher of mortals. Disturbed by the invasion of China by the Japanese, Yen Lo Wang sends the Overlord to see what he might do to ensure the Japanese Oni (mystical beings) do not get a firm toe-hold on the mainland in China. The Overlord accepts the honor of disrupting what Japanese moves he can, while ensuring the survival of the demonic mystic beings of China.

To this end, he devises a plan to create a safe haven in northern Indochina (Vietnam) that can be used by like-minded Chinese mystical beings such as Infernal Demons, Damned Immortals and their followers and pets to rest between assaults against the Japanese Oni invaders. He would like to accomplish a second task by disrupting the Japanese in a place they appeared fairly vulnerable: Indochina. To cover his tracks from the Japanese, he creates a plan to work from within the ranks of the Japanese themselves and use them to create the safe haven for him. They will be none the wiser, and he will siphon off some of the Japanese troops in Indochina.

He takes the guise of a Japanese Colonel who had been killed in combat against the Viet Minh in an ambush. He eventually maneuvers himself into a position where he is in charge of two battalions of Japanese troops, whom he leads off into the jungle under the ruse of a mission to destroy the Viet Minh guerillas. Once far from the prying eyes of the Japanese Headquarters, he sets his troops to the task of clearing an area of the mountainous jungle near the Laotian border of all the population, and to building a fortified Headquarters. At this point the Player Characters intervene in his plan. After defeating the Players, he sees that the area has been compromised and heads off to the Himalayas to set up a new redoubt against the twin onslaughts of the Japanese and the Communist Chinese. He leaves his right-hand man, a Damned Immortal, in Laos to continue hit and run raids against the Japanese and Viet Minh alike.

Phase 1: Indochina (1945)

Historical Background for O.S.S.

Operations in Indochina, 1945

Once a French colony, Indochina falls swiftly to the invading Japanese. Since then, an indigenous resistance force has sprung up to fight off the Japanese and to win their independence. Known as the Viet Minh, they are led by an enigmatic figure named Nguyen That Thanh, also known as "The General" or more commonly, Ho Chi Minh. Heading the mission to Indochina is veteran O.S.S. Major Archimedes L. A. Patti. Patti operates from 1941-43 in North Africa, Sicily and Salerno and is on his way to Anzio when re-directed to Asia on the 21st of January, 1944.

His specific instructions are to establish an intelligence network in the entire peninsula of Indochina. He is to assist all Allied forces, British, French, Chinese, and American, in combating the Japanese. He is, however, NOT to help the French in re-occupying Indochina in any way whatsoever. The U.S. gov-

Bolt Cutters
Wire Cutters
Flak Jacket, A.R. 10, S.D.C. 50
Flashlight
Camera & Film
Telescope x25
Barbed Wire
Dynamite
Climbing Gear
Medical Gear



ernment's position on prior colonial holdings is still in limbo as of this time. President Roosevelt privately pushes forward a policy of self-determination for Indochina (and the rest of the colonial holdings in the Pacific), but he dies on April 12th, 1945. President Truman shelves independence immediately to placate his French Allies. Patti also needs to establish escape routes for U.S. fliers shot down over the area. These goals are the ones the Player Characters are to follow.

Patti agrees to a secret meeting on China's southern border with "The General" who leads a ragtag army of exiles (the Viet Minh) fighting in Indochina. The Player Characters are along with Patti, and they get a chance to meet Ho Chi Minh (a name meaning "he who enlightens"). Ho Chi Minh is a frail, stooped 54 year old man with a wispy beard, who speaks perfect English. "The General" asks for official U.S. recognition of the Viet Minh as the rightful government in exile, and Patti asks for contacts and information. By the end of the meeting it is decided to leave the independence issue alone for now, but the O.S.S. will begin to arm and train Viet Minh guerillas for operations against the Japanese.

Maj. Patti chooses Kunming, in southern China, as the headquarters for his O.S.S. operations. The 23rd Fighter Group is also stationed there, consisting of a few of the famous ex-"Flying Tigers" with a mix of their old P-40 Warhawk fighters and some new P-51D Mustangs, under the command of Colonel Ed Rector. It does not take long for the French to find this out. French Major Jean Sainteny, a veteran of the Deuxieme Bureau since the early 1930s, arrives in Kunming in May 1945 to establish a French counterpart, M-5 or Mission-5, to the O.S.S.

operation. M-5 had already established a network along the Indochina border.

While the jockeying for position was going on in Kunming, the Japanese name the former Emperor of Vietnam, Bao Dai, a figurehead under the French, as Head of State, and re-establish the names of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia following the crushing of an abortive French uprising. Ho's Viet Minh continue to fight a guerilla war against the Japanese, and by May the Viet Minh are beginning to establish their authority over the countryside.

Planning begins for the first U.S. operation in Indochina: Operation Deer Team. A joint U.S.-French paratrooper drop lands at an important Japanese communications center near the Chinese border. Due to numerous run-ins with Sainteny, Patti chooses to run operations with the Viet Minh and not the French. A new Deer Team op is planned using U.S. and Viet Minh. The 23rd Fighter Group can provide limited air support for operations within Indochina, using P51D Mustangs. On the 16th of July 1945, a 50 man O.S.S. Team paratroops into a village (Tan Trao) 75 miles (120 km) northeast of Hanoi. A second Team (the Player Character's Team) of 50 men paratroops into the Tay Bac valley near the border of Laos. The first Team spreads out with troops under General Vo Nguyen Giap. The O.S.S. Teams are to train and arm the Viet Minh for joint combat operations. In one month, the O.S.S. can train about 200 handpicked future leaders of the Viet Minh (whom they will meet again later in 1954). They begin small-scale combat operations against isolated Japanese outposts.

Into Indochina 1945

Note: The jungle generally has 3-6 points of Positive Chi flowing through it.

The New Home in Tay Bac

Hook: The Players are given the equipment they will need to create their base camp. Flown in on two C-47s are the following:

5x crates of M1 Garand Rifles (20 rifles per crate)
20x crates of 7.62x63mm ammunition (500 rounds per crate)
4x crates of Mk II Pineapple Grenades (30 Grenades per crate)
2x Browning .50 cal machine guns with Anti-Aircraft mounts
6x crates of .50 cal ammunition (315 rounds/3 belts per crate)
20x Rolls of Barbed Wire
500x Sand Bags
2x Medical Gear
3x Field Radios
30x Batteries for Field Radios
10x Flak Vests
10x Flashlights
2x Telescopes
5x Binoculars
2x 60mm M19 Mortars
100x 60mm HE rounds
40x 60mm Flare rounds
60x 60mm Smoke rounds
30x Shovels
10x Pick-Axes
20x Wood Axes
30x Machetes

More equipment can be requested through Major Patti. It is up to the G.M. to give the final okay to any requested items. It should be limited to more of what they already have and only small arms for weapons (i.e. no howitzers).

Line: The first order of business is to upgrade the patch of dirt they land on into a proper airstrip. The strip is located in the Tay Bac river valley in northwestern Indochina, not far from the Laotian border (and Dien Bien Phu). The initial airstrip is hacked out of the jungle by the Viet Minh. It is completely up to the players to design their camp and its defenses. This should take the team at least a week. The next priority is to train the 200 Viet Minh on the new weapons the O.S.S. team has brought with them. This is where they first meet General Giap, who flies in to check on their progress. He insists, initially, that the Viet Minh should be in charge of the operation over all.

Sinker: The Player's orders say nothing of this. Giap will back down if there is any threat of being cut off by the O.S.S. He needs the weapons and training too badly to really press the point.

The training phase should last at least a few weeks. During this time the team may experience the following training events:

- Accidental discharge of weapon by one of the Viet Minh results in the near fatal shooting of a fellow guerilla.
- Various shooting incidents including trouble with the safety catch, closing eyes while shooting, using the wrong eye, holding the weapon out from the shoulder, etc.

- Viet Minh tries to clear a jam by ramming a cleaning rod down the barrel.
 - Trainees blasting everything but the target.
 - Viet Minh shoots himself in the foot after forgetting to put the safety on.
 - Various potentially lethal grenade mishaps.
 - Mortar team trainee accidentally blows up his own home.
- Feel free to add any other incidents to the training regimen.

First Strike!

Hook: The Player Characters are to mount a strike against a minor Japanese outpost with a few Viet Minh. But M-5 wants to have a piece of the action with the O.S.S. troops, leaving the Viet Minh behind. This would go against the training and orders of the O.S.S. team, but the local M-5 officer, Captain Henri Joffre, does not want to hear anything about that. He offers a squad of his men (2 Frenchmen and 8 Vietnamese Colonial troops) to provide the firepower (or at least to observe). He is very persistent. If denied he threatens to go to his superior, Major Sainteny, who will pass on the objection to Patti, which will cause a nice diplomatic row. M-5 has small teams scattered along the border area with Laos. Major Sainteny called in this particular group specifically to co-ordinate actions with the O.S.S., however, Major Patti was not informed of this.

Line: The isolated Japanese outpost is in a small village called Ban Tin Tac, a local crossroads. The only Japanese presence in the village is a reinforced squad of men. The entire force consists of 16 men armed with rifles and 2 machine guns in sand-bagged positions, one on either end of the village. They are there to ensure the villagers' crops make their way to the Japanese occupying force in Hanoi. At any given time only half of the troops will be on active guard duty, with the other half wandering about, playing cards or sleeping. The group is under the command of a Lieutenant.

Sinker: During the mop up from the operation, the Players learn, either from captured documents or from a prisoner, the name of the Colonel who is in charge of the Japanese operations in the area: Colonel Zenji Orita (the Overlord).

If the Team does not allow the French to accompany the operation, Capt. Joffre radios the M-5 H.Q. in Kunming to complain to Major Sainteny. The Major goes to Major Patti with his complaints, however Patti will back the decision of the Players. Tensions rise between the French and O.S.S. forces.

Document Control

Hook: Major Patti orders Deer Team 2 on a mission to strike and destroy an important Japanese communications post at Ban Na Song, located on the highway to Dien Bien Phu, a major logistical site. This will have the effect of temporarily cutting off the supply line to the Japanese troops operating near the border, as well as forcing them to divert more manpower to defend the site once they rebuild it.

Line: The radio site is defended by a platoon of Japanese (35 men and 1 officer) armed with 5 machine guns in wood reinforced earthen bunkers. The village is surrounded with barbed wire and punji stake traps which do 1D6 damage.

Sinker: The Players learn the location of Colonel Orita's H.Q. which is found to be located at Ban Na Phai to the southeast. The location is discovered by going through documents captured in the communications building that were not destroyed in time by the Japanese radioman.

Counterpoint

Hook: Colonel Orita's (the Overlord's) right hand man in Indochina, a Damned Immortal named Lt. Kennosuke Torisu/Chung Hu ("Loyal Tiger"), leads an attack on the O.S.S. base supported by two Zero fighters.

Line: The Zeros will bomb and strafe the O.S.S. airstrip/camp. The ground forces consist of at least two companies (180 men) of infantry armed with six Type 99 machine guns and a pile of grenades for everyone. Their objective is to damage the airstrip and to destroy the H.Q. building/bunker, as well as to kill as many of the O.S.S. training team as possible.

Sinker: The defense will depend entirely on how well the Player Characters set up their camp. It could just as easily end in a Japanese rout as an O.S.S. massacre. The keys to the defense will be the .50 cal Anti-Aircraft machine guns, the radios (so they can coordinate the defense properly) and the placement of the troops. The O.S.S. characters will undoubtedly have to be in the forefront, leading the defense by example.

Note: The "T.M.F." of flying craft is a negative modifier to strike, applied to the rolls of someone attacking the plane. For example, a Player is firing one of the .50 cal AA machine guns at a Zero (T.M.F.: 7). He would be -7 to strike as the plane flies overhead.

The Japanese Lt. Kennosuke Torisu/Chung Hu ("Loyal Tiger")

Damned Immortal

Age: 1043 years old.

Alignment: Diabolic.

Negative Chi: 16

The Eight Attributes: I.Q. 11, M.E. 13, M.A. 12, P.S. 21, P.P. 12, P.E. 16, P.B. 10, Spd. 11.

Hit Points: 132, **S.D.C.:** 305, **P.P.E.:** 15.

Level of Experience: 10th level Jian Shih O.C.C.

Martial Arts: Shih Ba Ban Wu Yi (Eighteen Weapons).

Attacks per Melee: 5

Escape Moves: Roll with punch/fall/impact and maintain balance.

Basic Defensive Moves: Dodge, parry, and automatic parry.

Advanced Defenses: Multiple dodge and circular parry.

Open Hand Attacks: Strike (punch), knife-hand and palm strike.

Basic Foot Attacks: Kick attack and snap kick.

Jumping Foot Attacks: Leap attack (with weapon) and jump kick.

Holds/Locks: None.

Weapon Katas: W.P. Axe (+4 to strike, +4 to parry, +3 to throw), W.P. Blunt (+4 to strike, +4 to parry, +3 to throw), W.P. Chain (+4 to strike and entangle, +3 to parry, +1 to throw), W.P. Forked (+5 to strike, +3 to parry, +3 to throw, +4 to entangle), W.P. Polearm (+4 to strike, +6 to parry, +3 to throw), W.P. Spear (+4 to strike, +4 to parry, +3 to throw), W.P. Staff (+4 to strike, +6 to parry, +3 to throw), W.P.

Large Sword (+4 to strike, +5 to parry, +2 to throw), W.P. Short Sword (+4 to strike, +3 to parry, +3 to throw), W.P. Whip (+4 to strike and entangle, +3 to parry, +1 to throw), W.P. Bow (+6 to strike, 7 shots per melee), W.P. Crossbow (+5 to strike, 6 shots per melee), W.P. Knife-Paired, W.P. Short Sword-Paired, W.P. Paired Large Sword & Knife, W.P. Paired Short Sword & Knife.

Modifiers to Attacks: Pull punch, knock-out/stun and critical strike.

Weapon Tap (Special): The attack does **no** damage, but makes a loud snap or bang by knocking the weapon against some part of the opponent's body or equipment. Getting a bang off a belt buckle, the skull, or a weapon is considered the most challenging. It adds +10% to any roll to impress or intimidate.

Martial Art Abilities or Powers:

1. "Fortress Penetration" Kata or Bassai Kata: +3 to strike, -3 to parry, dodge & roll.

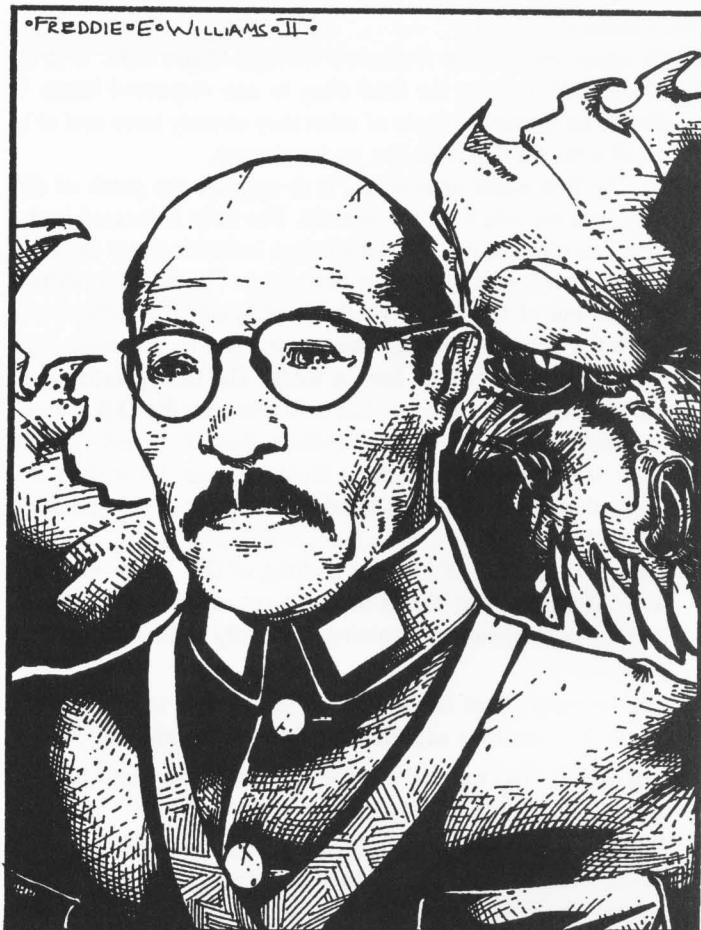
2. "Warrior Spirit" Kata or Debana-O-Kujiki Kata: Boosts M.A. to 20. Opponent must roll over 20% or be -4 to strike.

3. "Windmill" Kata or Yadomejutsu Kata: Automatically deflects all hand propelled projectiles, including arrows, spears, darts and rocks. Can only defend, not attack.

Language Skill: Chinese (Mandarin): Stage 2/Chinese Literacy 120%.

Philosophical Training: Taoism, 98%.

Bonuses: +3 to save vs pain, +3 on initiative, +1 to save vs Horror Factor, +1 to strike with a thrown weapon, +1 to pull punch/strike, +3 to roll with impact or fall, +2 to strike, +3 to parry, +3 to dodge, +10 to damage, critical strike on 18-20, knock-out/stun on 19-20.



O.C.C. Skills: Paramedic 120%.

O.C.C. Related Skills: Shell Game 65%, Feng Shui 65%, Jungle Survival 98%, Detect Ambushes 90%.

Secondary Skills: Meditation 13%, Military Intelligence 82%, Language: Japanese 95%, Basic Radio 98%.

Bonus Skills: W.P. Mortar (+4 to strike), Land Navigation 70%, Sniper (+2 to strike), W.P. Pistol (+4 to strike).

Immortal Powers & Abilities:

Superhuman: Fatigues at one third normal rate, +1 to save vs magic, heals twice as quickly as normal humans, stops aging and "feels" young, powerful and vital.

Incredible Healing: Impervious to disease, +10 to save vs drugs and poison, +3 to save vs pain, +4 to save vs Horror Factor, regenerates 6D6 Hit Points or S.D.C. every ten minutes and can regenerate a lost limb or eye within seven days.

Call Infernal Master: This bond allows the Overlord to spy on him at any time and allows the Immortal to contact the Overlord (who may, or may not, wish to respond).

Negative Chi Mastery: Negative Chi Attack, One Finger Chi, Fist Gesture and Dark Chi abilities.

Transform to Pure Negative Chi: The body completely dissolves, leaving nothing behind. While in the Negative Chi state, he can recover any lost Negative Chi, but only when in a Negative Chi environment. He is vulnerable only to Chi, magic and psionic attacks, and is impervious to any physical or energy based attacks. He re-materializes in one melee round (15 seconds) and is helpless during this time. If he enters a Positive Chi area while in a state of Pure Negative Chi, the normal flow of Positive Chi will automatically Chi Attack him at a rate of 3D6 points of damage to Negative Chi for every point of Chi flow in the area.

Demon/Infernal Shape: He can change shape at will into a likeness of the Overlord. The change takes one full melee round, during which he can do nothing else. He is now about 12 years away from becoming useless as a servant, as he will lose the ability to shift back into human form.

Gear: Uniforms of a Japanese Captain and a Chinese Captain, Giao Tzu Jen sword (2D6+2), 2 Biau Dau throwing knives (1D6, range 60 feet/18.3 m), Bi Shou dagger (1D4), Shi-Zi Jen sword of exceptional quality and age (3D6), P-14 Nambu 8mm pistol.

The Lieutenant's Story: Chung Hu is only 10th level in spite of his age, as the Overlord tends to send him on long term, meaningless assignments in order to keep him in line. The Overlord also keeps him chained to the bureaucratic desk to ensure that his paperwork is in order for the Yama King. Chung Hu, therefore, has actually not spent that much of his long life in the realm of mortals. He has been doggedly loyal however, and that is why he was entrusted to be part of the Overlord's plans in Indochina. Chung Hu does everything he can to defeat the O.S.S. characters and thus gain more respect from the Overlord. This is becoming a real necessity as he is nearing the end of his "usefulness" to the Overlord, when he changes permanently into demon form and therefore loses the ability to travel among mortals, which will occur in about 12 years.

Battle of Ban Na Phai (Overlord's H.Q.)

Note: The temple has 4 points of Negative Chi flowing through it.

This battle should be done in a very "James Bond-esque" style, with the O.S.S. team and their Viet Minh allies (plus possibly even the French) raiding the Overlord's H.Q. in Indochina full of Japanese soldiers. The Player Characters should take the forefront during the approach to the camp, hopefully arriving close to it without being discovered. They can then launch a surprise attack against the compound. Defending the H.Q. are two companies of Japanese troops (almost 200 men). The H.Q. is surrounded by wire and punji traps, and ringed by 8 machine gun bunkers. The interior area has two large, wooden barracks buildings, a large mess tent, and numerous smaller tents.

The H.Q. building itself is an old Buddhist temple built into the side of the mountain. All that shows from the outside is the front, which sticks out a few meters from the cliff wall. The rest of the temple is carved into the solid rock. It consists of an antechamber with three passages leading off to a sleeping area (the right side), a food preparation and eating area (the left side), and a central chamber. The central chamber is a massive affair, complete with cyclopean columns supporting the solid stone roof. Everything is carved, including the high, vaulted ceiling. Carved stairs in the solid rock sides run up to a surrounding walkway that is high enough so the ceiling carvings can be seen. The old shrine resides at the far end at ground level. Above the shrine, on the walkway, is a platform that the Overlord has converted into his private area. Human skulls line the walls with the Chinese symbol for Wan ("ten thousand") on them (a reference to his infinite power). No Japanese are allowed within the temple. It is reserved for the Overlord, his minions and any visiting spirits, demons, immortals, etc. At present there are 3 Possessive Entities at the temple, licking their wounds before heading back to fight the Japanese in China.

Possessive Entities

Horror Factor: 14

Alignment: Miscreant/Anarchist/Diabolic.

Weight: None.

Armor Rating: None. They are intangible and cannot be affected by any material weapons or attacks. This does not apply to the host bodies, of course.

S.D.C.: None.

Hit Points: None.

Negative Chi: 14/12/19

P.P.E.: 11/17/11

The Eight Attributes: I.Q. 12/7/11, M.E. 10/15/10, M.A. 7/13/10, the others do not apply except when in possession of another's body.

Natural Abilities: Sense Chi, sense Infernal influences, see aura, possession of the dead.

Psionics: None.

Magic Abilities: None.

Attacks per Melee: 2

Bonuses: +2 to resist eviction from a possessed body, +1 on initiative, +3 to save vs Horror Factor.

Special Attack: Possession. Usually this is done only on bodies that are missing their soul-spirit. However, the Possessive Entity can also attempt to seize control of the body of an unconscious or emotionally weak character. In doing so, the Possessive Entity expends a point of P.P.E. and makes a single roll to strike. The victim, even if unaware of the attack, is allowed to save vs possession (adding in the M.E. bonus, if any). The victim needs to beat the entity's roll to resist the possession. Characters who are seriously depressed or schizophrenic are -2 to save. When a Possessive Entity chooses to leave a body, or is on the verge of being forced out, it will usually "loot" the body of all available Chi and P.P.E. and flee.

During the battle within the temple the Possessive Entities will take, or attempt to take, possession of any Player Character or NPC killed or rendered unconscious. They will then join the physical fight to defend the temple. G.M.'s are encouraged to create backgrounds for the Possessive Entities in case they wish to use them as recurring villains.

The forces arrayed against the O.S.S. team here will most likely make this a fairly short, one-sided affair. Do not be afraid to let the characters have some measure of success, however. The Possessive Entities can be defeated, as can the Japanese soldiers. If the Overlord is truly threatened, he will leave the world of men and travel to the Hells of the Yama Kings to fight another day.

Regardless, the bottom line is, the characters' unconscious and battered bodies will be rescued during the chaos of the attack by the masters of the Yung Monastery. They will be brought to their monastery to be healed and then trained to fight against the Overlord and his minions.

The Infernal Demon Overlord

Japanese Colonel Zenji Orita/I Gui ("Righteous Demon")

Horror Factor: 16

Alignment: Diabolic.

Negative Chi: 173

The Eight Attributes: I.Q. 37, M.E. 9, M.A. 9, P.S. 25, P.P. 17, P.E. 33, P.B. 7, Spd. 13.

Hit Points & S.D.C.: None. He is made of pure Negative Chi. He can however convert his Chi into S.D.C. and/or Hit Points when he assumes physical form.

P.P.E.: None. He is made of pure Negative Chi. However, it is possible for him to "hoard" P.P.E.

Size: Can alter his size and weight at will, but usually stands about 9 feet (2.7 m) tall and weighs around 500 pounds (225 kg).

Level of Experience: Equivalent to 15th.

Attacks per Melee: 6

Bonuses: +4 on initiative, +3 to strike, parry and dodge, +16 to damage, +2 to save vs magic, +6 to save vs pain and Horror Factor, +100 S.D.C. to human or animal form, +17% to all skills, +19% to save vs coma/death, +8 vs poison.

Demonic Powers & Abilities

1. Assume Demonic Form. While in demon form, the Infernal has a natural Armor Rating of 17, a base S.D.C. of 40 (more are available in exchange for Negative Chi), horns, fangs, and spurs/spines/barbs (they inflict 2D4 damage each), as well as bonuses of +10 to P.S., +8 to P.E., +6 to P.P., +6 to Spd., and +2 to M.E.

2. Assume Other Forms. Infernals can take the form of a human, animal, or even an inanimate object, but A.R. is reduced to 10 and S.D.C. is 20 (more are available in exchange for Negative Chi).

3. Enter and Exit the Realm of Yama Kings.

4. Possesses ALL Negative Chi Mastery Abilities.

5. Sense Chen Chi — Living Vitality.

6. Torment (Special!): All Infernals are masters of the demonic art of torture. Virtually any piece of information, or a confession to any crime (whether or not the victim is guilty), is possible with just four uninterrupted melee rounds (one minute) of torment! Victims of this torment must roll to save vs psionic attack (actually a save vs Mental Endurance).

7. All Infernals are able to convert Chi to P.P.E. and vice versa: One P.P.E. point equals 6 Chi.

8. All Infernals have the following skills:

Chinese Language: Stage 4/Classical Chinese Literacy, 135%.

Tiao Qi, the game of Chinese Checkers, 89%.

Xiang Qi, the game of Shogi, 90%.

Wei Qi, the game of Go, 105%.

9. The ability to Manipulate/Control Undead.

10. All Infernal Demons can offer a version of Immortality to mortals, thereby creating a "Damned Immortal".

11. Bonuses: +1 to save vs magic, +5 to save vs Horror Factor, +2 to save vs pain, +8 to save vs possession, impervious to normal cold and heat, and is impervious to disease.

12. The abilities to see the invisible, see aura, and to detect concealment.

Infernal Strengths

11. Range of Human Skills.

W.P. Large Sword (+6 to strike, 7 to parry, +4 to throw).

W.P. Pistol (+5 to strike).

W.P. Rifle (+5 to strike).

Language: Japanese, 130%.

Art: Carving, 100%.

Infernal Weakness

9. Very unlucky, especially when gambling.

Special Powers

5. All "Negative and Positive" Chi Mastery Abilities

7. Teleport self at will, with an 88% accuracy; perfect accuracy if he can see where he's going.

Gear: I Gui carries a P14 Nambu 8mm pistol, an authentic high quality Daisho (1D8+2/1D6), a No-Dachi (3D6) and a Giau Tzu Jen (2D6+2).



Encounter Tables for Indochina 1945 (Phase One)

Encounter Table

- 01-05 Booby-Trap.** The characters encounter a punji trap or rigged grenade trap.
- 06-10 Possible Ambush Site.** The characters may want to note the location for future use.
- 11-15 Small Unmapped Village.**
- 16-20 Civilian Contact.** This could be farmers, wood cutters, hunters, monks, etc.
- 21-25 Japanese Contact.** See Japanese Encounter Table.
- 26-32 Animal Contact.** This can be anything from monkeys and birds, to jaguars or snakes.
- 33-40 False Alarm.** The characters think they see or hear something that keeps them on edge.
- 41-00 All Quiet.**

Japanese Encounter Table

- 01-05 Medical Team.** Lightly armed group carrying a few wounded from a skirmish with the Viet Minh (VM).
- 06-20 Guards with Prisoner(s).** 1D6 VM prisoners escorted by double their number of guards.
- 21-35 Collaborationist Porters.** Carrying supplies to a nearby Japanese outpost.
- 36-40 Japanese Sniper.** A single, highly trained Japanese soldier.
- 41-45 Small Patrol.** 2D6 Japanese soldiers out on a patrol for Viet Minh.
- 46-60 Large Patrol.** 1D10x10 Japanese soldiers on a mission to root out local VM guerillas.
- 61-70 Medium Patrol.** 3D6 Japanese soldiers on a routine patrol.
- 71-80 Mortar Squad.** 2D6 Japanese soldiers with a mortar they are taking to a local outpost.
- 81-85 Large Attack Force.** 2D10x10 Japanese soldiers on a specific attack mission.
- 86-95 Recon Patrol.** 3D6 Japanese soldiers on a reconnaissance patrol to find any VM.
- 96-00 Japanese Strike Unit.** 1D10x10 soldiers accompanied by 1D4 Zeros providing air cover.

Phase 2: The Monastery (1945-1954)

Note: The monastery has 6 points of Positive Chi flowing through it.

The story of the monastery

Shih Chin has fought against the Overlord and the Damned Immortal all of his life, either by himself or through proxies, as the Player Characters will be. Over the years, as he grows older, he begins to gather together a group of like-minded individuals and together they start the Yung ("Eternal") Monastery. Together the five masters seek out chosen individuals, and train them to overcome the Overlord's fiendish plots and one day defeat him once and for all. They have all tried at various points in their lives, and these attempts have left them all maimed. They cannot fight the Overlord and his minions directly anymore, but

they have a lifetime's worth of knowledge that they can pass on to the next generation.

They choose their students on the basis of visions that Shih Chin receives. They believe that the chosen people are actually reincarnations of their past students, come back to answer the call to justice once more. They teach the Players one of the martial arts that they know and also instruct them with a vision of the world which they all share. This means that by the end of the training, there will be no players with non-honorable or dishonorable alignments left. They will all be converted to either Principled (Good) with Discipline of Honor, Scrupulous (Good) with Discipline of Honor, or Aberrant (Evil) with Discipline of Honor, by the time the training is complete if they are not already one of these alignments. It is the individual Player's choice which alignment each character becomes.

The Master of the monastery is Shih Chin ("Master of Clarity"). Each of the martial art styles has its own teaching master:

Shih Hu ("Master of the Tiger") teaches Fu Chiao Pai — Tiger Claw Kung Fu.

Shih Jen ("Master of the Sword") teaches Gui Long — Dragon Spirit Kung Fu.

Shih Jin ("Master of Metal") teaches Shih Ba Ban Wu Yi — Eighteen Weapons Kung Fu.

Shih Bao ("Master of the Leopard") teaches Pao Pat Mei — Leopard Style Kung Fu.

Shih Chin is a mystical figure who is driven to the point of obsession. He will not rest until I Gui has been defeated once and for all.

Shih Hu will willingly sacrifice himself for the cause and is a strong advocate of justice.

Shih Jen ruthlessly drives the students in order that they may achieve what he has failed to.

Shih Jin is generous to a fault and will insist his students act likewise towards the peasants.

Shih Bao is a natural military leader with an instinctive grasp of tactics that he tries to pass on.

The Players may choose their mentor and thus the new style of martial art they will be taught over the following nine years. The G.M. is encouraged to expand and flesh-out the personalities of the Masters.

The Trial

Hook: After almost 9 years of intensive training, the Masters set up a test of training against a relatively minor force, to see how well the team operates together using their new found skills.

Line: An evil bandit with martial arts training in Snake Style Kung Fu is oppressing the peasants throughout southern China. He also commands a small force of ex-military thugs who have been trained in Martial Arts Hand to Hand (Agent).

Sinker: The enemy force is not that strong (essentially a highwayman who decided to set up shop in a village for a bit while the pickings were easy), but defeating the bandit and his thugs is secondary to testing the team's ability to work together. There will be the bandit leader, Lei She, plus a number of thugs equal to three times the number of Player Characters.



The Evil Bandit: Lei She ("Thunder Snake")

Age: 35

Alignment: Miscreant (Evil).

Negative Chi: 46

The Eight Attributes: I.Q. 10, M.E. 16, M.A. 15, P.S. 16, P.P. 12, P.E. 12, P.B. 11, Spd. 22.

Hit Points: 25, S.D.C.: 65, P.P.E.: 9.

Level of Experience: 5th Worldly Martial Artist.

Martial Arts: Snake Style Kung Fu — She Shen Kung Fu.

Attacks per Melee: 2

Escape Moves: Roll with Punch/Fall/Impact.

Basic Defensive Moves: Dodge, Parry, Automatic Parry.

Advanced Defenses: Multiple Dodge, Combination Parry/Attack.

Open Hand Attacks: One-Finger-Tip Attack (Special: Does absolutely no damage, but serves as a channel for Chi attacks directly to Hit Points), Palm Strike.

Basic Foot Attacks: None.

Jumping Foot Attacks: Death Blow, Choke.

Holds/Locks: None.

Weapons Katas: None.

Modifiers to Attacks: Pull Punch, Knock-Out/Stun, Critical Strike.

Martial Art Abilities or Powers:

1. Art of Stealth or Pi Mi Hsing Tung 65%, 80% in water using Jung Hua.

2. **One Finger Chi:** Range 30 feet (9.1 m), +3 to strike (no other modifiers used), each point of Negative Chi expended does 3 points of S.D.C. damage.

3. **Fist Gesture:** Range 35 feet (10.7 m), costs 8 points of Negative Chi, long range Death Blow (19-20).

4. **Calm Minds:** Range 120 feet (36.6 m), save vs Calm (16+ with any M.E. bonuses), those who fail cannot attack but can defend.

5. **Karumi-Jutsu:** Reduces body weight by 85%.

6. **Vibrating Palm:** 1 S.D.C. damage round one, doubles every successive round; inanimate and non-living targets only.

Language Skill: Chinese Stage 2, 80%.

Cultural Skill: Calligraphy, 60%.

Oriental Skill: Geomancy, 40%.

Philosophical Training: Taoism, 90%.

Bonuses: +3 to roll with impact or fall, +1 to strike, +3 to parry, +3 to dodge, +1 to damage, critical strike on 19-20, knock-out/stun on 20.

O.C.C. Skills: Basic Mathematics 90%, Climbing 90/55%, Demolitions 80%, Demolitions Disposal 80%, Read Sensory Equipment 70%, Running, W.P. Bolt Action Rifle (+2 to strike), W.P. Grenade Throwing (+2 to strike), Swimming 90%, W.P. Paired Weapons, W.P. Forked (+3 to strike, +1 to parry, +1 to throw, +3 to entangle), W.P. Short Sword (+2 to strike, +2 to parry, +1 to throw), W.P. Thrown Weapons (+4 to strike, 5 shots per melee), Automotive Mechanics 65%, Basic Mechanics 60%, Basic Electronics 65%, Armorer 85%, Land Navigation 80%, Pilot Tank 85%, Pilot Automobile 115/112%, Pilot Truck 80%, Pilot Motorcycle 80%, Pilot Commercial Vehicles 55%, Pilot Boats: Sail Type 80%, W.P. Machine Gun (+2 to strike), W.P. Artillery (+2 to strike), W.P. Pistol (+2 to strike), W.P. Mortar (+2 to strike).

Secondary Skills: Radio: Basic 75%, Mountaineering 65%, Spelunking 80%, Pick Locks 50%, Wilderness Survival 55%, Pick Pockets 45%, Escape Artist, Cook 80%, Fishing 75%.

Bonus Skills: Prowl 66%, Boxing, Body Building.

Gear: Arisaka Model 99 Rifle, Colt .45 1911A1 Pistol, 6 Biau Dau throwing knives (1D6), Gen (1D6/1D4), Da Kan Dau (1D6+1), mixed uniform of Nationalist and Communist Chinese bits and pieces.

Lei She's Story: Lei She is a deserter from both the Nationalist and the Communist armies fighting against the Japanese. Once he developed his military skills as an artilleryman with the Nationalists, he deserted to start a more lucrative life of crime. He was forced to join the Communists, but soon deserted them as well to return to pillaging the nearly undefended countryside (everyone is at the front fighting the Japanese). He has gathered together a group of like-minded thugs into a small roving personal army.

Average Thug

Hit Points: 15, S.D.C.: 25, Chi: 10.

Attacks per Melee: 2

Martial Arts Form: Basic Hand to Hand (Agent).

Armed with: Clubs, short swords and a mix of rifles and pistols.

A Spirit Wronged

Hook: The masters of the monastery put a second test of training into motion. This time the opponent will not be so easy to

overcome. Brute force will not be enough to discover the truth of the situation. The Team, sent to another remote village in southern China, has to find out who or what is attacking the local peasants.

Line: The opponent this time is a mystical one, an Angry Po Spirit — Po Chien. He was wrongly murdered, and is seeking revenge against the villagers who did not stand up for him. The Po Spirit is affected by magic, psionics and chi powers, but not by any physical attacks. Communist villagers killed the man, as they believed he was a Nationalist sympathizer. In fact he was an apolitical farmer who just wanted to work his land. He was mob lynched and no one tried to stop it. The Player Characters arrive at the small village to find a group of people who are terrified of what is happening, even if they cannot seem to figure out why it is happening to them.

Sinker: Villagers will not say what/who they think the Po Spirit is at first. One elder will eventually confess to the villagers' deed, but not before the Players see firsthand the handiwork of the Po Spirit in action. Di Nan (the Po Spirit) will use his pyrokinesis ability to set fire to people's homes, crops, clothing set out to dry on a line, hats, etc. He starts with those who stood by and did nothing, and gradually moves towards those who had an active hand, ending with the ringleader. His intention is to at least maim those directly involved and to kill the ringleader, who also happens to be the Village Elder's son.

Angry Po Spirit — Po Chien

(Di Nan — "Earth Man")

Horror Factor: 11

Alignment: None, per se. The entity is driven by whatever was bothering him.

Size: Human-sized.

Weight: None.

Armor Rating: None. This bodiless spirit is intangible and cannot be affected by any material weapon or attack.

S.D.C.: None.

Hit Points: None.

Negative Chi: 10

P.P.E.: None.

The Eight Attributes: Don't apply.

Natural Ability — Pyrokinesis: He is capable of generating a heated spark sufficient to set off most flammable objects.

Attacks per Melee: 1

Bonuses: None.

Special Ability: While the angry Po Spirit is incapable of performing a possession on his own, it is possible for others to capture him with Chi, magic or psionics, and to place him in a host body. Once inside a body, if there is no resistance, the Po Spirit can take charge and move around normally. Note that the entity retains the physical, combat, martial art, weapon proficiency, and pilot skills of the dead character, so he may be very adept at certain things. Likewise, the Po Spirit will have clear memories of the dead character's senses of taste and smell (visual and audio memories will be quite dim), so he may be able to recognize people from his past.



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While in possession of a living body, the spirit can communicate a bit better, but is still consumed with anger and an urgency to find his murderer. He is aggressive and agitated, and wants to "do what he must," usually without assistance from others. This means he is uncooperative, secretive, aggressive and obsessed. Anybody who gets in the way of his obsession is likely to get hurt.

Driving the Po Spirit away is difficult and may require an exorcism.

End of the Training

Once the training period is deemed to have come to a successful conclusion, the masters of the monastery assemble the Team. This happens after about nine years of training. The Team is informed that the masters believe the trail of the Overlord can be picked up again. It is rumored that his right-hand man (the Damned Immortal Chung Hu) has been spotted operating near the village of Dien Bien Phu. The Team is to travel there and pick up the trail if possible, so the whereabouts of the Infernal Demon Overlord can once again be ascertained. Once they know where he is, they are to carry out the task they have been charged with — destroying him once and for all.

Phase 3: Versus the Overlord (1954)

Historical Background for Dien Bien Phu

While the Player Characters are out of the loop in the monastery, a few changes have taken place in the outside world. The Second World War suddenly came to an end, after the 6th of August Hiroshima atomic bomb and the 9th of August Nagasaki atomic bomb were used with devastating results. The Japanese formally surrendered on the 10th of August, 1945. In Indochina, the Viet Minh cadres quickly moved into Hanoi and took over the city. On the 25th of August, Ho, accompanied by the O.S.S. Deer Team in Tan Trao, proclaimed independence for the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (D.R.V.), a Republic within the French Union (as an olive branch to the French) with future relations to be negotiated. He chose the 2nd of September as Independence Day. Ho presented his Declaration to Major Patti in Hanoi. It started out just as the U.S. Declaration of Independence, including reference to the Creator. No nation recognized the independence declaration.

In the aftermath, 200,000 Nationalist Chinese swarmed over the north of Indochina/Vietnam. They were eventually replaced by 15,000 French, who promptly re-established French Colonial rule over Indochina. The Viet Minh resumed their guerilla war. This time the enemy was the French instead of the Japanese, but for the Viet Minh, little else had changed. The French were dragged into a prolonged struggle in a faraway land.

After 7 years of war, France had lost 74,000 troops in Indochina/Vietnam, with another 190,000 bogged down. As an occupying power, they lacked any true popular support to carry the day. The WWII-trained French forces were caught fighting a style of war they had not been prepared for. The overall French commander, General Navarre, figured his only hope was to try

to bring the Viet Minh into a set piece battle. To this end, he sent his forces to occupy a strategic supply route from Laos, a small village in a faraway valley, Dien Bien Phu. It was referred to locally as the "arena of the gods."

Major Marcel Maurice "Bruno" Bigeard and 800 men of the 1st Colonial Paratroop Battalion flew to the valley on the 20th of November, 1953. They landed right on top of two Viet Minh companies. Forty French soldiers were lost finishing off the unexpected enemy force. Within a week 10,000 French troops were in place, with another 5,000 in reserve. They effectively cut off all major supplies running from China through Laos and into Indochina. Dien Bien Phu was transformed into a base camp. An airfield was added, as well as 7 outer bastions to defend the inner core of bunkers and command posts.

The Viet Minh, under Ho Chi Minh and General Vo Nguyen Giap, quickly mobilized two armies — one of 20,000 peasant laborers to create new routes through the jungle, and the other of 50,000 fighting men.

By January 1954, the French were successfully penned into Dien Bien Phu. French intelligence failed utterly by consistently underestimating enemy strength. In order to achieve a success before a Geneva meeting of the U.S., U.S.S.R., Great Britain and France on the future of Indochina, Giap accelerated his plans. He received massive assistance from the Chinese, including 600 heavy trucks packed with weapons. The French had reinforced their position up to 15,000 men, of which half were Algerians, Vietnamese and French Foreign Legionaries, but were still outnumbered three to one. Command fell to Colonel Christian de Castries. The French did not know that Giap had heavy artillery from the Chinese and Russians. These guns ringed the valley around the French position. Giap had forty-eight 105mm guns plus more than 150 lighter artillery pieces. Deep trenches lined the hills. The French, in the valley, who had stripped the local area for supplies to build their bunkers and defensive works, were completely exposed.

The French position consisted of 49 strong-posts grouped into three main sectors: Huguette in the west, Dominique to the northeast, and Claudine to the south. Outside of these were four isolated hill bastions: Anne-Marie, Gabrielle, Beatrice, and 6 miles (9.6 km) to the south was Isabelle. Inside of the three main sectors lay the airstrip and command center. The French had only been able to bring up 10 U.S.-supplied tanks, out of 1,400 supplied to them throughout Indochina, due to the difficult terrain.

Giap began the attack on March 12th, 1954, with a one hour long bombardment with 200 artillery pieces. The French were torn apart. The French artillery could not locate the Viet Minh guns. An entire Viet Minh division assaulted and took Beatrice. Only 200 of the 700 French defenders escaped. On March 15th, Gabrielle and Anne-Marie were taken out. Bigeard, who had been on his way home, was recalled and sent back to Dien Bien Phu. Colonel de Castries essentially abdicated command to Bigeard and Colonel Langlais. Bigeard immediately put together a counter-attack force and, through a day of heavy fighting, destroyed a Viet Minh battalion.

By the 27th of March, with Elaine-I captured and the airstrip under direct fire, the French were completely cut off from the outside world. There were 12,000 French left, and only a 40 bed hospital with 4 doctors and 1 nurse to care for casualties. They

began to dig tunnels to hide the wounded from further fighting. Beatrice, Gabrielle, Anne-Marie and Dominique had all fallen. The French still held on to parts of Huguette and Elaine, leaving only Claudine and Isabelle secured.

The Players re-emerge from southern China into Indochina at this point, and are met on their way to Dien Bien Phu by a small French fighting patrol of Foreign Legionaries.

Encounter Tables

Patrol Encounter Table

01-05 Booby-Trap. The characters encounter a punji trap or rigged grenade trap.

06-10 Possible Ambush Site. The characters may want to note the location for future use.

11-15 Small Unmapped Village.

16-20 Civilian Contact. This could be farmers, woodcutters, hunters, monks, etc.

21-25 Viet Minh Contact. See Viet Minh Encounter Table.

26-32 Animal Contact. This can be anything from monkeys and birds, to jaguars or snakes.

33-40 False Alarm. The characters think they see or hear something that keeps them on edge.

41-50 French Contact. This is usually a small patrol of 3D6 soldiers or Legionaries.

51-00 All Quiet.

Viet Minh Encounter Table

01-05 Medical Team. Lightly armed group with a few wounded from a skirmish with the French.

06-20 Guards with Prisoner(s). 1D6 French prisoners escorted by double their number of guards.

21-35 Porters. 3D6 porters walking bicycles laden with bundles of supplies for the Viet Minh.

36-40 Viet Minh Sniper. A single, O.S.S.-trained Viet Minh soldier.

41-45 Small Patrol. 2D6 Viet Minh soldiers out on a patrol.

46-60 Large Patrol. 1D10x10 Viet Minh soldiers on a patrol.

61-70 Medium Patrol. 3D6 Viet Minh soldiers on a routine patrol.

71-80 Mortar Squad. 2D6 Viet Minh with a mortar they are taking to Dien Bien Phu.

81-85 Large Attack Force. 2D10x10 Viet Minh soldiers on a specific attack mission.

86-95 Recon Patrol. 3D6 Viet Minh soldiers on a reconnaissance patrol to find any French.

96-00 Viet Minh Strike Unit. 1D10x10 soldiers accompanied by a 105mm howitzer.

My Ally is My Enemy

Hook: The Players have followed the instructions of the masters of the monastery, but the situation on the ground in Indochina has altered almost to the point of being unrecognizable. The Viet Minh they helped to train are now considered the enemy by the U.S. government, who is now backing France in the colonialist bid. The Chinese have become Communist, leading to the exile of hundreds of thousands of Nationalist Chinese to Taiwan, Laos and other parts of Southeast Asia. The Players have no way of knowing all of this, however, and will have to find out the hard way. The date is May 30th, 1954.

Line: The Players run into a patrol of French Foreign Legionaries, mostly ex-Wehrmacht, German troops, and they mistake the Players Characters as Russian advisors. They have heard that the U.S.S.R. and the Chinese are supplying weapons and equipment to the Viet Minh, and they think that trainers might have come along with the equipment.

Sinker: The main objective here is to avoid combat with troops who are their allies, even if they do not know this yet! The patrol is led by a French officer who also acts as translator for most of the German troops under his command. Once he finds out they are Americans, he immediately takes them under his protection and leads them back through Viet Minh lines and into Dien Bien Phu. They first are taken to the southernmost outpost, Isabelle. They must then run the gauntlet of fire to make it to the command bunker area. It is very likely that they will be fired upon by at least a few Viet Minh snipers, if not artillery.

Dien Bien Phu

Note: During the day 3 points of Positive Chi, and during the night 3 points of Negative Chi, flow through the battle zone.

April 1st-4th, 1954: Giap's second wave offensive strikes. Major Bigeard counter-attacks again and retakes most of Elaine in hand-to-hand fighting. At least 2,000 are killed on both sides. Giap begins a trench building program that reaches to within 400 yards/meters of the French positions in order to cut down casualties from French artillery and aircraft strikes. The French government promotes de Castries to General, and awards all the troops there the Croix de Guerre. de Castries pins the Legion of Honor to the only French woman at the siege, the air force nurse Genevieve de Galard.

There follows almost a month of preparation and small actions. During this time, the Players are co-opted by the local French officer in charge of M-5 operations, Major Henri Joffre, into a series of delaying actions and counter-attacks to clear the Viet Minh from positions near the command bunkers and airstrip. The Players will remember that they had dealings with him when he was a Captain back in 1945.

French Bearcat fighters and B-26 bombers buzz overhead constantly, providing a bit of cover fire against the heavily entrenched Viet Minh. Meanwhile, the Players struggle around the shrinking base to find anyone who might have seen Chung Hu pass through the area. There are only the French troops and a small number of locals still living in Dien Bien Phu. The locals are hard to track down, as they have taken to living underground as much as they can. The original village has been all but obliterated by the French fortifications and the Viet Minh artillery bombardments. Eventually they come across an old villager living in a hole he has dug into the ground just outside of the French-held lines. He informs the Players that Chung Hu was indeed through here just before the French came. He also tells them what direction Chung Hu was going when he left the village, heading into Laos.

The final attack lasts two days (May 5-6th), and ends on the morning of the 7th. A breakout plan is concocted whereby two columns will try to break through to Laos. Due to the condition of the men and the lack of ammunition, the attempt is never made. Position after position falls, and de Castries radios General Navarre in Hanoi to inform him that they have to surrender.

Navarre replies, "Do not raise the white flag, but stop fighting." It is just after 5 p.m., 55 days after the battle began. By the end, 3,000 men are killed, a further 3,000 are wounded, and the Viet Minh lose 8,000 men. French influence in Indochina comes to an end. The roughly 8,000 surviving French are marched into three months of captivity that half of them will not survive.

The Players must escape the ever-tightening gauntlet or be taken prisoner. If they are taken as P.O.W.s (Prisoners Of War), they can try to escape on the march to the prison camp or from the camp itself.

We're Baaack!

Note: Chung Hu's Laotian base has 2 points of Negative Chi flowing through it.

Hook: The Player Characters follow the direction that Chung Hu went from Dien Bien Phu and on into Laos. Once in Laos, they can easily find local villagers who can point them on their way to the only military camp around. The local Laotians do not really appreciate the presence of the camp, with its Chinese Nationalist exiles in their backyard controlling them. Chung Hu has taken to acting as the local warlord, forcing the peasants to support his personal army. He periodically strikes into Indochina and China against the Viet Minh and the Chinese Communists. He is anti-Communist, and holds a grudge from 1945. They also do hit and run raids against the Viet Minh supply lines that run from China, through Laos and into Indochina through Dien Bien Phu — the exact reason the French went out there in the first place. The Laotian base is a military camp of around 100 Nationalist Chinese troops, with a dozen machine guns and a few mortars (all U.S. equipment) defending it.

Line: The Players need to get information from the Damned Immortal, or others in the camp, on the whereabouts of the Overlord. This means they have to either attack the camp (directly or using stealth) or ambush their patrols to try to get the location.

Sinker: The only one who knows where the Overlord is located is Chung Hu. The Players do not know this, however, so they may try a number of different approaches to getting the information. The plan of action should be left entirely in the hands of the Players. If the Game Master feels the Player Characters are just not up to the task, then they may find the information they are looking for from a senior Nationalist officer, or in the Headquarters bunker, etc.

Grand Finale Battle

Note: The Monastery of the Overlord has 10 points of Negative Chi flowing through it.

Located in the Himalayas, far up in the mountains, is the final redoubt of the Overlord and his Nationalist Chinese allies. The location is remote, accessible only by foot. It is a journey that will take weeks to complete and could very likely cost the lives of many men. The players must beware of avalanches, extreme cold, altitude sickness and the Nationalist holdouts manning the outer observation posts.

Natural Obstacles and Dangers

Avalanches: Any use of explosives in the mountains will trigger an avalanche nearby, or right on top of the user (a 35%

chance). If caught in an avalanche, the Player must roll percentiles, 50% or higher, or be swept away and buried by the crushing snow. If caught, the Player takes 1D6x10 damage initially and will continue to take 2 points of damage per round that they are buried. It will take would-be rescuers 1D10 rounds just to locate the person, and a further 1D10 rounds to dig them out into open air again.

Extreme Cold: The extreme cold can also be a serious danger to the Players. If they are dressed for the cold, they will be alright. If they are not, they will take 2 points of damage every half-hour of exposure until they find shelter and heat.

Altitude Sickness: Altitude sickness can debilitate the Players as well. Each Player must roll percentiles, 50% or greater, to not be affected by the altitude. Those who pass operate normally. Those who fail must roll 1D20 against their P.E. If they roll over their P.E., they lose half of their attacks per melee and their combat bonuses are all halved until they get back down to lower elevations. If they roll under their P.E., they merely lose 1 attack per melee and -1 to all of their combat bonuses.

Man-Made Obstacles

In order to get into the valley where the monastery is located, the Players have to get themselves through Communist Chinese lines. The Communists have the Nationalists bottled up in the valley and have no intention of letting any reinforcements or supplies in, or anybody out. Beyond these lines the Overlord has observation posts, each manned by 2-3 Nationalist Chinese holdouts armed with M1 Garand Rifles. There are three of these scattered along the route the players must take to get to the monastery. This is in addition to any patrols from either side that may be encountered on the way through the valley.

Encounter Table

Himalaya Encounter Table

01-10 Nationalist Chinese Sniper. A highly trained soldier with a rifle and good cover.

11-15 Nationalist Ambush. 1D6 soldiers dug in with a machine gun.

16-20 Nationalist Mortar Attack. 4 soldiers with an M-19 60mm mortar.

21-30 Nationalist Strike Force. 4D10 soldiers moving down the valley on a sweep mission.

31-40 Nationalist Tax Collection Unit. 2D6 soldiers extorting money/food from the locals.

41-50 Communist Army Column. 1D6x100 soldiers moving to clear the Nationalist redoubt.

51-70 Communist Ambush. 3D6 soldiers set up to attack anyone moving in or out of the valley.

71-85 Communist Strike Force. 4D10 soldiers on a mission to hit a Nationalist outpost.

86-90 Nationalist Army Column. 1D6x100 soldiers moving to clear the valley of Communists.

91-00 Major Nationalist Strike Force. 4D10 soldiers supported by the Overlord himself!

The Monastery of the Infernal Demon Overlord

Once those obstacles are overcome, there is the monastery itself. It is an ancient, imposing structure that is obviously hun-

dreds of years old, if not more. 50 Nationalist Chinese troops plus the Overlord and his servants man the monastery. The exterior is bleak, weathered and age-bleached stone. There is only one obvious entrance, the huge front gates that are manned by 10 troops. Other entrance possibilities include getting in through one of the small upper windows, which would require mountaineering rolls to reach as well as having rope and clamps. Other than that one could scale the walls (mountaineering) to get into the front courtyard and go in through the temple entrance doors, or once again, take a try at the upper windows. There are 1D10 troops in the courtyard during the day, and 1D4 during the night. The interior of the temple is essentially one huge room, with numerous pillars, statues, vases on stands and various tapestries dividing it up into smaller segments. The Nationalist troops are actually quartered off to one side of the temple. Directly ahead of the door stands a dais with the Overlord's personal throne. It is an unimaginably intricate affair with numerous, intertwined carvings and multi-colored lacquered inlays.

The Overlord will most likely be sitting in the throne or just off to the side discussing affairs with the Nationalist Captain in charge or his other servants. His Iron Dogs flank the throne, unmoving. The Brass Snakes in his charge cling to columns in the dark, waiting to strike unsuspecting Players. The Overlord's Copper Pigeons perch on a roost near one of the small upper windows, waiting to perform their duty. If directly assaulted, all the creatures in the monastery will attack the interlopers immediately. The creatures fight to the death, while the Nationalists will fight until half of their number have been killed or otherwise incapacitated. The rest will then flee. The Overlord will defend his redoubt to his utmost. If he is in danger of actually being destroyed, and he has time to act, he too will flee (either through the mountains or back to the Yama King's Hell, where he will have quite an unpleasant time of it for failing in his mission).

The Servants

Where multiple stats are listed, they refer to the individual stats of multiple creatures (i.e. "P.P.E.: 10/5" means the first creature has 10 P.P.E. and the second creature has 5 P.P.E.).

Copper Pigeons (Tong Ko)

These were introduced by the Yama King Yen Lo Wang and are used for reconnaissance and for communications. The Overlord has 2 at his command.

Horror Factor: 8, but only while in copper form.

Alignment: Aberrant, completely obedient to the Overlord.

Size: That of a pigeon.

Weight: In metal form, they weigh around 15 pounds (6.8 kg), but only 12 oz (340.2 g) in feathered form.

Armor Rating: 12 in copper form, none otherwise.

Hit Points: None.

S.D.C.: 15

Negative Chi: 28/23

P.P.E.: 10/5

The Eight Attributes: I.Q. 7/2, M.E. 9/10, M.A. 3/7, P.S. 9/13, P.P. 18/13, P.E. 18/19, P.B. 4/7, Spd. 17/10 walking.

Natural Abilities: Fly at speeds up to 60 mph (96 km), extraordinary long-range vision (2 miles/3.2 km), nightvision (500 feet/152 m), see the invisible, see aura, sense evil/good, detect

concealment, Enter Realm of Yama Kings and Exit Realm of Yama Kings.

Chi Mastery Abilities: Sense Chi, Sense Ti Chi — Earth/Dragon Energy, and Chi Mask (allows a Copper Pigeon to appear to have the Chi of a normal bird).

Psionics: None, but highly resistant: +7 to save vs psionics.

Magic Abilities: None.

Attacks per Melee: 2 pecks with beak, for 1D4 damage each.

Bonuses: +2 to strike, +2 to dodge when on the ground, +7 to dodge while in flight.



Brass Snakes (Tou She)

These are used as protectors by the Overlord. He has 4 of them.

Horror Factor: 10, applicable only when they move. Motionless Brass Snakes look like small brass figurines and have no Horror Factor.

Alignment: Aberrant, completely obedient to the Overlord.

Size: Small; no Brass Snake is more than 3 feet (0.9 m) long. Most are around 18 inches (0.5 m). They also are thinner than most real snakes.

Weight: 6/5/3/6 pounds (2.7/2.3/1.4/2.7 kg).

Armor Rating: 18

Hit Points: None.

S.D.C.: 50

Negative Chi: 30

P.P.E.: 15/19/20/12.

The Eight Attributes: I.Q. 4/4/7/9, M.E. 16/16/11/16, M.A. 11/14/11/13, P.S. 22/18/21/20, P.P. 20/20/20/20, P.E. 23/21/23/22, P.B. 8/11/7/7, Spd. 12/13/12/13.

Natural Abilities: See the invisible, prowl 50%, sense Chi, see aura, sense Chen Chi — Living Vitality, and Enter Realm of Yama Kings (spell).

Special Ability: Brass Snakes have the ability to enter into any dead body, even one that is nothing more than a skeleton, and bring it to life under their control.

Psionics: None, but highly resistant: +4 to save vs psionics and magic charms.

Magic Abilities: None.

Attacks per Melee: 2

Bonuses: +1 on initiative, +5 to strike, +6 to dodge; damage is 1D6+2 for bite, plus special attack.

Special Attack: Liquid Brass: If injected, victims experience a horrible searing pain that seems to spread as it moves through the blood of the body. The molten metal causes 1D6 damage direct to Hit Points every melee round, for 1D6 melee rounds, in addition to bite damage. Victims must also roll to save vs pain each melee round to avoid being completely overcome by the agony (cannot move, concentrate or perform skills for the duration of the poisonous attack plus 1D6 minutes). Note: Each Brass Snake can only inject liquid brass twice per day.

Iron Dogs (Tieh Gou)

These are used for defense in the Overlord's final redoubt in the Himalayas. He has 4 of them who stand guard near his throne.

Horror Factor: 11

Alignment: Animal, completely loyal to the Overlord.

Size: Medium-sized dogs.

Weight: 216/220/226/222 pounds (98/100/102.5/100.7 kg).

They are made of pure iron, so they are much heavier than ordinary dogs.

Armor Rating: 16

Hit Points: None.

S.D.C.: 107/110/107/111.

Negative Chi: 80

P.P.E.: 21/21/22/33.

The Eight Attributes: I.Q. 9/5/7/8, M.E. 12/9/10/6, M.A. 6/7/5/6, P.S. 26/18/26/22, P.P. 17/14/16/13, P.E. 24/21/16/20, P.B. 2/6/3/2, Spd. 66/63/62/57.

Natural Abilities: Tireless running speed of 45 mph (72 km), leap lengthwise 20 feet (6 m; can only leap 6 feet/1.8 m high), track by smell (80% in Hell, 50% in the natural world), nightvision 300 feet (91.4 m), see the invisible, see aura, sense Chi, sense Chen Chi — Living Vitality, sense evil/good, Enter Realm of Yama Kings, detect concealment 70%, and create fear.

Special Ability: Impose Appearance. While an Iron Dog cannot shape shift, they have the ability to force those who look upon them to see something else. This "something else" can either be an ordinary dog or a human, depending on what the Iron Dog wishes. Seeing the true form of the Iron Dog requires a roll to save vs psionic/mental manipulation.

Psionics: None.

Magic Abilities: None.

Attacks per Melee: 4

Bonuses: +1 on initiative, +4 to strike and dodge. Each bite does 2D6+4 damage, a paw strike does 1D6 damage, a leaping pounce does 1D6 damage and has a 75% likelihood of

knocking a human down (victim loses initiative and one melee action). A tripping attack by striking at a target's feet with its paws, or a blocking movement with its body, does no damage but has a 60% chance of knocking the victim over (the victim loses initiative and one melee action).

Wrap-up & Continuation

The campaign can conclude in a number of different ways. The Players may destroy the Overlord, thus fulfilling their duties to the monastery. They may defeat, but not destroy him. This means the Overlord will have to face his Yama King master in disgrace, and it may be another way for the Players to "defeat" the Overlord, if he is destroyed by his master. Another option is for the Overlord to survive and become a recurring villain for the further adventures of the Player Character Team. The Yama King Yen Lo Wang might continue to crop up as a recurring villain, as the power behind the plots that the Players have to face, even if the Overlord has been destroyed.

The monastery provides another, easy to use, device for presenting further plots and adventures. The HL&S adventures can be expanded, or more can be added, to gain more experience for the Player Characters before they head back out to face their nemesis. There are also the Masters themselves who can have backgrounds and personality quirks added to them to give more flavor. These could come through the training phase, or even later if the campaign is extended beyond the scope of what is presented here. The hand of the Overlord might be seen elsewhere, and the Team could be sent in to investigate. Or they may continue to act to protect the peasants in the region from whoever may try to enslave them or do them harm. The Team might also venture back into Indochina (now Vietnam) during the developing U.S.-Vietnam War, which carries on until the early 1970s. Whose side are they on now?

Many of the characters presented may come back to haunt the Players, if they were not killed. The Evil Bandit Lei She, for example, might become the head of an international smuggling ring over the years. The Damned Immortal Chung Hu might survive to continue his war against the Communists, perhaps getting involved in the international drug trade operating out of Laos (if his Overlord master was not destroyed, of course). Depending on how their relations were, Major Henri Joffre might also play a part in the Player Characters' future. This does not even touch on the many soldiers, guerillas, thugs and peasants the Players will have had dealings with over the course of the campaign. Other plot threads can be expanded upon as well, such as the Japanese Oni invasion of the Chinese mainland. The Japanese might stage an air strike on Kunming while the Players are there, prompting any pilots in the group to try their hand against the Zeros in air-to-air combat. Perhaps there are still a few Oni holdouts in China by 1954, terrorizing the peasants in remote villages.

Destiny's Call presents the G.M. with a fairly wide-open vista to further detail and expand upon, to meet the needs of the Player group. Feel free to modify and develop the various aspects as you see fit. Any queries or questions can be posted on the Palladium Books web site, on the Message Boards under **The Rifter Forum** or **Ninjas & Superspies & Mystic China** board, or you can directly e-mail me at erikgrowen@yahoo.com. Enjoy.

Palladium Fantasy RPG®

BENEATH THE SURFACE

Optional Material for

The Palladium Fantasy RPG®

By Sonny Rice

At long last, we are heading for the Underworld.

I have been asked by Nobleman Hassimaar, of the Timiro Kingdom, to accompany him on his expedition and provide a journal of our travels.

I accepted hastily.

I have studied several languages from our beautiful planet and I have a vast knowledge of many of its inhabitants. I am quite confident that our exploration will be a success, especially accompanied by so many Dwarven knights, human soldiers, and Goblin slaves.

I hear there is even a wielder of magic within our midst. I am looking forward to conversing with the mage during our travels.

While I may be doing this exploit for the greater good of knowledge, Nobleman Hassimaar is doing it for fame and a raise in status when he returns. I am sure we will find great things beneath the surface. Precious metals and gems, unexplored Dwarven ruins, and maybe even a rune item. I have never seen one before. I have read that it was the Dwarves that invented rune magic, but I don't dare ask them about it. I know how Dwarves feel about magic!

My heart raced in excitement, as our huge procession marched down into the caves that lead deeper than any Kobold likes to go.

Even though fear tapped me on the shoulder, I pressed on without a complaint.

Our party was strong and determined enough to take on one hundred Nimro Giants.

I was safe with this bunch.

— Ten Years Underground

Why?

Why explore a realm of darkness? Why risk life and limb to search a place of hidden horrors and monstrosities that are attracted to your torchlight and your body heat like a moth to a flame?

The answer: Fame, fortune, and power!

Beneath the surface lie incredible secrets of wonder that have not seen the sun in over 100,000 years. Some secrets were never meant for light, and stay hidden within the security of pitch

black darkness — secrets waiting to be discovered by an adventurer with a fearless heart and an abnormal lust for power.

Does this mean that the Underworld is a place where any character can explore and return with enough raw might to threaten the gods themselves?

No.

Though there are enough magical items and precious metals buried in the crest of the earth to start your own kingdom, the dangers are the great equalizer.

An entire party could be swallowed whole by a hungry worm. A single misstep in any direction could lead a group into a cavern filled with sulfur dioxide. Even the consistency of the ceilings and walls could lead to doom for any band of warriors.

Then why go?

Maybe you want to learn secret spells that have never seen sunlight?

Maybe you seek the multitude of gems and precious metals to be found deep within the earth?

Maybe you suspect that many rune items were never really destroyed during the Millennium of Purification? The Underworld would be a fantastic place to hide these forbidden relics.

Beneath the Surface holds limitless possibilities for the brave, but truly separates the strong from the weak.

Is wielding power worth any risk? If you said "yes", read on.

Cavern Types

In Palladium, there are a few types of caverns and tunnels beneath the surface. The first type of caverns are called **Natural Caverns**. Natural caverns are created by corrosion and erosion by water mixing in with earth's natural elements. Natural caverns are famous for their stalactites (hanging, pointed spires on the ceiling) and stalagmites (pointed spires that grow from the ground and point up). *Living natural caves* are "alive" with fungus and are clear of dust and debris because of random floods, while *Dead natural caves* are filled with musty air and ridden with dirt covered rocks and stones.

Underground streams and lakes are not uncommon within natural caves. Some caves are completely filled with water, and can only be accessed by aquatic creatures. Water filled caverns are more frequent closer to the sea.

Natural caverns are the most common closer to the surface.

The second cavern type are **Lava Caverns**. These types of caverns are numerous near volcanos and closer to the center of the planet. Streams of lava have eaten through the soil and bed-rock and have been known to travel for miles before finally cooling. Lava Caverns are generally found only by spelunking near volcanoes or by mining and excavation.

The third and final type of caverns can only be found on Palladium. **Heat Worm Caverns** are found miles deep below the surface. The caverns are created from a creature that is exclusive to Palladium and has been known to grow a mile (1.6 km) in length. During travel, the heat from the monster's head liquefies the surrounding dirt and rock as it burrows through the ground. While the Heat Worm continues its movement, the caverns it creates slowly cool into a sleek surface which is easy for traveling. Underground denizens prefer Heat Worm tunnels because of the tunnel's immense size. The Heat Worm Caverns are free of debris and permit any traveler "safe" travel.

Heat Worm tunnel cave-ins are almost unheard of.

Natural Dangers

Aside from the numerous wandering monsters and hungry predators, there are a number of natural dangers that may detour an adventuring party. These dangers are extremely rare, but they do exist.

Heat becomes a major problem near any volcanic activity and also when coming to close to the core of the planet. **Molten lava** temperature can reach almost 2,000 Degrees Fahrenheit (1093 C) and will kill any living being it comes into contact with. Even the heat that radiates from a lava stream will become unbearable and blistering to most creatures. The closer a party comes to a lava pool or any other volcanic activity, the higher the cavern temperature rises, and it becomes difficult to press forward. Traveling in areas with abnormally high temperatures will increase chances for physical exertion. See the **Baalgor Wastelands™** book for rules covering heat and physical exertion.

Even **steam** can become a hindrance, once any lava comes in contact with a body of water or a small underground stream. Steam can scald the flesh off of any adventurer. It is up to the G.M. to determine the cloud of steam's size. An underground steam cloud usually does 3D6 damage per round. G.M.s may also adjust the cloud's painful effects. Characters will continue to be scalded until they get out of radius of the cloud, which might be a problem if the river of lava came into contact with a large underground lake.

Volcanoes can also produce tremendous clouds of **ash** and **poisonous gas** emissions (sulfur dioxide), which is enough to send back even the most determined of treasure seekers.

Gas can be as deadly as a pair of horned dragons. Most surface dwellers on Palladium need oxygen to survive. There are numerous pockets underground that hold lethal doses of natural gas that could put a battalion of warriors to sleep permanently, without a hint of anything irregular in the air.

Methane (a colorless and odorless gas) and Propane are two natural gases that will put any individual to sleep after breathing either of them for one full minute (the first melee round will cause dizziness from lack of oxygen, and after four melee rounds a saving throw vs non-lethal poison must be made to avoid falling into unconsciousness). If victims of the gas are not

pulled out of the cavern, they will suffocate and die. The most dangerous aspect of Methane and Propane is that they are highly flammable. If a torch is lit near a pocket filled with these natural gases, an explosion will fill the cavern halls. When an adventuring party is getting close to a flammable natural gas area, there is a cumulative 5% chance per melee round of igniting the gas. The further the travelers go, the more likely the gas will catch flame. The quick fireball of ignited gas will cause 1D6x10 to the entire group. If the gas pocket caught on fire in an early stage (an unlucky roll was made when the group first came into contact with the gas) then the damage will be 6D6 to the party. If Wizards or Warlocks use fire magic, then increase the percentage chance of ignition to 5% per every point of damage (A fireball doing 20 points of damage would ignite the natural gas at 100%). G.M.s may decide how much gas is in the cavern and adjust the damage accordingly.

Sulfur Dioxide can be instantly identified by its cloud, its smell and its effects. Sulfur dioxide burns the eyes, lungs, throat, and even the skin. Anyone caught in a sulfur dioxide cloud will take 2D10 damage per round and will suffer -8 to Strike, Parry and Dodge. Once the character leaves the cloud, the damage will stop, but the penalties will last for an hour unless the affected areas are washed out with water. Two saves vs lethal poison must be made every round inside the cloud. The first save is against the permanent effects of the cloud, while the second save is verses death! If the first saving throw is failed, roll 1D6 on the gas damage chart below:



1. Blindness.
2. Burned lungs, which will give -2 to Strike, Parry and Dodge permanently, and reduce P.E. and Speed by 2 points.
3. Damaged skin. Reduce P.B. by four.
4. Damaged eyes. Vision is reduced by 50%, and -2 to Strike, Parry and Dodge permanently.
5. Throat damaged. Hoarse and raspy voice. Reduce M.A. by 3 points.
6. Loss of one lung. -4 to Strike, Parry and Dodge permanently, reduce P.E. by 4 points and reduce speed by 75%.

Carbon Monoxide and other natural gases are not as damaging or as flammable, but will result in lack of consciousness if a save vs non-lethal poison is not made after the first couple of rounds.

Floods are very rare, but can happen in natural caves. Floods can be anything from water rising to knee level, to caverns filled with an angry current, crashing into everything in its path. G.M.s may decide the ferocity of the flood's currents and how much water is filling the tunnels (if the cavern is near the sea, the party may be doomed).

Cave-ins are also a rarity, but can happen in natural caves and mine shafts; they are almost unheard of in lava created caves and Heat Worm tunnels. Cave-ins can completely bury any unlucky soul. Damage from cave-ins is 1D6, +1D6 points per every 20 pounds (9 kg) of rock (a ton of crashing rock would completely squash adventurers!). Cave-ins are caused by earthquakes, erupting volcanoes, powerful magic spells, and even combat by supernaturally strong combatants. Giants have been known to cause cave-ins on themselves, when they miss their opponents and slam their tremendous fists against the side of the caverns. G.M.s may decide how much weight collapses during a cave-in.

Note: Death by a random cave-in will anger any gamer. Give players a chance to escape the downpour of rubble. Speed and high rolling dodges could save a character's life and add an element of excitement to the character's travels.

New Skills

Animal Sounds: This skill allows the character to imitate known animal sounds. The character with this skill can only imitate animals native to his home (in other words, a northern barbarian could not imitate southern birds, because he has never heard them before). The first skill number is for animal sounds known. The second skill number is to learn new animals sounds in new settings. **Base Skill:** 36%/16% +4% per level of experience.

Moving Blind: The character that has learned this skill has spent countless hours blindfolded. He has mastered the art of using his hands to identify objects, and using his feet to recognize slopes and pits, and has mastered the use of walking sticks and canes. While moving blind, the character's speed is reduced by 75%, but he has zero chance of falling in the dark. **Base Skill:** 25% +5% per level of experience.

Excavation: This skill is more of a directorial skill than a physical one. This skill gives the player exact knowledge on how to do an excavation without major setbacks. The character will know where to dig, what is the best type of soil, where to place support beams, and how deep to make the tunnels.

Players trying excavations without this skill are just asking to have their tunnels cave-in. **Base Skill:** 25% +5% per level of experience.

Lore: The Underground: This gives the character knowledge of the different types of caverns and underground gases, and the character is able to identify other natural hazards. Underground lore also gives the player knowledge of underground water (for flooding information). This skill allows the character to recognize natural traps of the underground, and to identify natural gases that have a smell. **Base Skill:** 25% +5% per level of experience.

Surface Mapping: This skill allows the character to create a map with any writing utensil and writing surface. Any intelligent creature, no matter what language they speak, can read the map. Many adventure seekers pay a large amount of coin for map writers. **Base Skill:** 35% +5% per level of experience.

Underground Mapping: Similar to Surface Mapping, except this skill gives the character good underground direction sense, and the character is able to create maps with almost no light. **Base Skill:** 30% +5% per level of experience.

Smelting: With the use of a forge or blazing furnace, a character is able to separate different elements from mined ore. This skill is useful when the character is trying to separate raw gold ore from stone and other metals. Smelters are paid well for their services. **Base Skill:** 30% +5% per level of experience.

Combat Beneath the Surface

Fighting on Cliff Faces

While hanging on to the cliff face with either a free hand and/or foothold (or maybe a rope is all that is keeping the character from 1,000 feet of death), combatants may throw safety into the blowing wind and try striking at one another. If the opponents are at the same level on the cliff face, they do not get bonuses against each other. On the other hand, they do get negatives for combat while hanging on to the cliff for dear life. If a character is hanging on to the cliff with one hand, then he does not receive any bonuses for striking or parrying. Parries and strikes will be made with unmodified rolls. Dodging, however, is impossible.

There are different penalties if one opponent is higher than the other on the cliff. The combatant higher on the cliff face receives a +2 to parry and strike without any other combat bonuses. He is able to look down at his enemy and strike repeatedly with kicks and with weapons long in length.

The downside to cliff face fighting is the accumulative chance of falling. For every one point of damage taken during combat, there is a 1% cumulative chance of letting go and falling off the ledge. So, if a soldier takes 30 points of damage, then he must roll over 30% to stay in his spot. The chance of falling must be rolled every time a person is struck. On the positive side, a character that has the climbing skill, but loses his footing, may roll under HALF of their climbing skill percentage to grab a ledge before descending to their death.

As an alternative, stronger characters can grab an opponent and try to throw him off the cliff. A roll to strike is needed to

grab for the first action, then a test of strength is rolled between the combatants. The end result could be a quick fight.

Fighting on cliff faces will cause fatigue in half the normal time.

Fighting on Narrow Ledges

In catacombs and in mountains, the ledge underneath a warrior's feet may not be large enough for brilliant combat maneuvers or even any type of movement. As two men-at-arms take their position across from one another, the ledge may only be large enough for a small fighting stance. In this case, dodging is impossible and parrying/striking are done at -2. This penalty is because of the difficulty of the combat on such a narrow ledge. One misstep could send a character plummeting down.

Since the characters are constantly moving during the battle, a sense of balance should be rolled at the end of every round. The character that has failed has lost his footing or thought the ledge was larger than it really was. Also, a sense of balance roll should be made every time someone is struck by a strong blunt weapon or after being struck by supernatural creature. The sheer force of the blow will send an opponent reeling.

If an individual fails the sense of balance, they do get another chance to grab the small ledge before they fall further. By rolling over 12 on a D20, a character may grab the ledge with his arms or hands and stop his descent. If the character is using a bladed weapon to drive into the ground, then he may use his strike bonus to roll over 12. The character may have saved his own life, but the enemy is still standing on the ledge. Now the "fighting on the cliff face" rules take over... but the opponent on the ledge is unhindered by the cliff face negatives.

Fighting in Mud

Fighting in mud is only a -1 to Strike, Parry and Dodge, but physical exertion happens twice as fast as opponents struggle through the muck.

Fighting on Rope Bridges

As the rope bridge swings from side to side, combat ensues. There are no negatives for striking and parrying, but dodging is at -4 because of the limited room. Also, a character that tries to strike and misses very poorly (rolling a natural one to strike) could cut the one of the ropes holding the bridge together. It is up to the G.M. how devastating the catastrophe could be.

Close Quarters Combat

Some caverns and tunnels are barely wide enough for a single person to pass through, let alone combat between two people. Both opponents are penalized -4 to strike and parry because they are so restricted in movement within the confines of the narrow tunnel. Dodging is at -4 also, and can only be done by jumping backwards (which might be impossible if there are other people directly behind the combatant).

Cave-ins During Combat

Some characters and villains are too strong for their own good. If strong combatants (supernatural strength or a normal P.S. of 26 or higher) are close to the side of the caverns while battling, missed strikes may blast against the wall and send debris down on the warriors. The G.M. may decide how much S.D.C. damage the wall is going to take before rocks and boulders come crashing down.

Creatures Beneath the Surface

Heat Worms

The ground shook as stalactites fell from the ceiling and injured many poor souls in our entourage. It felt as if an Earth Warlock had unleashed his full fury on all of us... but it was worse.

An enormous worm punctured the side of the cavern and continued its way through the opposite wall. It was like watching an endless caravan of wagons crossing my path, except the worm was much larger than any wagon. The head of the worm could easily overshadow all of the Timiro towers I had lived in. It blew through the ground as easily as I would walk through wheat in the farming fields.

All it was doing was passing by.

The great worm's passing obliterated half our company... but, thank Thoth, they were mostly slaves.

I was ready for the entire tunnel to crash down on us, but I was thankfully disappointed. When I examined the gigantic hole that the worm burrowed, I discovered that the creature had somehow melted down all the rock and stone into a smooth surface. The heat from the worm had cauterized the earth like a hot blade would a wound.

It was then that I realized that we were traveling down a similar tunnel. The stone and rock in our tunnel was as smooth as the cavern the worm had just created.

We were traveling down a worm's burrowed path!

I looked down the new cavern that the worm had just created and measured its size with my eyes. I went into shock.

The hole that the worm just created was smaller than the tunnel we were traveling in!

When the ground rumbles, underground denizens flee for their lives. Heat Worms are the largest worms on Palladium. The worm's size is an intimidating sight to behold, but nothing is more dangerous than its attitude towards bystanders as it tunnels through the earth. Heat Worms have no thoughts when it comes to other living beings; they could care less about any creature they pass or crush.

The tunnels that Heat Worms create are so large that an army could march through. Any underground traveler can distinguish a regular tunnel from a Heat Worm tunnel its smooth surface. This smooth texture is caused by the melting heat of the Heat Worm's head.

Any underground dweller knows that if the ground is shaking, then a Heat Worm will be making its way across the tunnel... and the worm will not detour out of the path of an innocent.

Heat Worm

Alignment: Generally considered to be Anarchist.

The Eight Attributes: I.Q. 1D6 (extremely low animal intelligence), M.E. 1D6, M.A. 1D6, P.S. 6D6+40, P.P. 1D6+10, P.E. 2D6+22, P.B. 1D6, Spd. 4D6.

S.D.C.: 1D4x100, **Hit Points:** P.E.x10.

Average P.P.E.: 2D4

O.C.C.s Available: None.

O.C.C. Skill Notes: None.

Horror Factor: 14

Natural A.R.: 7

Physical Appearance: Heat worms look like outrageously large earthworms. Aside from size, the other distinction is the glowing red head of the Heat Worm.

Size: Heat Worms have been known to be a half mile (.8 km) in length and 600 feet (182.9 m) in diameter.

Weight: Up to 1,000 tons.

Average Life Span: 700 years.

Natural Abilities:

1. Heat Worms are virtually blind, but they have an excellent sense of smell, and their heads are covered by dozens of natural motion sensors that pick up all vibrations within 700 feet (213 meters). Their sense of smell and vibration detection allow the worms to track prey if needed; track by smell 89%.

2. Heat Worms can burrow through the dirt, stone, rock, and other earthen obstacles at a speed of 4D6. Bedrock, limestone or other hard rock will not slow the worm's digging, because of the worm's intense heat that melts through almost any material. Heat Worms find digging through metal ore to be difficult, however, and will generally avoid it.

Combat: 2 attacks per round smashing/crushing, or 3 attacks if attacking with head.

Damage: Crush damage by rolling over somebody inflicts 1D4x100. If fought up front, the heat from the head of the worm causes 3D6 damage per melee round, and enemies run the risk of being inadvertently swallowed on a natural attack roll of 19 or 20.

Bonuses: +2 to strike with body, +6 vs poisons or toxins, +4 vs psionic attacks.

Magic: None.

Psionic Powers: None.

Vulnerabilities/Penalties: None.

Allies and Enemies: None.

Language: None.

Favorite Weapon: None.

Habitat: All of the underground is the Heat Worm's habitat. They never get close to the surface, but there have been Heat Worm tunnels as little as one mile (1.6 km) below ground.

Notes: Heat Worms are constantly burrowing and feeding off the nutrients from the dirt. Although they are greatly feared beneath the surface, Heat Worms will never directly attack any creature unless they receive a large amount of damage. Heat Worms are a major part of the underground ecology. Their tunnels are used for traveling, and hundreds of creatures can feed for years off of the worm's carcass.

Tunnel Trap Worms

Today we lost nine men, including our ranger. We had a small band that was scouting ahead, by order of Nobleman Hassimaar. I thought it was a solid plan.

Our expedition came to a fork in the cavern. After we analyzed both tunnels, Nobleman Hassimaar ordered the front team to descend down the tunnel to the right.

Nobody foresaw the danger of the decision... except for our mage.

While the men made their way down the cavern, our mage whispered a few words under his breath. I couldn't comprehend the language he was using.

Suddenly, the mage cried out, "NO! GET OUT OF THERE! GET OUT OF THAT TUNNEL!"

Before anyone could react, the cavern mouth closed. I watched in terror as I realized that the stalactites and stalagmites were a creature's teeth, and the stone lined gullet was a form of camouflage. Nobody could see that it was a monster's mouth and throat, not a cavern opening.

Before anyone made a move to rescue our comrades, the giant worm pulled back its head and then burrowed away from us with the speed of a viper.

They were gone.

"How did you know," I asked the mage as my senses returned.

"Its aura. I could see its aura."

Tunnel Trap Worms are the second largest worm in the Palladium underworld. When a Tunnel Trap Worm latches its mouth to a large tunnel, it looks exactly like another tunnel opening. The worm's teeth are identical to stalactites and stalagmites that need to be avoided when traveling. Most experienced underground travelers can tell a Tunnel Trap Worm from a regular cavern opening, but it is the inexperienced and the careless that feed the belly of the giant worm.

Tunnel Trap Worm

Alignment: Generally considered to be Anarchist.

The Eight Attributes: I.Q. 1D6 (low animal intelligence), M.E. 1D6, M.A. 1D6, P.S. 4D6+30, P.P. 1D6+10, P.E. 2D6+18, P.B. 1D6, Spd. 1D6.

S.D.C.: 4D4x100, **Hit Points:** 4D4x10.

Average P.P.E.: 2D4

O.C.C.s Available: None.

O.C.C. Skill Notes: None.

Horror Factor: 14

Natural A.R.: 13

Physical Appearance: A Tunnel Trap Worm looks like a giant earthworm with the head of a leech. Through years of evolution, the Tunnel Trap Worm has gained a rocky hide, a stone-layered gullet, and teeth that look almost identical to stalactites and stalagmites. When the worm connects its maw to an adjacent tunnel, the Tunnel Trap Worm's mouth looks dangerously similar to a cavern opening.

Size: Tunnel Trap Worms have been known to be up to 1,000 feet (305 m) in length and 200 feet (61 m) in diameter.

Weight: Up to 800 tons.

Average Life Span: 300 years.

Natural Abilities:

1. Tunnel Trap Worms, like Heat Worms, are virtually blind, but have an excellent sense of smell, and their heads are covered by dozens of natural motion sensors that pick up all vibrations within 700 feet (213 meters). Their sense of smell and vibration detection allow the worms to track prey; track by smell 89%.

2. Because of the Tunnel Trap Worm's hard rock exterior and stone-like skin that lines the insides of its throat and gullet, it is nearly impossible to see the worm with any sort of infrared vision. Only on a high perception roll of 18 or higher will a character be able to notice small pockets within the cracks of the stone skin.

Combat: 2 attacks per melee round.

Damage: Crush damage by rolling over somebody inflicts 1D6x10. If someone is fighting up front, the Tunnel Trap Worm will try to swallow the prey whole, which requires a natural attack roll of 19 or 20.

Bonuses: +1 to strike with body, +5 vs poisons or toxins, +2 vs psionic attacks and magic.

Magic: None.

Psionic Powers: None.

Vulnerabilities/Penalties: None.

Allies and Enemies: None.

Language: None.

Favorite Weapon: None.

Notes: What makes the Tunnel Trap Worm so dangerous is its camouflage. The creature will lie in waiting for a foolish under-dweller to walk into its mouth. Aside from that, it will never attack prey unless attacked first. Once the worm has swallowed its victim, it will remove itself from the tunnel and burrow to another waiting spot.

Cavern Crabs

Without our ranger, we were lost.

The caverns all looked the same. Every rock and every boulder looked like the same obstacles we had to avoid hours before.

"We're going in circles," I announced.

"Quiet your mouth, scholar," one of the remaining Dwarves barked. "Quiet it or I'll quiet it for ya."

Typical Dwarf.

As the three remaining Dwarves conferred with each other about which direction we were heading, screams from the rear of the party pierced our eardrums.

I turned in time to catch a glimpse of a huge pincer that snapped before my face. One of the Dwarves yanked me backwards by my cloak, out of the range of the menacing monster.

I watched the battle ensue as everyone attacked the beast from all sides.

It was a crab. A giant crab, with a hollowed-out boulder on its back. The crustacean must have been hiding inside the boulder until the majority of the expedition walked past.

If it weren't for our remaining Goblins, nobody would have seen the creature move out of its hiding spot.

No underworld traveler is safe from the territorial Cavern Crabs. Any unsuspecting spelunker could pass by what they think is a normal rock beneath the surface, while the rock holds an armored killer. A Cavern Crab will attack anything in its territory, but will always use the element of surprise by springing from its rock "home" when someone comes too close.

Cavern Crab

Alignment: Generally considered to be Anarchist.

The Eight Attributes: I.Q. 1D6 (low animal intelligence), M.E. 1D6, M.A. 1D6, P.S. 5D6+6, P.P. 2D6+2, P.E. 2D6+10, P.B. 1D6, Spd. 3D6.

S.D.C.: 1D6x10, **Hit Points:** P.E.x2.

Average P.P.E.: 2D4

O.C.C.s Available: None.

O.C.C. Skill Notes: None.

Horror Factor: 11

Natural A.R.: 14

Physical Appearance: Cavern Crabs look like warped versions of hermit crabs. The outside "home" of the Cavern Crab is a giant rock which the crab has hollowed out with its pincers and legs. Once in its home, a passerby could walk past the rock and not notice anything unusual. When the crab strikes, it always carries its home on its back, which does nothing to hinder its movement because of its thin, hollowed outer layer.

Size: 6-7 feet (1.8-2.1 m) long.

Weight: 1,000 to 2,000 pounds (450-900 kg).

Average Life Span: 9 years.

Natural Abilities:

1. Like most creatures beneath the surface, a Cavern Crab's eyes can only see in the infrared spectrum of light, with a line of sight that reaches up to 250 feet (76.2 meters). Heat attacks, such as close torches or fireballs, disorient the crab and give it a -3 to Strike, Parry and Dodge. Sunlight causes a painful blindness that hinders the crab at -10 to Strike, Parry and Dodge.

2. Because of the rock "home" of the Cavern Crab, the creature cannot be detected with infrared vision until it has come out of its home.

Combat: 3 attacks per melee round.

Damage: Leg strikes do 2D6 + P.S. damage bonus. Pincer damage, whether being clubbed by the pincer or snatched, does 3D6 + P.S. damage. If a natural 19 or 20 is rolled for an attack, then the crab has snared its prey within its pincers; roll percentiles: 01-30%, no arms are caught in the pincer; 31-80%, one arm is caught in the pincer; 81-100%, both arms are caught. The crab will attempt to crush/squeeze its victim to death.

Bonuses: +1 to strike/parry/dodge, +5 vs Horror Factor, +1 initiative.

Magic: None.

Psionic Powers: None.

Vulnerabilities/Penalties: None.

Allies and Enemies: None.

Language: None.

Favorite Weapon: None.

Notes: Cavern Crabs are omnivores. They can live off of fungi and other underground plants, but prefer under-dweller meat.

Vydoracks

"That's water down there! Don't you see it?"

It appeared the Elven archer was right.

We were thirsty. We had been lost for over three months... at least I think was three months. Our water supply was slowly dwindling... and here was fresh water right in front of us... I could even smell it.

The problem was that it was a small pool of water and it rested down in the center of a giant funnel of loose dirt. It wasn't a natural hole. Something dug the cone shape into the ground until it reached the water... and it must be close by.

Nobleman Hassimaar agreed to send a man down to investigate... so we sent a Goblin slave.

A human soldier and a Dwarven knight held the end of the rope as they lowered the sacred soul down the loose dirt. If it

weren't for the rope, the ground would have broken underneath the green-skin's feet, and he would have tumbled all the way down the funnel and into the water. The strength of our men was keeping his descent controlled.

My mouth watered as I stared into the pool, while the torchlight was flickering off its reflective surface. I wanted to jump in and feel the water's cool touch, but precaution beneath the surface was a priority.

"Hey!" yelled up the Goblin. "This no water! This solid!"

I peered over the rim of the dirt funnel and saw the Goblin standing on top of the water as if were ice, but it was too warm in the caverns for any water to freeze.

Just as the Goblin crouched over and started rapping on the hard, reflective surface, something shifted in the ground underneath him.

One moment the Goblin looked up at us with a worried expression; the next moment, he disappeared under the ground. The strength of the creature buried at the bottom of the funnel was uncanny. At first it looked like the human soldier and Dwarven knight were gaining slack as they tugged and pulled the rope, but it was an effort that would leave us with two more dead warriors.

The creature gave a great tug and sent both men-at-arms sailing into the bottom of the cone of loose dirt. Just as suddenly as they were standing there, they were both pulled underground.

Our archers fired arrows, but they didn't know what they were shooting at. Magic lightning shot forth and struck the center of the pit, but the lack of movement unsettled the mage even further.

"We can't do anything else," I said. "They're gone."

"We've got to kill that thing!" the mage said with wild eyes.

I grabbed the mage by the shoulders and forced him to look into my face. "We can't go down there," I said. "That's the creature's home."

Vydorack

Alignment: Generally considered to be Anarchist.

The Eight Attributes: I.Q. 1D6 (low animal intelligence), M.E.

1D6, M.A. 1D6, P.S. 4D6+12, P.P. 3D6+4, P.E. 3D6+6, P.B.

1D6, Spd. 3D6 (Burrow Spd: 6D6).

S.D.C.: 3D6x10, **Hit Points:** P.E.x3.

Average P.P.E.: 2D4

O.C.C.s Available: None.

O.C.C. Skill Notes: None.

Horror Factor: 12

Natural A.R.: 13

Physical Appearance: Vydoracks look like giant insects. They have six short legs, which are used for digging, a giant abdomen covered in a hard exoskeleton, a small ant-like head that pokes out of the exoskeleton, and an enormous set of pincers that are mounted near the creature's mouth. The beast looks like a gigantic beetle with immense pincers on its disproportionate head. The most key feature on the Vydorack is the small (two to four foot/.6-1.2 m diameter) reflective surface on its back. This part of the creature's shell is a smooth, shiny texture that closely resembles a mirror. When Vydoracks bury themselves into the dirt, they leave this small reflective patch for all travelers to see. This surface of the Vydorack is often mistaken for water, especially because of the smell it gives off.

Size: 18-26 feet (5.5-7.9 m) long.

Weight: 1.5 to 3 tons.

Average Life Span: 40 years.

Natural Abilities:

1. Like most creatures beneath the surface, the Vydorack's eyes can only see in the infrared spectrum of light, with a line of sight that reaches up to 150 feet (45.7 m). Heat attacks, such as close torches or fireballs, disorient Vydoracks and give it a -3 to Strike, Parry and Dodge. Sunlight causes a painful blindness that hinders Vydoracks at -10 to Strike, Parry and Dodge.

2. Vydoracks, like Heat Worms, have an excellent sense of smell, and their eyes are surrounded by dozens of natural motion sensors that picks up all vibrations within 300 feet (91.4 meters).

3. When a Vydorack is buried deep at the bottom of its funnel, it is impossible to detect with infrared vision until it strikes.

4. The dirt of the funnel is so loose and smooth that it is almost impossible to climb out without help. Once a victim has come close to the dirt funnel edge, he must roll a sense of balance check at -30%. If the victim fails, he will slide down the dirt funnel to the bottom, where a Vydorack is likely hidden. In order for the victim to climb out on his own, he must make a climb/scale walls roll at 1/8th of the normal skill percentage. Vydoracks have spent thousands of years perfecting their funnel traps.

5. Vydoracks are able to secrete an odor that matches the scent of water. Any creature with a decent sense of smell will be fooled by the scent 90% of the time.

Combat: 3 attacks per melee round.

Damage: The creature's bite does 2D6 damage. The giant pincers in front of the mouth do 6D6 + P.S. damage. If a natural 19 or 20 is rolled for an attack, then the Vydorack has snared its prey within its pincers; roll percentiles: 01-30%, no arms are caught in the pincers; 31-80%, one arm is caught in the pincers; 81-100%, both arms are caught. If the monster catches prey, it will try to burrow back into the ground with its victim. **Bonuses:** +3 to Strike, Parry and Dodge, +5 vs Horror Factor, +3 on initiative.

Magic: None.

Psionic Powers: None.

Vulnerabilities/Penalties: None.

Allies and Enemies: None.

Language: None.

Favorite Weapon: None.

Notes: The Vydorack is another predatory monster that likes to hide in waiting for its next victim. Once it finds dirt loose enough to create its funnel trap, it burrows backwards into the ground and begins creating the trap.

Mataat

The stench filled the entire tunnel. It almost burned my lungs with its smell, and nearly forced my trail rations back up from my stomach.

It was death. Old death.

None of us wanted to go forward, but turning back meant over a hundred days of backtracking before we would reach another unexplored tunnel.

Going back was not an option.



We were running out of Goblin slaves, but they had better underground sight than any of us, and they were a thousand times more expendable than any Dwarven knight. A shove from the noble sent a Goblin sprawling past the corner that reeked of decay.

We were all tensed and ready for battle. We were tired of losing our comrades. We weren't going down without a fight.

The Goblin lifted himself off of the ground and looked up. When he froze in his position, we knew something was there... and we were ready.

Moments creaked by like hours, but the Goblin stood unharmed.

"Go see what it is," Nobleman Hassimaar whispered to me.

Reluctantly, I slithered against the cavern wall and slowly peered around the corner.

There were hundreds of them. Small, hairless humanoid creatures no taller than a Dwarf. They were walking in and out of some structure that almost filled the entire cavern. The creatures weren't menacing, they were busy doing their every day work, in fact, they were ignoring us!

I waved our warriors forward and we started making our way towards the bizarre-looking creatures with weapons in hand. They still didn't pay us any attention.

"You think they'll let us by?" One of the human soldiers asked me.

"I hope so." Admittedly, I wasn't paying much attention to the fear in my stomach or to my worried comrades. I was fascinated that we found a new species of humanoids.

It was when we started to pass by the curious looking creatures that the brunt of the stench almost knocked me backwards.

It was the structure they were living in.

They were living in a dead Heat Worm!

The Mataat, the Carrion People

Alignment: Mostly Unprincipled or Anarchist. A few may be Scrupulous, Miscreant or Aberrant, but they are rare.

The Eight Attributes: I.Q. 3D6, M.E. 3D6, M.A. 2D6, P.S. 2D6, P.P. 3D6, P.E. 3D6+6, P.B. 2D6, Spd. 3D6.

S.D.C.: 15 plus whatever is gained from O.C.C. and physical skills, **Hit Points:** P.E.+1D6 per level of experience.

Average P.P.E.: 3D6

O.C.C.s Available: Any man of arms (except for Long Bowman, Knight or Palladin) or clergy (typically Shaman), with some psychics (Psi-Mystics or Psi-Healers only). The Mataat are carrion eaters; they can protect their tribe, but prefer to feed off of other people's kills.

Horror Factor: 7

Natural A.R.: None.

Physical Appearance: The Mataat look like small, pale, hairless humanoids with talon-like claws for shredding corpses, and large, bulbous heads. The most bizarre feature of the humanoids are their flat faces. The Mataat's mouth and nose have been compared to a rare breed of owl. The nose of the Mataat is flat and ends in a sharp talon, used to help tear carrion, and protrudes straight down the face to cover the mouth, which is filled with teeth. The Mataat is able to move its nose, like an extra appendage, when it speaks or eats. The taloned nose is not very suitable for use in combat. The bizarre faces of the Mataat, along with their black, lifeless eyes, make them a strange sight to behold.

Size: Four to five feet (1.2-1.5 m) tall.

Weight: 75 to 100 pounds (34-45 kg).

Average Life Span: 20 to 30 years.

Natural Abilities:

1. Like most creatures beneath the surface, The Mataat's eyes can only see in infrared vision, with a line of sight that reaches up to 300 feet (91.4 m). Heat attacks, such as close torches or

fireballs, disorient the Mataat and give it a -3 to Strike, Parry and Dodge. Sunlight causes a painful blindness that hinders the Mataat at -10 to Strike, Parry and Dodge.

2. The Mataat also have a very advanced sense of smell, and can use this ability as the Track Humanoids skill at 30%, +5% per level. If the Mataat are tracking creatures in any stage of decay, they receive a bonus of +10%.

Damage: 1D6 claws; or by primitive weapon type.

Bonuses: +2 to strike and dodge, +3 to parry, +1 to pull punch, and +2 vs Horror Factor.

Magic: Only by magical O.C.C.

Psionic Powers: Only by O.C.C.

Vulnerabilities/Penalties: Sunlight (mentioned above).

Allies and Enemies: The Mataat are a shunned race of people because they feed on the dead of all creatures. They have no allies, but have no enemies either, although they have fallen victim to various under-dwelling beasts.

Language: Mataatian, apparently unrelated to any surface language.

Favorite Weapon: When forced to fight, they prefer crude stone clubs, or slings for distance.

Notes: The Mataat are a peaceful people that rarely attack anyone unless they are defending their home. Mataat have been known to set up an entire village in the insides of a dead Heat Worm or Tunnel Trap Worm, which is a place they could feed for years.

Sharee

"Are you Heaters lost?"

The voice sounded very close to my ear!

Our men-at-arms drew their weapons with lightning speed as fear and adrenaline took over their bodies. I couldn't quite make out where the voice came from, but I knew it was close.

"There," the mage pointed after mumbling his spell magic under his breath. "He's in the alcove of rocks."

We all turned and faced... nothing... sort of.

At first, I couldn't see anything but darkness and shadows — shadows created by our abundance of torches.

As I squinted my eyes, I could make out the creature's form. It was another humanoid!

He walked out leisurely from the alcove with his hands raised. His skin was as brown as the rocks he was hiding in and it was covered with tiger stripes that were a darker shade. His loincloth hardly kept his masculinity hidden and various dagger hilts were distributed all over his body.

"I've never seen so many Heaters this deep before," the creature spoke eloquently in our tongue. "Are you looking for anything in particular?"

"We're trying to get out of here," I answered the stranger. "Our ranger was lost some time ago. We have no way of getting back to the surface."

Just as I finished my sentence, I saw something miraculous. Before my eyes, the humanoid changed colors! His skin slowly turned from brown to a ruby red. Even his tiger stripes changed into a deeper shade of red. He showed no fear of us as he spoke.

"I'll lead you to the surface."

Excitement filled my lungs and tension eased out of my muscles. Thoth had answered my prayers.

"Thank you, sir," I said with relief. "Thank you for your kindness."

"I'm not doing it for kindness," the crimson creature stated bluntly. "I need weapons. Lots of them. When I return you to the surface, you will donate weapons to me and my people. As many as we can carry. That is my price."

"I agree to your terms," replied Nobleman Hassimaar. "Return me and my charges safely and you will be rewarded."

"So be it."

The creature immediately walked to the rear of our party and began walking in the opposite direction we were heading.

"Where are you going?" demanded the noble.

"If you want to return safely, then I will lead you this way... but if you want to walk into a Maxpary colony, we can continue on your route."

I liked him.

The Sharee, the Chameleon People

Alignment: Mostly Unprincipled or Anarchist. A few may be Scrupulous, Miscreant or Aberrant. A Diabolic Sharee would be killed by their society.

The Eight Attributes: I.Q. 3D6, M.E. 4D6, M.A. 3D6, P.S. 3D6, P.P. 3D6, P.E. 3D6, P.B. 2D6, Spd. 3D6.

S.D.C.: 15 plus whatever is gained from O.C.C. and physical skills, **Hit Points:** P.E. plus 1D6 per level.

Average P.P.E.: 3D6

O.C.C.s Available: Any (Sharee Assassins are deadly, but are shunned if they are not working for the Sharee people).

Horror Factor: None.

Natural A.R.: None.



Physical Appearance: The Sharee are very similar looking to humans except for the pigmentation and reptilian surface of their skin. The Sharee natural skin color is a light red, with dark red stripes that cascade over their entire body like a tiger. The Sharee are able to concentrate and change their color pigment to any color in the visible spectrum. Different travelers have run into different colored Sharee, but can tell their race by the deeper colored stripes. This chameleon ability is the Sharee's natural defense.

Size: 5-7 feet (1.5-2.1 m).

Weight: 100-250 pounds (45-113 kg).

Average Life Span: 60 years.

Natural Abilities:

1. The Sharee are one of only a few races that have both infrared vision and normal surface vision. A hard blink of the creature's eyelids will switch from one vision to the other. After adjusting for one melee round, the Sharee will have no negatives beneath the surface and only limited negatives on the surface. Because the Sharee live so close to the surface, their bonuses are only -3 to Strike, Parry and Dodge during daylight hours and are brought back to normal at night.

2. The Sharee's most famous ability is their chameleon skin. When this race concentrates for a melee action, they are able to change their skin pigment to any color they desire. When this ability is in effect, it is similar to the skill *camouflage*, except that it only applies to the character, and its base percent is at 60% +4% per level of experience. It is a very useful tool, but is useless when failing to move silently. The Sharee will lie in hiding for some time without a single movement just to be safe.

3. The Sharee's most beneficial ability is their power to reduce their body temperature low enough to be invisible to creatures that see in infrared. The power is a fantastic ability when standing still, but the Sharee will still draw a predator's attention if moving. The concentration necessary to lower body heat takes a full melee round (15 seconds).

Combat: 2 attacks per melee round, or by Hand to Hand skill.

Damage: 1D6 by hand or damage by weapon type.

Bonuses: +2 to Parry, +3 to Dodge, +2 vs Horror Factor, +2 on initiative.

Magic: Only by O.C.C.

Psionic Powers: Only by O.C.C.

Vulnerabilities/Penalties: Sunlight hinders their vision (see above); however, if an enemy were to take advantage of the Sharee when seeing in the infrared, someone could temporarily blind the Sharee with a bright fireball or other large heat-based attack. The enemy would gain the element of surprise while the Sharee was disoriented.

Allies and Enemies: The Sharee are allied with no race, but have done some limited trading with some of the friendlier under-dwellers near the surface. The Sharee's enemies are endless, like the rabbit on the surface world.

Language: Shareenese and Elven.

Favorite Weapon: The Sharee prefer weapons that can be easily hidden, such as knives and daggers.

Notes: The Sharee are a hunted people. The flesh and meat of the Sharee are considered to be a favorite of the majority of underground predators. This is why the Sharee make their homes so close to the surface. On the downside, humanoid races are often confused with the Sharee when they travel beneath the

surface. Underground predators will go to great lengths to eat any humanoid flesh, especially if they think it is the Sharee.

Utherians

The Sharee guide was fantastic. Ever since he took the reigns of the expedition, we hadn't lost a single member of our group. Not only had he detoured us around many dangers, but he had also taken the time to describe the habits of the many horrors that we have faced beneath the surface.

I recall vividly the time our guide discovered Giant tracks.

"Underground Giants? Are you sure they are not Jotans?" I asked.

The Sharee male only looked at me and scoffed at my question. "Jotans don't grow this large. This is an Utherian, the Three-Faced Giants." The Sharee guide politely waited for me to grab my book and ink quill.

"Utherians are a strange lot. Lethargic they may be, but one of them could easily wipe out the rest of your warriors. I've dealt with a few in my time. Moody folk. You never know what emotion is dominant in their small brain at the time.

"It's said that one brain works all three faces that go around their head. As simple as they are, not even I could sneak up on them.

"Stay away from them, human. Utherians may be lazy, but if one sees you on an empty stomach... I'll be finishing your book for you."

Utherian, Three-Faced Giant

Alignment: Any, but lean toward Anarchist, Miscreant, and Diabolic.

The Eight Attributes: I.Q. 2D6, M.E. 3D6, M.A. 2D6, P.S. 5D6+6 (supernatural), P.P. 3D6+6, P.E. 5D6+6, P.B. 2D6, Spd. 4D6.

S.D.C.: 1D4x10+40, **Hit Points:** P.E. +1D6 per level of experience.

Average P.P.E.: 5D6

O.C.C.s Available: Any. Leans towards men of arms or clergy (typically Shamans).

Horror Factor: 12

Natural A.R.: 5

Physical Appearance: Utherian Giants are a strange sight to behold. They are immense in size, even for Giants, and they have three faces that circle their head. Some Utherian faces are exactly the same, while others have three completely different faces. Utherian faces are connected from cheek to cheek and cover three sides of the Giant's head (similar to a three-sided pyramid, but the Utherian's head is round like a normal giant-sized head). All three faces share the same brain.

Size: 19-24 feet (5.8-7.3 m) tall.

Weight: 1,000 to 1,600 pounds (450-720 kg).

Average Life Span: 350 years.

Natural Abilities:

1. Like most creatures beneath the surface, the Utherian Giant's eyes can only see in the infrared spectrum of light, with a line of sight that reaches up to 400 feet (121.9 m) in all directions. Heat attacks, such as fireballs, disorient the Giant and give it a -3 to Strike, Parry and Dodge. Sunlight causes a painful blindness that hinders the Giant at -10 to Strike, Parry and Dodge.

2. Utherian Giants can never be surprised when awake. Their three faces circle around their entire head, and can see in all directions.

Combat: 3 attacks per melee round, or by O.C.C. and Hand to Hand skills, whichever is greater.

Damage: Typical Giant damage or by weapon type.

Bonuses: +2 to initiative, +3 vs Horror Factor, +3 to Strike, +2 to Parry.

Magic: Only by O.C.C.

Psionic Powers: Only by O.C.C.

Vulnerabilities/Penalties: Sunlight hinders their vision (see above).

Allies and Enemies: Utherian Giants are a secluded and slothful society, but they are bitter enemies of the Raxian Giants. Utherians believe that Raxians are a blight on Giantkind.

Language: Giantese/Troll.

Favorite Weapon: Utherians prefer Jotan- and Kobold-made swords and pole arms.

Notes: Utherians are the laziest members of Giantkind. As fierce fighters as they are, they have no leader that motivates them to fight and conquer. Utherians will deal with humans and other races, because they have been beneath the surface for tens of thousands of years. They were never used in the Elf/Dwarf War.

Raxians

"How do you hide from a Raxian Giant?"

The Sharee's question baffled me.

"I don't know. How do you hide from a Raxian Giant?"

"You stand directly in front of the Giant, point at a nearby rock, and yell, 'I'M HIDING OVER THERE!'"

Jackal-like laughter erupted out of my red-skinned comrade.

I didn't get it.

Our Sharee guide did everything he could to quiet himself before he woke up the rest of the camp. "I'm hiding over there," he repeated to himself as he wiped the tears from his eyes.

"What are Raxian Giants?" I didn't want to ask, but I had to know. It bothered me when I didn't understand a joke.

"How can you be a man of books and knowledge?" The guide shook his head as he regained his composure and then gestured for me to retrieve my writing book. "Raxian Giants are legendary for their stupidity. Even with two heads, they don't have enough brains to fill a normal sized head.

"One time, I stumbled upon a Raxian Giant sleeping. I wasn't even paying attention; it was when I was younger. Anyway, the thing made no noise when it slept. None! I thought it was dead. So, I crept up beside it and then... CLICK.

"One of its heads woke up."

His tale was fantastic. I could tell he was accustomed to story telling. He must have told this one a thousand times.

"I was terrified," he continued. "There I was, in front of a Raxian. Its eyes locked right on me and I didn't have time to alter my color. You know what I did then?"

I shook my head.

"I told the Giant that I was a dream and that, if he closed his eyes, I would jump into his mouth and fill his stomach. Sure enough, his eyes closed, and I ran until my legs couldn't hold me up any more."

Raxian, Two-Headed Giant

Alignment: Any, but lean toward Anarchist, Miscreant, and Diabolic.

The Eight Attributes: I.Q. 2D4 (per head), M.E. 1D6, M.A. 2D6, P.S. 4D6+8 (supernatural), P.P. 3D6+4, P.E. 4D6+8, P.B. 2D6, Spd. 4D6.

S.D.C.: 1D4x10+15, **Hit Points:** P.E. +1D6 per level of experience.

Average P.P.E.: 4D6

O.C.C.s Available: Any men of arms, clergy, Witch or Shaman.

Horror Factor: 12

Natural A.R.: 5

Physical Appearance: Raxians are ugly, giant, two-headed humanoids with pale white skin. Their bodies are very muscular and they wear primitive clothes that hardly cover their skin.

Size: 17-19 feet (5.2-5.8 m) tall.

Weight: 750 to 1,200 pounds (337.5-540 kg).

Average Life Span: 250 years.

Natural Abilities:

1. Like most creatures beneath the surface, a Raxian Giant's eyes can only see in the infrared spectrum of light, with a line of sight that reaches up to 400 feet (121.9 m). Heat attacks, such as fireballs, disorient the Giant and give it a -3 to Strike, Parry and Dodge. There are some Raxian Giants that have wandered to the Mount Nimro region and have helped the Nimro build underground caverns. These select few have been used to the fire forges of the Nimro, so they are only reduced to -3 Strike, Parry and Dodge in sunlight, as well as near lava. All others, however, suffer the usual -10 to Strike, Parry and Dodge in sunlight.

Combat: 3 attacks per melee round, or by O.C.C. and Hand to Hand skills, whichever is greater.

Damage: Typical Giant damage or by weapon type.

Bonuses: +1 to initiative, +3 vs Horror Factor.

Magic: Only by O.C.C.

Psionic Powers: Only by O.C.C.

Vulnerabilities/Penalties: Sunlight hinders their vision (see above).

Allies and Enemies: Raxian Giants are bitter enemies with Utherian Giants. Their war has raged for over 2,000 years, and it doesn't look like it will end any time soon. Nimro and Jotan Giants have tried to bring peace, but the Giants' hatred for each other is too deep.

Language: Giantese/Troll.

Favorite Weapon: Raxians prefer their hands, clubs of stone, and hurling rocks.

Notes: Raxians are incredibly stupid Giants. They are the mockery of Giantkind. When other Giants insult each other, they use the Raxians' name for total humiliation. What the Raxians lack in intelligence, they make up for in tenacity and rage.



Necro Knights

I've lost track of all time. I don't know how long we have been underground, but ever since our Sharee guide has taken over, time has flown as easily as hawk rides the sky.

I miss the sky.

It took awhile, but I was starting to feel the easy feeling of optimism fill my spirit and ease my footsteps forward. I truly believed we were going to make it.

A glint of hope that was quickly shattered.

"BLASPHEMERS!"

The voice bellowed down the underground tunnels and sounded like it had slipped down from a grave. Before anyone could act, a creature emerged from the side of the tunnel. It looked as if someone had buried it in the dirt for a hundred years and we had somehow activated with our presence.

"PAY THE PENALTY FOR YOUR IMPUDENCE!"

It was a human skeleton, wearing full plate mail armor. It moved with such speed and efficiency that it seemed the weight of the metal armor didn't hinder it at all. It swung a glimmering voulge in its steel gauntlets and downed two of our soldiers before we could act.

Nobody could stop it.

It hacked through the remaining soldiers and mortally wounded our three remaining Dwarven knights. The fear in my stomach paralyzed my body as I stared in dumbfounded terror at the uncanny, undead creature slaying all of my companions before my eyes.

It was a thud from my Sharee companion's elbow that sent blood circulating through my body again.

"Come on," he said. "We must flee!"

"But... my friends... my noble."

The undead warrior cut through everyone in his path as easily as a farmer would cut down wheat with a scythe. Nobleman Hassimaar kept putting slaves between him and the deathless Knight, but he was running out of obstacles... and the obstacles were running away.

"Your noble is dead! We will be also, if we don't flee immediately. It will come for us when it is done!" The Sharee grabbed me by the shoulders and then screamed in my face. "Let's go!"

So... I ran.

I took one more glance behind me as I followed my underground guide. I looked in time to see the Knight had impaled my noble with his voulge and was making his way to our mage. The mage's words burned into my memory.

"My magic's not working! He's negating me! The thing is negating me!"

I didn't stick around to see what happened to the mage. I can only guess he met the same fate as the rest of group.

Necro Knight

Alignment: Miscreant or Diabolic.

The Eight Attributes: I.Q. 3D6, M.E. 3D4+1, M.A. 3D4, P.S. 3D6+16 (supernatural), P.P. 3D6+8, P.E. 3D6+6, P.B. 1D6, Spd. 3D6.

S.D.C.: None, **Hit Points:** 4D6x10+100.

Average P.P.E.: 4D6x10

Average I.S.P.: 3D6x10

O.C.C.s Available: Knight, Palladin, Long Bowman, or Assassin.

Horror Factor: 14

Natural A.R.: 11

Physical Appearance: Necro Knights look like skeletons wearing full armor and armed to the teeth. Even though the Knights are mostly covered, they always leave one of their

appendages, or even their head, in the open to notify all spectators of their true nature.

Size: 6-7 feet (1.8-2.1 m) tall.

Weight: 200 to 300 pounds (90-135 kg).

Average Life Span: Immortal.

Natural Abilities:

1. Necro Knights do not have normal vision or infrared vision. Instead, due to their highly magical minds and bodies, Necro Knights are able to see with a constant "See Aura" that allows them to see all creatures that have P.P.E. Magical constructs and mages that are able to make P.P.E. invisible will be hidden from the Necro Knight's sight. The range of the Knight's sight is 150 feet (45.7 meters).

2. Necro Knights bio-regenerate at a rate of 6 Hit Points per melee round. Even if they are killed, unless their remains are blessed or treated with holy water, they will reform and plot their vengeance.

3. Necro Knights are immune to any type of fear or Horror Factor, magical or otherwise. They are also immune to sleep, paralysis, poison and non-magical weapons. Cold and fire do half damage, and magical piercing weapons (such as arrows and forks) do half damage, but magical edged and blunt weapons do full damage.

Combat: 6 attacks per melee round or 2 attacks by magic.

Damage: By magical weapon type.

Bonuses: +4 to Strike and Parry, +3 to Dodge, +3 to Initiative, +5 to Pull Punch, +2 to Disarm.

Magic: Blinding Flash, Negate Magic, Agony, Animate and Control Dead, Tongues, Fireball and Call Lightning.

Psionic Powers: Telekinesis (Super), Telekinetic Leap, Teleport Object, Commune with Spirits, and Empathic Transmission: Despair.

Vulnerabilities/Penalties: Holy water does 6D6 damage per vial; holy items do double damage.

Allies and Enemies: Necro Knights are rewarded warriors that worship the Old Ones. They will attack any intelligent creature that does not worship the Old Ones. They will work with Chaos Priests and favored warriors who worship them, but they are not team players. Their primary enemies are creatures that worship any other god. Allies usually consist solely of Minotaurs.

Favorite Weapon: A magical weapon or rune weapon of any kind.

Notes: Necro Knights are always on the lookout for "heretics" to slaughter. While the majority of Knights have the intelligence to plan and use pawns for their murders, there are some Knights who will attack "non-believers" on sight without a second thought.

Dirt Vipers

The death of my comrades hung heavy in my mind. I felt as if I abandoned them; but if I stayed, I would be dead too.

"You're a scholar," my Sharee friend reminded me. "There was nothing you could have done to prevent the outcome."

He was right.

The obliteration of our expedition was days behind us. Whenever we needed food, my guide would find us some edible mushrooms that were plentiful in certain areas underground.

But what little hope I had of seeing the sun again, died with my comrades.

Suddenly, the walls of the dirt tunnel we were in seemed to come to life. I could see movement all around us, but nothing had come out of the walls... yet.

"Get to the center of the cavern and don't move!" ordered the Sharee.

I obeyed the guide and took a giant leap to the middle of the tunnel and froze. He, in turn, did the same.

Within moments after we stopped moving, so did the things beneath the dirt.

"What were those things?" I whispered.

"Dirt Vipers," he said. "They're still there. They're waiting for us to move again."

"Why don't they come out and see?" I asked.

"Because they can only move through the earth. They can't slither on any surface. The only way for us to see them is when they strike, by popping out of the tunnel surface. I didn't see any movement on the cavern floor, so we should be all right."

We waited for over an hour, but there was no motion within the walls.

"They have to still be there," the Sharee man said to himself as he took a step forward.

Like a burst of light, a Dirt Viper exploded from the wall to our right and snapped its full toothed jaws a foot from my guide's face.

He never even flinched.

"Are you ready?" he asked me.

"For what?"

"To run."

"Why? Won't they leave if we stand long enough?" I asked.

"Normally, but not this time. Ready?"

I crouched down and prepared my legs to spring into action.

"GO!"

We sprinted down the cavern with every ounce of speed we could muster. I kept my eyes locked on the red silhouette of my guide as I heard hissing from all directions. I forced myself not to look every time I heard the rumble of crashing dirt and the "chomp" of the snakes biting empty air.

"Don't slow down," I barely heard the Sharee guide over the hundred hisses that filled the tunnel. "Keep up the pace!"

Dirt Viper

Alignment: Considered Diabolic (very hostile).

The Eight Attributes: I.Q. 1D6 (Animal intelligence), M.E. 1D6, M.A. 1D4, P.S. 2D6+3, P.P. 4D6, P.E. 3D6+4, P.B. 1D6, Spd. 6D6.

S.D.C.: 6D6+8, **Hit Points:** 3D6+3.

Average P.P.E.: 2D4

O.C.C.s Available: None.

Horror Factor: No Horror Factor for one, but a Horror Factor of 7 for four or more.

Natural A.R.: None.

Physical Appearance: Dirt Vipers are the size of Python snakes, with the speed of the Black Racer snake. Their scales are dark brown in color and their heads are disproportionately larger than their bodies. The Vipers have four large in-



cisors that protrude from their mouths, like those of a traditional venomous snake, along with rows of needle-teeth. When a Dirt Viper latches on to its victim, only death can pry it off — either the Viper's or the victim's.

Size: 9 to 12 feet (2.7-3.7 m) long.

Weight: 200 to 250 pounds (90-112.5 kg).

Average Life Span: 130 years.

Natural Abilities:

1. Like most creatures beneath the surface, Dirt Vipers can only see in the infrared spectrum of light, with a line of sight that reaches up to 150 feet (45.7 meters). Heat attacks, such as close torches or fireballs, disorient the Viper and give it a -3 to Strike, Parry and Dodge.

2. Like most underground worms and snakes, Dirt Vipers have an excellent sense of smell, and the head is covered by dozens of natural motion sensors that pick up all vibrations within 400 feet (121.9 meters). Their sense of smell and vibration detection allow the worms to track prey in nearby catacombs; track by vibration 89%.

3. Dirt Vipers are extremely venomous. The poison from a Dirt Viper's bite does an extra 4D6 damage each round the snake is latched to its victim. A save vs lethal poison must be made each round the Viper is clinging to its prey. Even if the prey saves vs poison once, the snake will keep injecting its venom until one of them dies. The Dirt Viper's venom sacks are so large that they take up a large part of the snake's body, so it can keep this up for quite some time.

4. The Dirt Viper's first attack is when it erupts from the cavern wall, ceiling, or even the floor. It will lock its tail in a sturdy piece of dirt, coil the rest of its huge form, and then spring out to latch onto the closest prey. When the Viper shoots forth from its hiding spot, it gains surprise. If it is traveling with other snakes

that join in springing on other travelers, the other Vipers get a one time +8 on Initiative on the initial attack. The downside to the Viper's strategy is that it can only move inside the ground. It cannot slither in open areas. A normal Dirt Viper can only shoot out 5 to 6 feet (1.5-1.8 m) from its holding spot. Adventurers that keep their distance from the snapping jaws of a Dirt Viper can avoid its venomous strike unless there are more than one or they spring from the ground floor.

Combat: Two attacks per round.

Damage: The bite of a Dirt Viper does 2D6 damage. If the victim tries to use his strength to pull the snake from his body, an additional 2D6 will be done when the snake is ripped from its victim. Every time the Viper bites, it injects its venom (see above).

Bonuses: +3 to Initiative (see above for group attacks), +4 to Dodge, +3 to Strike.

Magic: None.

Psionic Powers: None.

Vulnerabilities/Penalties: See above.

Allies and Enemies: No allies. Dirt Vipers prey on anything that moves.

Favorite Weapon: None.

Notes: Dirt Vipers will attack any creature that moves, although they will stay away from the Tunnel Trap Worms and Heat Worms. These snakes are infamous in the underground. If one Dirt Viper has been spotted, then travelers will stay away from that area. Dirt Vipers are known for traveling in groups.

Murder Fog

It came out of nowhere.

My torchlight caught a glimpse of the fog as it started slowly at our feet.

"What is this stuff?" I asked.

My guide stopped in front of me and crouched down to examine the vapor. "I don't know. I've never seen anything like this before."

His answer wasn't the least bit reassuring.

The further down the tunnel we went, the thicker the fog became. I could barely make out the Sharee that stood directly in front of me.

"I think I see something," he said. "It's... warm."

I could barely see where the Sharee was pointing. It was a faint, white glow that gave off a smooth warmth. It felt as if we had reached the center of the fog and the radiance was its heart.

It was unnatural. I felt it in my soul.

"Are those people in there?"

He was right. I saw humanoids emerging from the warm light in the center of the fog. There were dozens of them, in all shapes and sizes. There were Goblins, Trolls, humans, and I even saw the point of Elven ears.

I quickly spurted out a greeting, in seven different languages, but the approaching mob said nothing in return.

"I don't like this," I said flatly.

"Wait. I think I see another Sharee in there."

"No! Don't!"

He heard my warning too late.

One of the humans stepped forward with a pick axe and drove the mining tool down into the Sharee's skull. His last words were stopped short by surprise, pain and blood.

There were too many of these creatures. They came in all different races and each one was wielding a mining tool... and they were coming for me.

Murder Fog

Alignment: Diabolic!

The Eight Attributes: I.Q. 1D6 (killing the living is their only thought), M.E. 1D6, M.A. 1D6, P.S. 3D6+8 (supernatural), P.P. 3D6+4, P.E. 3D6+10 (supernatural), P.B. 1D6, Spd. 2D6.

S.D.C.: None, **Hit Points:** 2D6x10 for each undead miner.

Average P.P.E.: The entire fog radiates high levels of P.P.E. for reasons unknown, but the creatures inside the fog are undead, and have none.

O.C.C.s Available: None.

Horror Factor: Horror Factor of 7 for the unnatural underground fog, and then a Horror Factor of 13 when the walking dead emerge from it.

Natural A.R.: 8 (for each humanoid).

Physical Appearance: The fog is a bright, white mist that moves through cavern depths unnaturally. Under-dwellers and surface dwellers are able to see the fog because of a bizarre, warm light in the center of the white haze. Once the fog reaches sentient beings, the real horrors spill forth. 7D6 humanoids (humans, Elves, Dwarves, Trolls, Orcs, etc.) emerge from the fog, wielding mining tools as weapons, with their flesh hanging in various states of decay.

Size: Various (any humanoid who has died while mining, primarily slaves and workers).

Weight: Various.

Average Life Span: Unknown.

Natural Abilities:

1. Since the Murder Fog and its denizens are undead, they are immune to psionics and magic that affect the mind. These monsters are also immune to any type of fear or Horror Factor, sleep, paralysis, poison and non-magical weapons. Cold does half damage, while magical weapons and fire (normal and magical) do full damage.

Combat: Two attacks per round, per humanoid. If the fog surrounds a victim, then attacks will come from all directions!

Damage: Shovel: 1D6 + P.S. damage, pick axe: 2D6 + P.S. damage, mattock or large pick: 3D4 + P.S. damage, hammer: 1D4 or 2D4 + P.S. damage.

Bonuses: +1 to Strike, +3 vs Magic, +5 vs Psionics; NEVER DODGE.

Magic: None.

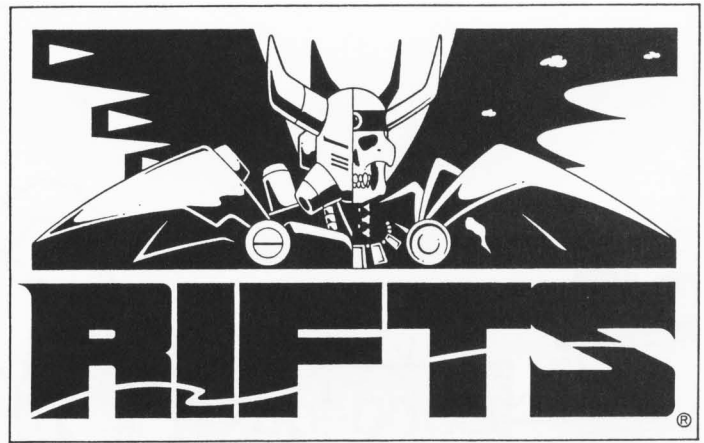
Psionic Powers: None.

Vulnerabilities/Penalties: Takes triple damage from holy weapons. Holy water does 3D6 per splash.

Allies and Enemies: The Murder Fog is the enemy of the living.

Favorite Weapon: Mining tools.

Notes: The origins of the Murder Fog are unknown, whether it is a creation of a mad and powerful Necromancer, or the dreams come to life of the Old Ones.



Goodcourt

Life in a Fadetown

Optional Source Material for Rifts®

By Eric Swanson

Often, players and G.M.s think that excitement and intrigue can only be found in the spires of Atlantis, the battles raging across Europe and North America, or the deep wilderness. But adventure and discovery can be found in the daily goings-on of a small town inhabited by normal people (as normal as people can be in the world of Rifts®).

This place is not for those with no sense of subtlety or restraint. Force of arms and arrogance will get nowhere. Keen observation, forethought, the ability to build trust, and lots of skill rolls will be needed to be successful.

Below is a narrative of the village, followed by Game Master information with adventure ideas and plot hooks.

The setting is Goodcourt, a very small, semi-isolated town on the edge of the Magic Zone, that just happens to have a few peculiarities.

Thirty-one miles (50 km) northwest of the ruins of Nashville and 19 miles (30 km) southeast of old Clarksville, on the west side of the Cumberland River is a village. It has stood there since sometime after the Coming of the Rifts, and the full history of the village is lost. Only a few of the villagers carry on the oral history, most of which, they will admit, is only legend. Many believe that Goodcourt was built on the ruins of a larger town that was destroyed with the eruption of the Ley Line, and the subsequent flooding caused by the damage to the nearby hydro-electric dam. Many of these same people believe that they are descendants of the survivors who stayed and struggled to eke out a bare living.

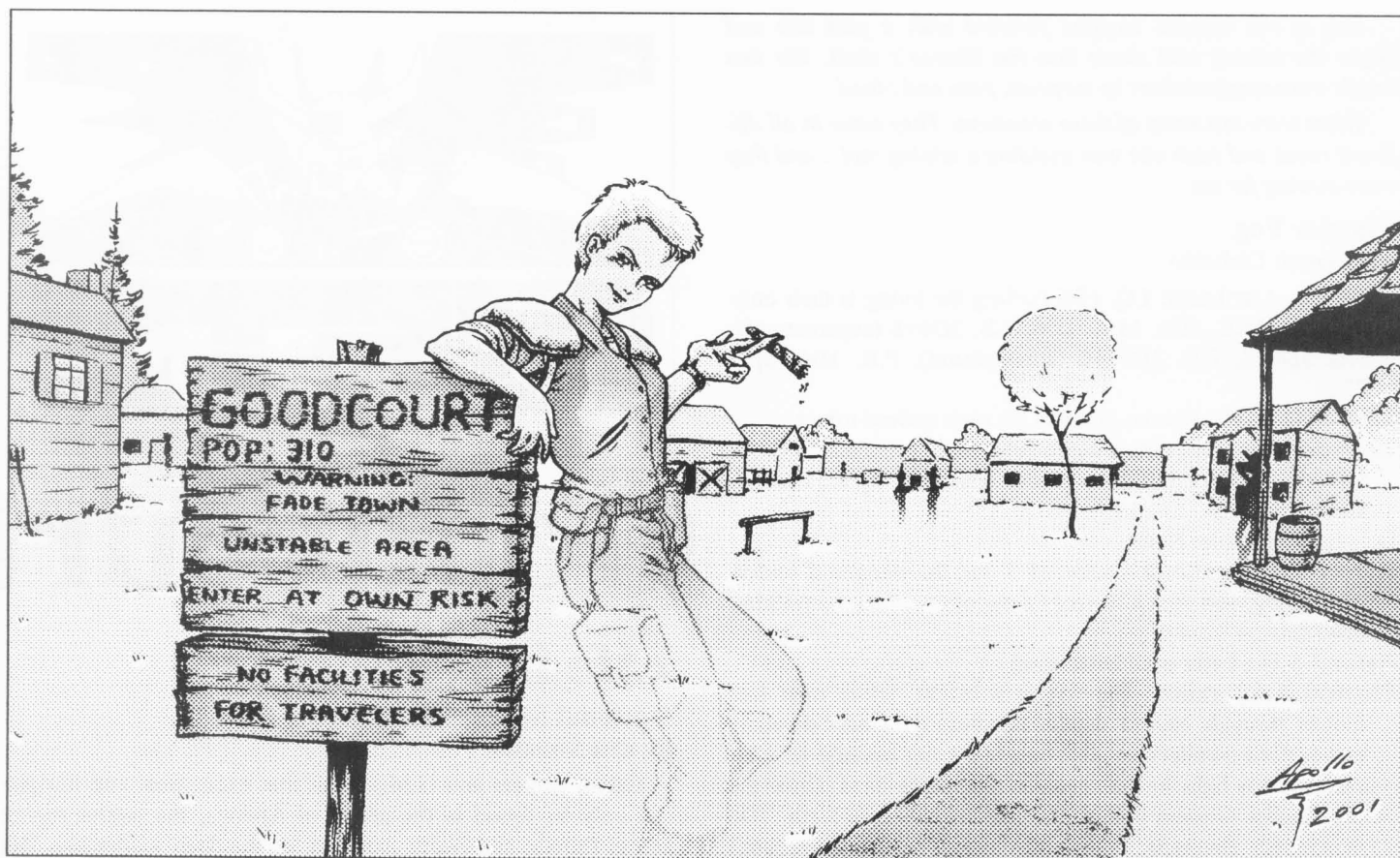
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WARNING: FADETOWN

UNSTABLE AREA

Enter At Own Risk

No Facilities for Travelers



That is what the sign 2 ½ miles (4 km) down the well-maintained, 16 foot (4.9 m) wide concrete road reads. The road extends another mile and a half (2.4 km) through the lightly forested, rolling hills and ends mere meters from the first buildings.

There are no walls, posts, or other defenses. The only apparent security is the occasional armed and armored guard. The most remarkable features of the town upon first entry are the large, decrepit pre-Rifts dam blocking the river on the south edge of town, and the weak Ley Line that bisects the river, cuts through the dam, and runs through the south edge of the village.

The town is surrounded on the west and south by fields of beans, corn, barley, lettuce, cabbage, and peas. To the north are well-tended orchards of apples and pears. Small gardens of onions and tomatoes are scattered around and within the village.

Most of the buildings, including the vast majority of the residences, are wood-plank or split-log, single-story structures with glass windows. Certain buildings (detailed later) are stone, or a mix of stone and concrete. The only Mega-Damage structure is the dam, made of ferrocrete and other alloys. All buildings have internal plumbing. Power and other infrastructure issues are at the heart of what makes this town unique.

As the sign said, there are no facilities for travelers. Those wishing to stay will need to make special arrangements with the townsfolk or sleep outside the village bounds.

Two Industries Make the Best of Unfortunate Circumstances

The two major industries of Goodcourt are agriculture and Techno-Wizardry. Both are variously assisted and complicated by the Ley Line and its unique Fade effects. Twice a month, one

of two Fade effects occurs. Each has a 50/50 chance, and the research that has been done indicates no pattern to the Fades. The first Fade possibility is a "Ghost Fade" that affects 10-60% (1D6x10%) of the population for 8-13 days (7+1D6). The second is a "Magic Fade" lasting 7-12 days (6+1D6). The break between Fades lasts 2-12 days (2D6).

The two industries and the remnants of the pre-Rifts dam interrelate to pervade life in Goodcourt. The lack of conventional technology, access to low-risk Ley Line energy, and plentiful food drew a group of skilled but unambitious Techno-Wizards. The items they created increased agricultural production tenfold and power threefold. This, combined with large sections of the population not needing sustenance for weeks at a time due to the Ghost Fade, has allowed exporting of grains, fruits, and vegetables. Some of this food makes its way, through intermediaries, as far as CS Missouri. The relatively easy life allows the Techno-Wizards to produce a few more mundane TW items for export.

The hydro-electric dam is the architectural landmark of the area, and the primary generator of power that allows the modern conveniences found in Goodcourt. The knowhow to rebuild the dam is gone, but the town retains the capability to maintain the dam and perform minor repairs, slowing the decay and delaying the eventual failure of the dam. It has had parts rebuilt with Techno-Wizardry devices, allowing it to function at as high as 70% capacity. When the Magic Fades hit and the plant has to rely on conventional technology, the capacity drops to 20%, leading to power brown-outs and disruption of electrical service and waste treatment.

As with many Fadetowns, the locals have had to adapt themselves to the environment and have become typically insular.

The Ghost Fades have forced the populace to be very communally oriented (losing half the farmers at harvest time means everyone needs to pitch in) and to be slow-paced (spending two weeks WATCHING everything but not being able to really DO anything leads to patience). The conditions have also helped to create a unique political system called the Gathering of Goodcourt (described later). The Magic Fades have made everyone resourceful and adaptable (making candles for when the TW generators go out, for example) as well as used to odd behaviors among significant townspeople (the various magic-users in Goodcourt tend to get weird when the "line goes down"). The Fade effects mean that, by and large, the townsfolk have no experience with Ley Line storms or entities appearing on the Line, and think of the Ley Line as a generally beneficial thing. A third condition that may be related to the Fade effects (or may be due to something else entirely) is that there are no major or master psionicists among the populace that grow up here. Even minor psionicists are rare, making up less than 5% of the population.

The food and TW tools are traded to other communities in the Magic Zone and surrounding areas. Due to the town's insularity and desire to stay beneath the notice of potentially hostile powers, all trade is conducted by "Exporter/Importers," a title conferred by the Gathering on some locals and a few outsiders. The "Ex/Im's" are mandated to trade or sell the town's production and are provided with lists of major items that the townsfolk need, and they are expected to make acquiring these items a high priority. Other than that, they have complete discretion in how they conduct trade and with what medium of exchange. They serve at the pleasure of the Gathering, and can be removed whenever the Gathering decides. As a symbol of their position, and to facilitate trade, every pair or group of Ex/Im's is given a 10-wheeled, reinforced S.D.C. truck with a TW engine and a TW refrigerated cargo area. They travel as far north as Dweomer and as far west as Whykin. Unless they are told to be on the lookout for specific items, most prefer to trade for TW-quality crystals, mechanical parts, books, art, craftworks, and exotic foods. They tend to frown on weapons because of the attention they would attract.

Getting Around Town

This is not a big deal. Almost the entire town can be taken in with one sweeping gaze. And from the windows on the control room of the dam, the entire village, fields, orchards, and the surrounding terrain can be watched. With one notable exception, everyone lives in wooden cabins clustered together in a flat, grassy area about 150 yards/meters from the edge of the river, just downstream of the dam. The average home is a couple of rooms with indoor plumbing and strung-up indoor lighting. Paths of woodchips run between the buildings. Near the roads are a series of wooden and concrete sheds that store all the tools, supplies, and foodstuffs for the town. A couple of the concrete sheds are kept refrigerated by TW devices and store perishable items. The town doctor has a larger-than-normal house, as a large part of it functions as a clinic. The notable exception is a house dug out of a hillside to the south. It faces north and is featureless except for a wooden door and a small porthole-like window. This is the house of a secretive Ley Line Walker.

The few non-wooden structures in the cluster of buildings serve special functions. The town's library is an outsized brick structure. The front part of it is the actual "public" library that

sees only moderate use, since the majority of the population (60%) is illiterate. The side and back function as a workshop and lounge for the Techno-Wizards and the observing High Magi. Given the nature of this group, it is used a lot more as a lounge than as a workshop. The only two-story structure in the town proper is the stone Constable's Office. This functions as an administrative office, conference room, militia headquarters, and holding area. The second floor is windowless and poorly insulated (the stone making it hot in the summer and numbingly cold in the winter). It is only accessible from one set of interior stairs and has a lockable, heavy wooden door. This is used as a holding cell (holds 14 people with room to sleep on the floor, many more standing room only). The Constable doesn't normally jail offenders (usually some kind of community service or other punishment straightens out local offenders), but the room can be used to keep potentially dangerous people until a decision is made about what to do with them.

Next to the Constable's Office is a large stone shed, with heavy wood doors kept padlocked. This is the town armory and is where the militia's energy rifles, TW grenades, truncheons and equipment are held. Also held here are about 100 rifles and shotguns and a couple dozen submachineguns, as well as about 4000 rounds of the appropriate ammunition. These are for the townsfolk to use in case of all-out invasion or other emergency. The rifles and shotguns also see use in the occasional hunting foray. The keys are kept by the Constable or a deputy militia member on duty in the office.

The only other stone structures are the wood/pulp and grain mills downstream (north) of the dam. They produce finished wood and small quantities of paper as well as barley grain for local and export use.

The most physically imposing structure is, without a doubt, the looming old dam. The dam dates to sometime long before the Coming of the Rifts. The words "Tennessee Valley Authority" were found on various things in the dam. It was originally built of normal construction materials, then reinforced and remodeled with ferrocrete and other Mega-Damage materials in the last decade before the Rifts. It stands about 65 feet (19.8 m) high and has five stories. It originally stretched the 110 feet (33.5 m) across the river, but about 16 feet (4.9 m) has collapsed at the far side of the river and only 5 of the 12 spillways work. The dam can be reached by a pathway that climbs a slope up to the control room level (4th floor) on the near side of the river. A light Mega-Damage door wide enough for a small cart or forklift accesses the control room interior. The door is unlocked during the day and a deputy lounges outside under a shelter half. The deputy only asks that all "dangerous items" (i.e. weapons and armor) be left with him before granting entry. Inside the place is a haphazard collection of jury-rigged technology, TW devices plugged into the workings, and signs of decay (peeling paint, loose cables, leaking pipes, etc.). Most of the turbines are TW-assisted. The crew is untrained and relies on the remaining manuals and spec sheets to effect repairs. They work just to keep the conventional tech from further failing and, when they have a spare moment, to move through the unused sections and try to repair or salvage what they find.

The Ley Line cuts through the dam, and anyone looking through the control room's panoramic windows will see everything with a bluish tint. The Line travels northeast for 7 miles

(11.2 km) and southwest (near the edge of town) for 5 miles (8 km). It doesn't intersect any other Ley Line. It is weak and if not for the Fade effects it causes, it would be totally unremarkable.

The river itself is northward-flowing, slow-moving most of the year, and hasn't flooded in living memory. It averages about 26 feet (7.9 m) deep downstream of the dam. Behind the dam, the river has formed a small lake with a treacherous undercurrent caused by the dam, and averages 65 feet (19.8 m) deep. Fish are caught on both sides, but are far from plentiful. No monsters have been found in the water but rumors of serpents some distance upstream are occasionally heard.

Who's in Charge Around Here?

The short answer is the Gathering of Goodcourt, but like any other political system, what goes on behind closed doors is often more important than what goes on in front of the public. The insular nature of the community and the lackadaisical nature of many of the folk have led to a communal, fully democratic system that allows everyone to participate without anyone having to take full responsibility for decisions.

The Gathering is made up of all the adults in town, "adult" being defined as anyone who takes a share of the work and isn't dependent on others for day-to-day living. The Gathering is held monthly, or whenever someone thinks an issue is of concern to the entire town (and that seems to be most issues). Anyone may call for a Gathering. The time is set for the evening two days after the initial call is made. The agenda is drawn up immediately and posted in public. Items for debate are also announced publicly twice a day for the two days. The Gathering can be held anywhere there is space; an open area in the village is generally used during clear days, the Constable's Office when the weather is inclement are the most common. All who wish to participate assemble (attendance is not generally required). Anyone may speak by waiting for the current speaker to finish and then stepping forward (often leading to much jostling and jockeying). Theoretically, even strangers may speak, but they are not generally taken seriously unless they prove to be very eloquent or are backed up by a trusted Goodcourtier. Any party who has a stake in the outcome is allowed to speak, and is listened to closely, but is recused from voting when the time comes so that all decisions produce an objective outcome. Consensus must be obtained for any decision that changes the status quo. If even one person says no, and cannot be convinced by the side conversations that often happen in such cases, then the decision fails. The Gathering allows for the Ghost Fades by tabling any decision that involves a person who is currently a "ghost" until the Fade is over. However, other decisions will still be made by those not affected.

The Gathering has only two absolutes. One is that all items in town, outside of personal effects, are owned by the Gathering (that is, the village as a whole). The second is that the Gathering appoints all the administrative positions in the town, and has sole discretion in removing those who hold the appointments.

This is how things work in theory. In practice, many of the townsfolk rarely attend the Gathering, most of the speaking is done by a small handful of people (some, former adventurers), a lot of "lobbying" goes on before and during the Gathering, and some people carry a great deal more weight than others. Peer pressure is often brought to bear. The conservative nature of the

people also means that most decisions that would alter the course of the town are defeated. This is not to say that the occasional proposal by a young farmer's wife doesn't get passed, but, rather, she should be sure to have the ear of someone more influential or be able to get enough other farmers' wives on board and hope that peer pressure carries the day. The constant attendees are the resident Ley Line Walker, the Constable, the Librarian, and the Paramedic. The Doctor, the Exporter/Importers, and the other mages usually attend as well.

Is it My Turn for the Bicycle?

The village is run communally. Except for individual homes and some personal items, everything is group-owned. Food stores, books, the armory of weapons, 3 TW tractors, 6 TW plows, 10 draft horses, 3 wagons, 4 bicycles, 8 rowboats, the TW Ex/Im trucks (currently 6) and a host of tools and implements are all owned by everyone, and their use is shared. Even the many musical instruments (almost every Goodcourtier can play some kind of instrument) are all owned in common. The occasional disagreement is generally handled by one of the part-time militia deputies or the Constable. The Ghost Fades have made it necessary for everyone to pitch in when things need to get done, and not having to argue over who owns what makes the doing easier. It has also virtually eliminated theft (though the Constable is still called when someone's personal items turn up missing or someone's house has been invaded). Again, the more influence someone has, the more things he or she can claim as "personal items."

Famous Faces and the Little People

As with any place, some townsfolk stand above the rest and are more likely to interact with outsiders. But, unlike in other places, the cold, slightly suspicious nature of Goodcourtiers, the rotating militia membership, and the village's chaotically democratic decision making mean that a farmer or maintenance worker can cause visitors as much trouble as the resident magic-users.

The population of 310 adults consists of about 220 who are full-time farmers or orchard tenders. Another 65 work at the dam, run the grain and saw mills, maintain the two roads that lead out of the town, and distribute supplies. The rest of the town are either magic-users or hold one of the Gathering-appointed positions. With children, the total population is 338. All the people are human, and most are Unprincipled in alignment and naturally wary of anything strange, be it non-humans, humans in power armor, or even an unfamiliar animal. Most (60%) of the population is illiterate, but the last few years have seen an upsurge in basic education, led by the town Librarian and the two Midwives.

The militia are all farmers and other townsfolk who take turns working part-time. They function as deputies to the Constable and as town guards. All are volunteers (though there is peer pressure for all able-bodied men and women to take their turn). Thirty people are called for duty each month. They work 6-hour shifts every day (doing the 6 hours in addition to their normal work of tending fields, monitoring the dam, etc.), and are expected to respond at a moment's notice in an emergency.

The first Gathering-appointed positions are for medical care. The town Doctor is Grinling, often called "Grinling the Extraor-

dinary” by awed villagers. He is a tall, stocky middle-aged man who grew up here and learned his skills and philosophy from his small stock of books. He is an experienced holistic doctor and a committed pacifist. He refuses to carry weapons of any kind and will only don armor when pleaded with. He has studied the teachings of a pre-Rifts philosopher named Gandhi and follows the tenets of non-cooperation and civil disobedience. He takes a spiritual and mystical view in both his work as a healer and in his relationships with others. His clinic has no high-tech diagnostic tools but does have a few TW treatment items, and he maintains a large stock of medicinal herbs and tries to keep in stock anything that would be routinely needed. He and the other medical staff do not like to rely too much on the TW items, due to the frequent and unpredictable Magic Fades. Grinling is noted for treating routine illnesses and injuries in a fashion that leaves little scarring and few complications, and has a sensitive, concerned bedside manner.

While Grinling is the primary doctor, his skills are weak in dealing with the trauma that occasionally occurs. For this, he is assisted by the town’s emergency paramedic — Penn Kellerman. Penn is a former adventurer from Ishpeming who “retired” here 4 years ago. Penn is not a trained medical doctor, rather he is a Scientist trained in biology and chemistry and experienced in field surgery. He believes in using violence for self-defense and takes a very scientific view of things, causing some professional and personal friction with Grinling that, so far, has remained respectful. This is because each admires the strengths of the other. Methodical, complication-free treatment on one hand and quick, life-saving “meatball surgery” on the other. Still lean and tough, Penn won’t join the militia but will defend the clinic and his patients with force. Now at age 40, he spent a decade adventuring before settling down. Given the chance, he is happy to share stories of his past. He still uses the same type of medical equipment he trained on years ago and is the only medico to have been outside the immediate area.

Goodcourt also has two Midwives, who deliver babies, act as nurses and teach public health and literacy to the villagers. Malvina Woad and Ione Chetter are both married to farmers and are familiar with herbal applications. They look at Grinling as a paragon of virtue and Penn as a dashing hero. They remain in awe of Penn’s medical equipment and Grinling’s wisdom.

The position of town Librarian was created when the Techno-Wizards arrived and set up the Library. The position has only been held by one man — Father Onslow. This librarian and teacher is also an immigrant. Originally from western Oklahoma, he became a Preacher like his father. Part of a planned mission to New Lazlo sponsored by a wealthy patron, he was put on a plane 12 years ago. Bad weather and poor maintenance led to the plane’s crash in the Magic Zone, of which he was the only survivor. He found his way to Goodcourt, and after treatment and long discussions with Grinling, he earned a spot as a teacher and chronicler. With the arrival of the Techno-Wizards, he was asked to run the Library. He gave up preaching to become a scholar, though the lackadaisical nature of the mages has rubbed off on him. His old fire only shows through when disciplining students or when debating at the Gathering. He got the nickname “Father” due to both his previous career and his age (58).

One of the most visible positions is that of town Constable. The current Constable has held the position for 6 years and is

very popular, though he was initially viewed with great suspicion. He is Edmond Zubok, formerly Sergeant Edmond Zubok of the CS military and listed as MIA/presumed dead. A conscript from New Chillicothe, he rose to the rank of Sergeant and a position as an infantry squad leader in a CS Missouri regional unit. His platoon was ordered to raid into the edge of the Magic Zone. The platoon was ambushed by Goblins, and he was knocked out late in the fight by a mis-thrown CS stun grenade. He was left behind when the surviving 14 troops evacuated. An Exporter/Importer found him and brought him back to Goodcourt, causing much consternation among the Gathering (and leading to the dismissal of the Ex/Im). When his wounds were tended to by Grinling, he was carefully introduced to the village. While disturbed by the prevalence of magic, he was comforted to know that no D-Bees lived here. Despite the propaganda of his CS upbringing, he was much less prejudiced against humans who used magic or psionics than he was of D-Bees. He still distrusts non-humans but is loyal to Goodcourt and the decisions of the Gathering, and his position requires him to be distrustful of all outsiders anyway. He much prefers the small-scale socialism of Goodcourt over the bureaucratic fascism of the Coalition States, and will try to “convert” any other individuals from the CS he encounters. His job has two purposes: peacekeeping and defense. He much prefers the former, and enjoys resolving disputes and disciplining the occasional miscreant. Since there are no law codes and no “state” to offend, all offenses are effectively disputes between individuals (detailed later). Constable Zubok is fair in dealing with disputes, and can be counted upon to make the guilty party understand his or her mistake and the victim to feel justice has been done. The second part of the Constable’s job, defense, concerns Zubok. He understands that he is the best person for this job, but is a reluctant fighter. He worries about the day that one of his militia will die under his command, and wonders whether he will be able to order his fellow citizens into certain death if the time comes. He drills his militia and has upgraded their equipment, and would like to build some defensive works, but knows that a determined invader can roll through town virtually unimpeded. The town’s best defense is keeping a low profile, and he works to that end. So far, he has not needed to face these worst possibilities. Under his tenure, the worst dangers to the town have been a wounded Rhino-Buffalo that trampled the orchards last year, and a small group of D-Bee bandits that tried to make off with some Techno-Wizardry items 3 years ago. In both cases, he, along with his militia, assisted by the magic-users in town, solved the problem with no serious injuries to Goodcourtiers (the Rhino-Buffalo was killed [and eaten], two bandits were killed, and the other 12 were driven off).

The other appointed positions are those of Exporter/Importers. One who has made a name for herself is Pate. She is the primary person responsible for keeping track of inventory and watching the storage sheds. She can usually be found hanging around the refrigerated sheds, chomping on a cigar and complaining about something. A short, muscular, 30-something with a gruff manner, Pate isn’t known for witty conversation. She is blunt and to-the-point. Constable Zubok has said, on more than one occasion, that she would make a great supply sergeant in the Coalition military. She is an Exporter/Importer who used to travel widely but now rarely leaves town. She had a reputation for getting things by less-than-savory means, and had contacts

with the Black Market that she has since let fade away. Knowing the current stocks of the town and its needs inside and out, she understands the advantage she has, and rarely haggles. While not an Operator, she can tell the utility of almost anything, and can separate the wrecked and worthless from the new and valuable with a few minutes' appraisal. Her hobbies include grumbling, smirking, gesticulating with the ever-present cigar, and groaning at the latest exploits of the town's two most beloved figures, Bren and Somiver.

Bren and Somiver are two Ex/Im's with a (unintended) streak for comedy. They never fail to get into something that the rest of the village finds uproariously funny. Every time they go out on the road, they come back with some story of misadventure and hilarity that causes groans and laughs. Not fully comprehending the humor of their circumstances, they tell these tales with all the seriousness they believe is deserved, adding further to the others' fun. While a little slow at picking up on what's going on, they are not totally incompetent, and occasionally stumble into a really good deal. The Gathering knows not to send them on any deal that is particularly important, and the two take their TW truck (the most unreliable in the small fleet) on a regular run to the northwest, trading foodstuffs for craftworks, art, and books with the groups of scrupulously honest Grey Seers that live along the route.

The remaining people of note in Goodcourt are noteworthy not for any position they hold, but rather for the power they wield.



It's a Magic Kind of Town

Three kinds of magic are practiced in Goodcourt — Techno-Wizardry, Dweomerian High Magic and traditional Ley

Line Wizardry. The Techno-Wizards are a colorful bunch who are responsible for much of the town's success. High Magic has just recently arrived in town in the form of students from Dweomer. The single Ley Line Walker in town is a person who holds many secrets, in a town that has so little room for secrets.

Ten years ago, a group of skilled Techno-Wizards, from various places in and around the Magic Zone, came across Goodcourt and its Ley Line. Being relatively unambitious for their kind, they figured that putting up with an occasional Ghost Fade (no one knew of the Magic Fade at this point, since there were no magic-users in town) was a fair trade for access to a stable, safe Ley Line. Throw in the steady food supply that the small farming town could provide, and it seemed like a great deal. A deal was made with the Gathering to provide a TW-based infrastructure and TW agricultural improvements, in trade for food and the right to take up residence. Five weeks later, a Magic Fade hit, catching the Techno-Wizards by surprise. Three of the nine Techno-Wizards packed their bags and left. The rest still thought they could do better here than in Stormspire or some other place. The six who remained (5 traditional Techno-Wizards and a Combat Techno-Wizard) — Myrick Appleton, Madelon of Southside, Cashin the Salacious, Garvin the Green, Dragutin Kay, and Lazar the Resolute — have kept up their end of the bargain, and Goodcourt has prospered. As a group, they are cheerful twits, who become harried twits when the Magic Fade hits and their devices power down. While not truly lazy, they are unambitious (they have been referred to, on more than one occasion by more than one person, as “underachievers”). They'll create items needed by the village, but they do not experiment, research, or innovate. They put effort into their work, but don't lose sleep over it. The exceptions to this laid-back behavior are Cashin regarding romantic liaisons, or Lazar regarding combat. They all like to participate in the community, but have drawn the line at making their personal magic items communal.

The work of this “cabal” of Techno-Wizards came to the attention of instructors in Dweomer's Brotherhood of Creation. They were most interested in learning about the civil applications of Techno-Wizardry. A year ago, they put together a project to send a group of “graduate students” to Goodcourt for a “field study.” After getting a hesitant nod from their superiors in the Brotherhood and the okay from the Goodcourt Techno-Wizards (and the Gathering), five promising young High Magi — Till Flyfair, Dagmar Birdcharmer, Viveka Heaman, Stetson Wimple, and Haakon Wells — were outfitted and sent to Goodcourt. They have been here for 10 months, and have 14 months left before they are to return to Dweomer. The plan was to observe and study with the Techno-Wizards, but the Magi quickly realized that the Techno-Wizards had little interest in mentoring, so they soon adapted their laid-back style. What was planned to be a “field study” has turned into an extended “spring break.” All five say they'll buckle down when they return to Dweomer but, with the exception of Haakon, they are in no rush to go back. So far, the people back in Dweomer have no idea that the group has turned into a bunch of goof-offs, but they are waiting for some kind of update. The group earns its keep in Goodcourt by assisting in construction and design of housing and other things. They have well insinuated themselves into daily Goodcourt life, and are considered members of the community.

By general agreement, the most mystically powerful person in town is the resident Ley Line Walker, Adina Tulliver. She is a mystery that many townsfolk never get tired of talking about. She maintains a stone and concrete house, dug into the side of a small hill south of the town proper, on the other side of the Ley Line, near the lake behind the dam. What is known about her is that she is from the "True" Federation of Magic, and she came into Goodcourt 5 years ago and talked her way into staying. She claims to be studying the Fade effects with an eye toward controlling or ending them. Most of the villagers don't like her because she rarely "pitches in," but they value her wisdom in the Gathering and her attempts to stop the Fading. She alienated herself further when she let slip that she regarded the villagers as "bumpkins" and the other wizards as "goof-offs." She spends most of any given day by herself, "due to the burdensome requirements of research," she says. Interestingly, she rarely uses the Library or workshop. Her response is that the Library is biased to the needs of the Techno-Wizards and thus is either "irrelevant or too simplistic" for her needs. And, indeed, she has her own stack of books in her house. It is also no secret that she does not like uninvited visitors and has warded her house against the too-curious. The only exception to her aloofness is the Gathering. She is a constant attendee, and during the Gathering becomes much more outgoing and downright charming. She is often a voice for caution, and has swayed the Gathering from making decisions that could have led to discovery by foreign powers on more than one occasion. She has used her magic to assist the community, but it is clear that she has a lot more ability than she has displayed.

Rumor-mongering about Adina has become a hobby among many Goodcourtiers. The rumors about her include that she is more powerful than she lets on, that she is on the run from something, that she maintains something dangerous in her house, and that she isn't really concerned with the Fade effects, but uses it as an excuse to avoid work. On the occasions she has been confronted about these things, she responds to the first with "my true power will be revealed when I think the time is right," and the second with "my past deserves the same level of privacy as yours." The third she declares to be patently untrue (and she has, in fact, invited people over to see her place). As for the fourth, she doesn't even deign to answer most of the time. The other wizards in town don't engage in the rumor-mongering, but they have asked her about how the research is going. To them, she will snappishly respond that "further measurements are needed, my last test underestimated the seasonal variations in energy release," or some other arcane response that makes the Techno-Wizards realize just how far out of their league Ley Line research is.

Strangely, despite Adina's sense of privacy and secrecy, she is often one of the first (after the Ex/Im's and the Constable or a deputy) to take a look at strangers. She doesn't introduce herself, but will interrupt any exchange between a Goodcourtier and a visitor.

Law and Justice

As mentioned before, Goodcourt has no written laws and no "state" to prosecute violators. Instead, everyone has a developed sense of justice. Everyone knows that murder, rape, destruction of communal property, and assault are wrong. Communal own-

ership of most things renders theft almost moot. Nonetheless, people, being people, will invariably do something that causes real or imagined harm to someone else. When that happens and someone's sense of justice has been wronged, the Constable or a deputy is called. For all but the most serious offenses, conflict resolution is the name of the game. The parties involved get a hearing, generally an informal, "what's your side of the story?" After all parties are heard, the officer renders a ruling, the goal being to restore a sense of justice to the complainant and to make the offender realize that the act is wrong and that he or she has harmed the town, offended neighbors and shamed him or herself. This usually requires some kind of proportional restitution. As an example: Young Roddy burns down a wall of Farmer Gordon's house. Roddy had the lighter and kindling on him, and Deputy Orfil "sentences" him to apologize to Farmer Gordon and his family, restore the wall back to the way it was, put the Gordon family up at his place until the wall is fixed up to the Gordons' satisfaction, and assist the Gordons in dealing with any inconvenience this causes (maybe even setting a date the wall has to be done).

For more serious offences, recidivists, and times where resolution is impossible because guilt is in doubt, the Constable always becomes directly involved. The Constable investigates the situation and delivers a ruling. If the crime is deadly serious, the perpetrator is incorrigible, or the perpetrator refuses to accept the ruling, a Gathering is called (any person in the conflict, including the person given a punishment, has the right to bring the issue to the Gathering). The Gathering reviews the issue and the judgment of the peace officer, and can decide to overturn, modify or support the first ruling. Exile, imprisonment, public humiliation, and even death, are all possible punishments. It is a credit to both the innate sense of community and to the system that death has never been called for, and exile has rarely been used. The balance to this system is that the peace officers must be fair, as having too many rulings brought before the Gathering leads to the shame of removal from the Militia or, in the case of the Constable, to loss of office. Constable Zubok is especially good at striking a balance between the needs of the community and the needs of the individual. In his 6 years, he has only had 6 judgments brought to the Gathering. None were overturned and only 2 were modified.

Foreign Relations

Goodcourt keeps a low profile. Its entire survival is predicated on staying "below the radar" of hostile powers, as the CS or the "True" Federation of Magic would presumably be. The disorienting effect of the Ley Line on psychics helps to prevent detection by CS Psi-Hounds and Psi-Stalkers, and the lack of any regional ambitions keeps it below the notice of Dunscon. This is a continuing strategy of Goodcourt. Trade through the Exporters/Importers happens with enclaves of Grey Seers, Stormspire, and Magestar, though none of these places officially recognize Goodcourt. The CS also has no official knowledge of the village, but since trade from Goodcourt makes it all the way to Whykin, via independent merchants, tracing the location of Goodcourt would be a relatively easy thing for anyone connected into the merchant network of CS Missouri. Dweomer and the Native American-controlled Central Preserve are the only regional powers that recognize Goodcourt. The long distance

(310 miles/496 km) between Goodcourt and Dweomer prevents any relationship closer than trade, the occasional direct communicate and, rarely, travel (usually through magical means). The Central Preserve wishes no closer relationship than regular trade, and Goodcourt respects this. Goodcourt is completely unknown to Psyscape, Lazlo, New Lazlo, Free Quebec and Archie-Three. The Gathering has made it clear to the traveling Ex/Im that no new, formal contacts should be made, though they know of the existence of Psyscape, New Lazlo, and Free Quebec, and might consider allowing trade with the first two sometime in the future. The new war by the CS against Tolkeen has moved many units away from CS Missouri, relieving some of the pressure against the Magic Zone and making detection by the CS less likely. It has also, however, subtly stirred up the Federation of Magic as they watch and wait. Both Constable Zubok and Adina Tulliver know that an active Federation would increase chances of press gangs looking for "recruits" into Dunscon's forces coming to town.

Game Master's Section

This section provides details on the major NPCs of Goodcourt, gives insight into some secrets, details some new Techno-Wizard items, and provides adventure ideas and plot hooks. While power levels can be adjusted up or down if needed, it should be remembered that brute force isn't the nature of this town, and the combination of the Constable and his Militia and the Wizards should be enough of a match for the average group of player characters, should they get unruly.

Non-Player Characters

The Average Goodcourtier

Alignment: 80% Unprincipled, 20% any except Diabolic.

H.P.: Average 11 to 20, **S.D.C.:** Average 15.

Attributes: All average, tending toward low M.A. and high P.E. **P.P.E.:** Average 9.

I.S.P.: None for most, normal for those with Minor Psionics.

Appearance: Varies. Ethnically, the town is mostly made up of people of mixed European and African descent. Most are descendants of the pre-Rifts locals.

Disposition: Generally, a Goodcourtier is insular, reserved, hard-working, and suspicious of sudden change (think Appalachian mountain folk). Most (60%) are illiterate but want to learn. The presence of the Fade effects reinforces their behavior, while the Techno-Wizards present a different model of behavior. They do like to celebrate with food, drink and music as a way of relaxing, and are friendly, open, and trusting of each other. They hold night-long celebrations at the drop of a hat. They prefer to avoid violence, but can be vengeful if wronged.

Experience Level: 1st to 4th level Vagabond.

Magic: None, but are familiar with Techno-Wizard items and are not surprised by magic.

Psionics: None for most. About 16 people have Minor Psionic abilities.

Combat: Two attacks per melee round.

Bonuses: +1 to save vs magic in addition to any attribute bonuses.

Damage: Normal for a human.

Skills of Note: Varies by occupation. Mostly, skills related to agriculture and repair, and other skills related to life in a rural town with a 1920s level of technology. Most have at least one Play Musical Instrument skill.

Weapons and Equipment: Personal hygiene items and mementos. All other items are collectively owned. In major emergencies or for hunting, citizens have access to an armory of S.D.C. rifles, shotguns and sub-machineguns.

The Average Militia Member

The militia is made up of townsfolk who have volunteered to be deputies and defenders of the town. Every month, 30 of them are activated and take on these duties in addition to their daily chores. About 180 men and women are involved in the militia.

Alignment: 80% Unprincipled, 20% any good.

H.P.: Average 11 to 16, **S.D.C.:** Average 25.

Attributes: All at least average with a minimum M.A. 10, M.E. 10, P.P. 9, P.E. 10.

P.P.E.: Average 9.

I.S.P.: None for most, normal for those with Minor Psionics.

Appearance: Varies. Ethnically, the town is mostly made up of people of mixed European and African descent. Most are descendants of the pre-Rifts locals.

Disposition: Generally, a Goodcourtier is insular, reserved, hard-working, and suspicious of sudden change (think Appalachian mountain folk). Most (50%) are illiterate but want to learn. Those who volunteer for the Militia tend to be more community-oriented and helpful. They are trained problem-solvers and tactically familiar with the town. While not fully trained soldiers, they are brave defenders of their town. They do like to celebrate with food, drink and music as a way of relaxing and are friendly, open, and trusting of townsfolk. They prefer to avoid violence in routine matters of peace-keeping but are ready to fight.

Experience Level: 1st to 3rd level Deputy (from *New West*™).

Magic: None, but are familiar with Techno-Wizard items and are not surprised by magic.

Psionics: None for most. About 8 members have Minor Psionic abilities.

Combat: Four attacks per melee round.

Bonuses: +1 to initiative, +2 to parry/dodge (at level 2), +2 to pull punch, +3 to roll, +1 vs Horror Factor (at level 2), +1 to save vs magic, in addition to any attribute bonuses.

Damage: Normal for a human; Kick Attack 1D6 S.D.C. (at level 3).

Skills of Note: W.P. Energy Rifle, W.P. Blunt, Hand to Hand: Basic, all other Deputy O.C.C. skills except Surveillance Systems; other skills are applicable to life in a rural town with a 1920s level of technology. Many have one Play Musical Instrument skill.

Weapons and Equipment: Each militia member on duty is assigned: NG-L5 Laser Rifle, 4 standard E-clips, Truncheon (Nightstick), 2 TW Paralysis Grenades, Homemade Armor (30 M.D.C. and non-environmental), TW Magic Optic System, and Gas Mask. As Goodcourtiers, each also owns personal hygiene items and mementos. All other items are collectively owned.



Grinling the Extraordinary

True Name: Grinling Linus Nash

Alignment: Principled

H.P.: 41, **S.D.C.:** 20.

Attributes: I.Q. 17, M.E. 15, M.A. 18, P.S. 11, P.P. 12, P.E. 13, P.B. 14, Spd 11.

P.P.E.: 89

I.S.P.: None.

Age: 53

Height: 6 feet 1 inches (1.85 m), **Weight:** 218 lbs (98.1 kg).

Appearance: Tall, stocky, and clean-shaven with thin white hair. He resonates with an inner tranquility and strength of character.

Disposition: Grinling is a dedicated pacifist and healer. He is a vegetarian and refrains from all intoxicants except the occasional glass of wine. He has the heart of a warrior, and will not compromise his beliefs even if it means his death. His character comes from his belief in the inherent divinity of all living creatures (he is aware of the undead, and isn't sure whether they also share this divinity). He is respectful, remarkably patient and caring, and is the consummate healer. He usually participates in the Gathering and is regarded as a moral authority. While he is prepared to block decisions that he finds morally repugnant, he usually offers his perspective and then goes along with the prevailing decision.

Experience Level: 6th level Dryad Druid (from **Rifts®: England**). Note: He is not an actual Druid and has no standing with the Woodland Druids of England, but has the power, abilities, and skills of a Dryad Druid except for the ability to make wands/staves.

Magic: None, but high P.P.E. allows him to use TW items without needing a Techno-Wizard to recharge them.

Psionics: None.

Combat: Two actions per melee round (no Hand to Hand skill).

Bonuses: +6 vs Faerie magic, +5 vs poisons/potions, +2 vs magic, +2 vs Horror Factor.

Damage: Normal for a human, but would never strike another.

Skills of Note: Holistic Medicine (68%), Mystic Herbology (68%), speak Gobblely, Algonkian and Troll/Giant (93%), Literacy: American (98%), First Aid (78%); other O.C.C. skills as Dryad Druid (no Hand to Hand or W.P. skills), plus additional skills applicable to life in a rural town with a 1920s level of technology.

Weapons and Equipment: A large stock of various enchanted and mundane healing herbs. Various TW treatment items (see the *New TW Items* section for some descriptions), bandages, disinfectant, other low-tech medical items. Personal items and small collection of books (most are in the Library). All other items are collectively owned.

Penn Kellerman

True Name: Penn George Kellerman

Alignment: Scrupulous

H.P.: 36, **S.D.C.:** 32.

Attributes: I.Q. 15, M.E. 13, M.A. 13, P.S. 14, P.P. 17, P.E. 18, P.B. 14, Spd 16.

P.P.E.: 11

I.S.P.: None.

Age: 40

Height: 5 feet 9 inches (1.75 m), **Weight:** 163 lbs (73.4 kg).

Appearance: Fit, weathered-looking, and clean-shaven with dark hair. He carries himself in such a way that it's clear he is used to danger and adventure. His nose is noticeably large (a cheap bio-system replacement). He still carries his northern accent.

Disposition: A man of action. While a trained scientist, he has always harbored a desire to be a daring hero. Any sign of medical trouble will see him rushing to the rescue. He is a little egotistical but generally easy to get along with. Likes to tell stories about his days as an adventurer, particularly his 6-month trip into the Xiticix Hivelands with a bunch of psychics to find out about the psychic abilities of the Xiticix. He religiously attends each Gathering because he sees it as his duty to help steer the course of his adopted home.

Experience Level: 4th level Rogue Scientist.

Magic: None.

Psionics: None.

Combat: 5 attacks per melee round.

Bonuses: +2 to pull punch, +5 to roll, +3 to parry/dodge, +1 vs Horror Factor.

Damage: Normal for a human; kick does 2D4 S.D.C.

Skills of Note: Hand to Hand: Basic, W.P. Energy Rifle, W.P. Auto Pistol, Gymnastics, General Athletics, Swimming (55%), speak Simvanese (80%), Literacy: American (85%), Paramedic (70%), Field Surgery (33%), Biology (65%), Chemistry (65%), Analytical Chemistry (60%), Computer Operation (75%), plus other O.C.C. skills and skills applicable to emergency medicine.

Weapons and Equipment: Old adventuring gear: JA-9 Variable Laser Rifle, 2 long E-Clips, .45acp Auto Pistol, 2 clips .45acp ammo, Huntsman Armor, Thermo-Imager Goggles, 1 pair of Walkie-Talkies, RMK, Surgical Kit, Bandages, Disinfectant, other low-tech medical items, personal items.

Cybernetics: Cheap Bio-System nose (a reminder of a close encounter with a Xiticix).



Father Onslow

True Name: Onslow Guthrie

Alignment: Scrupulous

H.P.: 23, **S.D.C.:** 27.

Attributes: I.Q. 15, M.E. 14, M.A. 17, P.S. 13, P.P. 11, P.E. 12, P.B. 15, Spd 13.

P.P.E.: 6

I.S.P.: None.

Age: 58

Height: 5 feet 9 inches (1.75 m), **Weight:** 161 lbs (72.5 kg).

Appearance: A dark-skinned man with white hair and intense eyes. Many wrinkles cover his face. He is always well-groomed and speaks, in the finest tradition of his Baptist forebears, with a well-modulated, southern-accented voice. His hands are shaky and he occasionally trembles (nerve damage from the crash).

Disposition: Formerly a Preacher in the Fire and Brimstone tradition, he has now settled into the quiet life of a librarian and scholar. He has become quite laid-back and somewhat of a procrastinator due to the influence of the Techno-Wizards, but his old fire shows through when "speechifying" at the Gathering or disciplining a student that has "worked his last nerve." He has an addiction to coffee and gets ornery if he doesn't have a cup or two in him. At celebrations he is known to "put away a few" and is usually the winner at any drinking contest. He is a regular at the Gathering and can be counted on to have a strong opinion about everything.

Experience Level: 3rd level Fire & Brimstone Preacher (from **New West™**)/1st level Rogue Scholar.

Magic: None.

Psionics: None.

Special Abilities: Tolerance to Alcohol (can drink twice as much as normal).

Combat: 5 attacks per melee round.

Bonuses: +2 to roll, +6 to pull punch, +2 to parry/dodge, +1 vs Mind Control, +2 vs Horror Factor, +4 vs Possession.

Damage: Normal for a human; kick does 1D6 S.D.C.

Skills of Note: Hand to Hand: Basic, W.P. Energy Pistol, W.P. Blunt, speak Spanish (98%), speak Fennodi (90%), speak Dragonese/Elven and Algonkian (80%), Literacy: American (98%), Literacy: Spanish (65%), Writing (60%), Performance ("Speechifying"; 55%), Paramedic (65%), Lore: Religion (80%), Lore: Native American (60%), Lore: D-Bee (60%), plus other O.C.C. skills.

Weapons and Equipment: Quilt Vest (A.R. 12, 40 S.D.C.), Pearl-handled Wilk's-Remi 104 Derringer Laser Pistol, Weighted Mahogany Cane (1D6 S.D.C.), and personal items; all other items are collectively owned. He keeps a pre-Rifts cappuccino machine in his house that, technically, belongs to the entire village but which, in practice, he uses far more often than the others.

Malvina Woad and Ione Chetter

They have identical descriptions; feel free to modify for greater personality.

True Names: Malvina Diane Yulin-Woad and Ione Mae Forrest-Chetter

Alignment: Scrupulous

H.P.: 17, **S.D.C.:** 18.

Attributes: I.Q. 13, M.E. 15, M.A. 14, P.S. 12, P.P. 14, P.E. 12, P.B. 11, Spd 16.

P.P.E.: 7 each.

I.S.P.: None.

Age: Both are 34.

Height: 5 feet 3 inches (1.6 m; Malvina) and 5 feet 4 inches (1.63 m; Ione), **Weight:** 154 lbs (69.3 kg; Malvina) and 163 lbs (73.4 kg; Ione).

Appearance: Stout, weathered-looking, they appear older than their actual ages. Malvina has kinky dark hair and chocolate skin. Ione has fine dark hair in a bun and dusky skin.

Disposition: Both are second-generation Midwives and proud of their profession. They are particularly proud to play the important roles of health and literacy teachers and consultants on public health in the town. They are more curious about visitors than most, and spend more time with Grinling, Penn, and Father Onslow (all three they adore) than with their husbands. They are also fierce rumor-mongers and gossips. They are at most Gatherings, primarily to get new items for gossip or to bask in the accolades for their latest successful birthing.

Experience Level: 2nd level Vagabonds.

Magic: None.

Psionics: None.

Combat: 2 attacks per melee round (no Hand to Hand skill).

Bonuses: +1 vs Magic.

Damage: Normal for an untrained human.

Skills of Note: General Athletics, Swimming (55%), Literacy: American (57%), First Aid (60%), Holistic Medicine (20%), Cook (50%), Brewing (30%/35%), Animal Husbandry (40%); other O.C.C. skills and skills applicable to their jobs and to life in a rural town with a 1920s level of technology.

Weapons and Equipment: Personal items, birthing items (towels, basin, herbs for relaxing the mother and regulating labor). All other items are collectively owned.



Constable Zubok

True Name: Edmond Walter Zubok

Alignment: Principled

H.P.: 32, **S.D.C.:** 44.

Attributes: I.Q. 13, M.E. 11, M.A. 15, P.S. 18, P.P. 14, P.E. 16, P.B. 14, Spd 22.

P.P.E.: 8

I.S.P.: 31, Minor Psionic.

Age: 29

Height: 5 feet 11 inches (1.8 m), **Weight:** 190 lbs (85.5 kg).

Appearance: A light-skinned man with red hair just a little too long for military regs. Tired blue eyes, clean-shaven, sharp in movement and always looking around when not in direct conversation. Has a Missouri accent and his mannerisms are a cross between those of a career soldier and a country boy. When on duty, he wears his Dead Boy Armor, but without the helmet in order to appear more accessible and less threatening.

Disposition: He has a strong sense of duty. First it was to his family, after being drafted it was to the CS, and now it is to Goodcourt. He is suspicious of outsiders (particularly of those who hail from the CS) and makes it plain to them. He really dislikes D-Bees but is trying very hard to overcome that prejudice. He is plain-spoken and not good at guile. With townsfolk he is friendly (but no one calls him by his first name) and politely honest. He loves settling arguments fairly and likes order and predictability. He will become a hardcase if it is called for, but it's clear he doesn't like to do it. He fears for the eventual day that his town will come under attack, and wonders if he's up to the certain death and destruction that would be caused. This weighs heavily on him. He was seen crying over the bodies of the bandits that his men killed. No one mentions that incident to him. He is always at the Gathering, as most decisions have some effect on his work. He has heard of the CS war against Tolkeen and Free Quebec, but having been here since the earliest stages of the

CS build-up against Tolkeen and before the secession of Free Quebec, he knows no details.

Experience Level: 5th level Grunt.

Magic: None.

Psionics: Minor Psionics: Empathy and Mind Block (often uses Empathy when dealing with suspects). His empathic nature is what makes him so sensitive to the suffering of war.

Combat: 5 attacks per melee round.

Bonuses: +2 to strike, +2 to roll/pull punch, +3 to parry/dodge.

Damage: Normal for a human; kick does 1D6 S.D.C.

Skills of Note: Hand to Hand: Expert, W.P. Energy Pistol, W.P. Energy Rifle, W.P. Blunt, W.P. Revolver, Body Building, Climbing (65%/55%), Running, literacy: American (40%), Robot Combat: Basic, Pilot: Robots & PA (68%), Law (45%), Camouflage (55%), Military Etiquette (55%), and other O.C.C. skills.

Weapons and Equipment: His old-issue equipment (he was lost before his unit was re-equipped with the latest CS weaponry): C-18 Pistol with 3 E-clips, CV-212 Laser Rifle with 3 E-clips, Survival Knife, 2 Parachute Flares, Gas Mask, damaged CA-1 "Dead Boy" Armor (70 M.D.C. left — he refuses to let the Techno-Wizards touch it). In addition: Truncheon, 1899 S&W .38 Revolver (from **New West™**) with 18 rounds regular ammo and 12 silver bullets.

Pate

True Name: Annabelle Pate

Alignment: Anarchist

H.P.: 25, **S.D.C.:** 13.

Attributes: I.Q. 14, M.E. 13, M.A. 13, P.S. 14, P.P. 14, P.E. 13, P.B. 11, Spd 11.

P.P.E.: 8

I.S.P.: None.

Age: 35

Height: 5 feet 2 inches (1.57 m), **Weight:** 165 lbs (74.3 kg).

Appearance: A short, muscular woman with brush-cut, salt and pepper hair, and brown eyes under an oft-furrowed brow. Thick, freckled arms under rolled-up sleeves. Always has a thick cigar in her mouth or her hand; sometimes lit and sometimes not. Smirks more often than smiles.

Disposition: She is fascinated with details, and can always be counted on to know what the town's inventory is and who has what. She is gruff and short-tempered but easy to calm down. During her days as a traveling Ex/Im, she worked with the Black Market and, if pressed, will admit that she engaged in unlawful activity in CS territory and in other places. That's all behind her now. She settled down with a mill worker a couple years ago. Though they quickly split up, she has stayed put. She considers herself above the daily goings-on and is something of a workaholic. She respects the Techno-Wizards but thinks, unlike most of her fellow Goodcourtiers, that they should be held to higher standards. Her one enjoyment that doesn't involve sarcasm or belittlement of others is playing the accordion at celebrations. She is one of the best musicians in town, specializing in folk tunes and polkas. She attends the Gathering only when an item is of direct interest to her, preferring to spend the time in the supply sheds.

Experience Level: 3rd level Smuggler (from **Rifts: Mercenaries**).

Magic: None.

Psionics: None.

Combat: 4 attacks per melee round.

Bonuses: +2 to roll/pull punch, +2 to parry/dodge.

Damage: Normal for a human; kick does 1D6 S.D.C.

Skills of Note: Hand to Hand: Basic, W.P. Knife, W.P. Auto Pistol, Literacy: American (60%), speaks Spanish, French, Techno-Can, and Algonkian (80%), Palming (40%), Swim (60%), Pilot: Truck (53%), plus other O.C.C. skills.

Weapons and Equipment: Notebook and a few pens (for inventory tracking and notes), Survival Knife, a couple of cigars, lighter; all other items are collectively owned.

Cybernetics: Toxic Filter (no one knows she has this implant).

Bren and Somiver

Other Exporter/Importers are similar (though with less personality).

True Names: Bren Erliss and Jimmy Somiver

Alignment: Unprincipled

H.P.: 27, **S.D.C.:** 12.

Attributes: I.Q. 11, M.E. 10, M.A. 13, P.S. 15, P.P. 14, P.E. 15, P.B. 12, Spd 11.

P.P.E.: 7 each.

I.S.P.: None.

Age: 24 (Bren) and 25 (Somiver).

Height: 5 feet 6 inches (1.68 m; Bren) and 5 feet 11 inches (1.8 m; Somiver), **Weight:** 222 lbs (99.9 kg; Bren) and 153 lbs (68.9 kg; Somiver).

Appearance: They are quite the opposites. Bren is short-ish and roly-poly, Somiver is taller and thin-ish. Both are talkers with thick accents. Bren sports a dark moustache and Somiver has a long, unkempt blond beard. Both favor blue jeans from the CS, bandanas, and heavy work boots.

Disposition: They fancy themselves to be just like the "truckers" they saw in a pre-Rifts movie. Unfortunately, they are more like a comedy pair from other, older, movies. They are earnest in their efforts and sincerely try to score a great deal that'll make them heroes in the eyes of their neighbors. Somehow, though, something always happens to make them out as hapless victims of some cosmic comedy. Each has a (not-so-secret) crush on Pate and both try to help her out, but she can only grimace at their constant bumbling. Both are musicians (drum and flute), but during celebrations they spend more time telling stories for the amusement of the others than actually playing. They don't attend the Gathering much, since they spend as much time on the road as possible. Everyone recalls the time that Bren stood up to speak during a rainstorm when a Ghost Fade occurred, leaving him a silent ghost with raindrops falling transparently through him.

Experience Level: 3rd level Vagabonds.

Magic: None.

Psionics: None.

Combat: 4 attacks per melee round.

Bonuses: +2 to roll/pull punch, +2 to parry/dodge, +1 vs Magic.

Damage: Normal for a human; kick does 1D6 S.D.C.

Skills of Note: Hand to Hand: Basic, W.P. Auto Pistol, W.P. Blunt, speak Gobblely (90%), Literacy: American (40%), Pilot: Truck (53%), plus other O.C.C. skills.

Weapons and Equipment: Personal items. Other items are communally owned, but they usually have in their posses-

sion: TW 10-wheeled Truck, food, .32 auto pistol (equiv to 7.65mm), 1 clip (8 rounds) of .32, baseball bat or other club, survival items while traveling.

The Techno-Wizards

The six Techno-Wizards are left sketchy in order to better fit them into individual campaigns. Only their levels, notable traits, and special equipment are listed.

Names: Myrick Appleton (6th level Techno-Wizard), Madelon of Southside (6th level Techno-Wizard), Cashin the Salacious (5th level Techno-Wizard), Garvin the Green (4th level Techno-Wizard), Dragutin Kay (4th level Techno-Wizard), Lazar the Resolute (5th level Combat Techno-Wizard).

Alignment: All are Unprincipled.

H.P.: Varies, **S.D.C.:** Varies.

Attributes: Varies; minimums: I.Q. 12, M.E. 12.

P.P.E.: Between 94 and 105 (93+1D12).

I.S.P.: Between 39 and 50 (38+1D12).

Age: Dragutin is the youngest at 33. Myrick, the oldest, is 39.

Height: Varies, **Weight:** Varies.

Appearance: All dress very informally and don't go in for the Techno-Wizard "style." Myrick is bald. Garvin likes the color green, and Madelon is the only woman.

Disposition: All of them are laid-back and unprofessional. They have natural talent and do ply their trade, but are behind their peers in skill level. They like the easy life they have here and won't rock the boat. They often go to the Gathering, but don't actively participate. They'd rather be smoking, joking, and partying. It can take effort to get them motivated, but they do produce quality work, the mystic turbines in the dam and the sewage treatment system being their two biggest successes. They don't get riled over anything, even the Ghost Fade. They just take the intangibility in stride. The Magic Fades make them act like headless chickens, as they run around trying to keep all their devices working. There are two exceptions to their usual mellowness. The first is Cashin, when pursuing the current object of his romantic affections. He is not choosy about gender or age, and no one knows what it is that attracts him. He will latch on to someone and pursue them until they agree to an intimate encounter or until he finds someone else to capture his fancy. He is quite obnoxious in his pursuit, and generally scares off anyone he is interested in. The second exception is Lazar the Combat Techno-Wizard (from **The Rifter™ #2**). While not bloodthirsty, he truly enjoys the raw competition of personal combat and likes nothing better. While not wishing for the destruction of the town, he genuinely hopes for someone or something to come to town spoiling for a fight. He is a big booster of the Militia and will work closely with the Constable when the time comes.

Magic: Spells vary, nothing above 8th level.

Psionics: Minor Psionics: Mind Block, Speed Reading, Total Recall, Tele-Mechanics.

Combat: 2 attacks per melee round (Lazar: 5 attacks per melee). Lazar has Hand to Hand: Martial Arts; the others have none.

Bonuses: +2 vs Horror Factor, +1 vs Magic, +1 Spell Strength (Lazar also has +2 to strike, +3 to parry/dodge, +3 to roll/pull punch).

Damage: Normal for a human; Lazar: Kick does 1D8 S.D.C., Jump Kick and Entangle attack.

Skills of Note: Appropriate W.P.s, Literacy: American, speak Techno-Can, plus other O.C.C. skills.

Weapons and Equipment: They have kept their own magic items private, but would use them to assist the town.

Myrick Appleton: TW Ley Streaker, Dragonfire TW Flamethrower, TW Spray Gun (see *New TW Items*).

Madelon of Southside: TW Tree Trimmer, TW Armor (30 M.D.C., non-environmental, *Superhuman Speed*), TWC-150 Eyes of Thoth Glasses, TWC-100 Receiver/Translator, 2 TW Paralysis Grenades.

Cashin the Salacious: TW Ley Streaker, Amulet of Protection against the Supernatural (+2 vs Horror Factor), TW Lightning Staff.

Garvin the Green: Lightning Rod, TWB-1000 Ring (w/10 P.P.E. stored), TW Super-Belt (8 P.P.E./round of *Magical-Adrenal Rush*).

Dragutin Kay: TW Earthshaker, TW Skull Medallion (10 P.P.E. for 6 rounds *Aura of Death*), TW Optic System.

Lazar the Resolute: Wing Board, Cheetah Imitator Armor, TW Fireburst Rifle, Draining Blade.

The High Magi

The five High Magi are left sketchy in order to better fit them into individual campaigns. Only their levels, notable traits, and special equipment are listed.

Names: Till Flyfair (2nd level), Dagmar Birdcharmer (2nd level), Viveka Heaman (1st level), Stetson Wimple (1st level), Haakon Wells (1st level).

Alignment: All are Scrupulous.

H.P.: Varies, **S.D.C.:** Varies.

Attributes: Varies; minimums: I.Q. 12, M.E. 12, M.A. 12, P.P. 12, P.E. 12.

P.P.E.: Between 117 and 126 (116+1D10).

I.S.P.: None.

Age: Haakon is the youngest at 17. Till, the oldest, is 21.

Height: Varies, **Weight:** Varies.

Appearance: All still dress as if in Dweomer, but only wear their armor during emergencies or when trying to make an impression. They always try to look like they are more accomplished than they are. Dagmar and Viveka are both women and try to bring a "sense of style" to the other women of Goodcourt.

Disposition: Like the Techno-Wizards, they have become quite laid-back and unprofessional (in attitude, if not appearance). They are quite impressionable, and the Techno-Wizards have given them some bad habits they'll need to break if they are to succeed back home. However, they do retain some of the discipline they were instilled with, and have given the Techno-Wizards some ideas recently and can take credit for the little innovation that happens. Till acts like the older brother of the rest, because he is the "leader" of the expedition. Haakon is the most studious, as well as the one who most wants to get back to Dweomer. They often go to the Gathering, but usually pose more than participate. They are aware of their status as both "outsiders" and as "juniors" among Goodcourt's mages. They have become used to the Ghost Fades and often play jokes on their fellows during this time (a ghosted Magus will peep on one of the women while

she is changing, a non-ghosted Magus will close a door on another, trapping him for a few minutes, etc.). The Magic Fades disturb them as much as any other mage, but since they have higher levels of P.P.E. than the Techno-Wizards, the more experienced TWs will tap them for extra energy to keep things running. They maintain their own weapons and armor but have enough connection to the town that they will assist in times of need.

Magic: Initial spells (a formidable selection for such green spellcasters).

Psionics: None.

Special Abilities: Fatigue at half normal rate, good balance and coordination, Automaton creation and bonding rituals, Pilot Automaton, Link with the Lords of Magic, Impervious to Possession, recover P.P.E. at a rate of 10 per hour of sleep or 15 per hour of meditation.

Combat: 4 attacks per melee round; all have Hand to Hand: Basic.

Bonuses: +5% to save vs coma/death, +2 to initiative, +1 to strike, +1 to parry (+3 at level 2), +2 to dodge (at level 2), +4 to pull punch, +3 to roll, +1 vs Horror Factor, +1 vs Mind Control (at level 2), +1 to save vs Magic/Illusions, +1 spell strength (at level 2).

Damage: Normal for a human.

Skills of Note: Appropriate W.P.s, Literacy: American, speak 3 languages of choice, plus other O.C.C. skills.

Weapons and Equipment: They have kept their own magic items private but would use them to assist the town. They have minimal gear and came with just their weapons, armor, and some travel supplies. Their armor has become much the worse for wear and each suit has 35-50 M.D.C. left.

Till Flyfair: TW Spitfire Revolver (from *New West™*), TWW-1000 Water Sword (from *The Rifter™ #2*).

Dagmar Birdcharmer: Whip of Pain (from *Federation of Magic™*), TW Wing Board.

Viveka Heaman: 5 Flash Freeze Grenades (from *Federation of Magic™*), 3 TW Storm Flares.

Stetson Wimple: TW Eagle Eye Marksman Rifle (from *New West™*), TW Magic Furnace (see *New TW Items*).

Haakon Wells: TWW-950 Fire Dagger and 2 TWW-150 Steam Grenades (all from *The Rifter™ #2*).

Adina Tulliver

True Name: Adina Tulliver

Alignment: Anarchist

H.P.: 44, **S.D.C.:** 17.

Attributes: I.Q. 19, M.E. 13, M.A. 14, P.S. 11, P.P. 11, P.E. 16, P.B. 15, Spd 14.

P.P.E.: 175

I.S.P.: None.

Age: 44

Height: 5 feet 8 inches (1.73 m), **Weight:** 126 lbs (56.7 kg).

Appearance: A solid-looking woman with attractive features but a very off-putting manner. She has wavy brown hair and blue eyes. She dresses in the style of a wizard but without all the extra accouterments. She does have a few pieces of jewelry prominently displayed, and a simple tattoo of a knotted cross on the right side of her neck. She always carries her spear with her and she moves casually with it despite its size. She favors light pastel colors and off-white. She dresses up

for any Gathering, applying make-up and adding more jewelry to her ensemble.

Disposition: Adina is secretive and aggressive. She maintains distance from other Goodcourtiers and can be sarcastic and sharp when approached. She is confrontational and vaguely threatening to anyone who stands up to her. She can also seem melodramatic and fake. The truth is that most of this is a front. While not insecure, she is not as self-assured as she puts on. She is from the "True" Federation, and was a skilled but insignificant sorceress with an attitude. After a run-in with an equally skilled, but much more imposing, Necromancer, she was forced to flee and now hides out here. She lives in fear of discovery. The story about studying the Ley Line is mostly a ploy to allow her to stay here. She likes being on a Ley Line, and doesn't want to leave. While she does take the occasional look at the Line and the Fade effects, it's out of personal curiosity (she is a Ley Line Walker, after all) and because the Magic Fades drive her crazy. She would like to stop them, but knows that it is beyond her abilities. Her "research" generally consists of sending an observation ball down the Line. For her own safety (she is sure that the Necromancer and his minions are still looking for her), she has made it a priority to guide the town's course so that it remains undiscovered by the world at large. Her best tool is manipulating the Gathering. She does this through both skilled argumentation and magical manipulation of the other attendees (*Charismatic Aura*, *Charm*, and *Compulsion* being most useful). The depths to which she will sink to achieve her aims should not be underestimated. She can be subtle or direct as her plans dictate. She will do anything short of causing permanent harm to someone to ensure that she has things her way. Her dislike of the other mages comes from both the concern that her manipulation will be discovered and because she sees a lot of her old self in them. And she really does think of the townspeople as bumpkins, but sees it in her own interest to assist them.

Experience Level: 9th level Ley Line Walker.

Magic: Lantern Light, Sense Evil, See Aura, Globe of Daylight, Thunderclap, Manipulate Objects, Detect Concealment, Extinguish Fire, Cloak of Darkness, Invisibility: Simple, Impervious to Fire, Orb of Cold, Impervious to Poison, Multiple Image, Watchguard, Fire Bolt, Trance, Charismatic Aura, Weight of Duty, Seal, Charm, Armor Bizarre, Compulsion, Globe of Silence, Protection Circle: Simple, Desiccate the Supernatural.

Psionics: None.

Special Abilities: All Ley Line Walker abilities.

Combat: 4 attacks per melee round.

Bonuses: +3 vs Magic, +4 vs Horror Factor, +2 spell strength.

Damage: Normal for a human; no Hand to Hand skill.

Skills of Note: W.P. Spear (from **Rifts®: Japan**, +3 to strike, parry, throw), speak Spanish and Elven/Dragonese (98%), speak Demongogian (95%), Literacy: American (98%), Literacy: Elven/Dragonese (65%), Literacy: Spanish (55%), Writing (60%), Performance (30%), Lore: Demon and Monster (75%), Prowl (65%), Ventriloquism (48%), Seduction (44%), Advanced Math (85%), plus other O.C.C. skills.

Weapons and Equipment: Magic Boots (change to look like any kind of footwear, works as 9th level *Superhuman Speed* twice per day), Potion of *Breathe without Air*, Magic Spear (a

6-foot/1.8 m long spear of heavy mahogany with a bronze, 4-bladed head and a green glow, has 125 M.D.C., +3 to strike or throw, +2 to parry, can cast *Ignite Fire* at will, does 1D8 Mega-Damage, or 2D8 Mega-Damage on a Ley Line), spell books, other books including fiction, spell components, sunglasses, personal items.

Note: Her home isn't concealing anything special, and her only mystical protections are a simple Protection Circle ready for activation near the door, she'll cast *Watchguard* before going to sleep or when she'll be out of sight of the place, and she'll use *Seal* for extra security. Most of the stories about the place are just gossip that she lets continue because it'll keep people away.

Insanity: She has an insane fear of animals (domestic and common mammals), caused by her nemesis ambushing her with re-animated woodland animals. Given the horses, cats, and other animals common to this rural area, she can often seem jumpy when outside. This is another big reason she remains secreted away so much. While people have noticed her reaction when a cat runs by her or she walks past the horses, they attribute it to her general hostility and know nothing about the depths of her behavior.

New TW Items

The Techno-Wizards have implemented tried-and-true TW devices as well as created a few new things to help the town prosper. Below are a few TW items as well as some new personal items. Besides these items, the town also has TW plows, tractors with TW-converted electric engines, and Magic Optic Systems for the Militia. Since Goodcourt is on a Ley Line, these items function at double normal power, though many become inert when the Magic Fade comes.

TW Dynamos

These are medium-sized Mystic Generators modified and tied to the hydroelectric turbines in the dam. While the water still turns the turbines, the electromagnets are weak and the power transfer grid is beyond repair. The TW Dynamos are mystic replacements that still rely on the river to initiate the process. Even with only some of the dam working, the Ley Line increases the output enough that the dam could conceivably power multiple towns as it did before the Rifts, however the power lines only run locally and the Dynamos step down output to household-current levels, limiting the area the power grid could reach. During the Magic Fades, the Dynamos cease to function and, while the conventional turbines still produce enough raw power to handle the town, output is inefficiently handled and brown-outs are frequent.

TW Refrigerated Cargo Trucks

These are standard 10-wheeled trucks with reinforced bodies (A.R. 10, S.D.C. 440), TW-converted electric engines, and a cargo area that can be magically refrigerated (36 degrees Fahrenheit/2 degrees Celsius). The range on the trucks is 500 miles (800 km) before needing a recharge. If active, the mystic refrigeration unit will last 3 days before needing another 10 P.P.E. pumped into it. This limits the range of the Ex/lms, and the few who travel longer distances (i.e., to Dweomer) either know

friendly mages along the route who will recharge them, or they meet their contacts halfway. The Ex/Im's who actually live somewhere else can bring their trucks in for a recharge any time.

TW Sewage Treatment System

One thing the Techno-Wizards noticed upon arriving in town was that waste and garbage were being dumped directly into the river. Knowing the basics of health and sanitation, one of the first things they created was a treatment system. Each building has an indoor toilet and sink-sized, water-filled, garbage pit. Three-inch pipes buried 2 feet (.6 m) below ground carry the flushed waste and small pieces of garbage to a 6-foot (1.8 m) square, 4-foot (1.2 m) high contraption located just north of town by the river's edge. The device converts the waste and garbage into nearly clean water, runs it through a pipe and into the river. A second system located a little ways upstream (south) of the dam pumps water into town, purifying it as it leaves the river.

P.P.E. Cost: 50

Spells Needed: *Negate Poisons/Toxins, Purification, Create Water.*

Physical Requirements: An airtight, hollow container (size depends on capacity needed), appropriate piping, Topaz worth 5000 credits, 2 clear Quartz crystals worth 500 credits each, and 4000 credits worth of copper wiring and other materials.

Duration of Charge: The three spells need to be re-cast once every week.

Time: 2D4 days.

Cost: 65,000 credits.

Note: While the water purification inflow works all the time, the amount of waste and garbage going to the waste treatment outflow strains the system; only the boost provided by the Ley Line makes it feasible. When the Line is under the Magic Fade, the outflow capacity is diminished and the locals have to be careful not to flush any substantial garbage, or risk dumping the stuff directly into the river and possibly backing the entire system up (Ugh!).

TW Laundry

Another item the Techno-Wizards added to improve the quality of life is a TW laundry. Easy to make, they were an instant hit. There are two located under a shelter near the middle of the village. Drop in up to 45 lbs (20.3 kg) of dirty clothes and when the buzzer sounds, 5 minutes later, they are clean and dry!

P.P.E. Cost: 30

Spells Needed: *Cleanse.*

Physical Requirements: A box-like container that can be closed (size depends on capacity needed), 4 clear Quartz crystals worth 500 credits each, and another 200 credits worth of materials.

Duration of Charge: 12 uses.

Time: 3D4 hours.

Cost: 12,500 credits.

Note: Off the Ley Line, this machine would take 10 minutes per load. When the Magic Fade occurs, these machines become completely inert.

TW Medical Tool

At the request of Penn Kellerman, the Techno-Wizards developed this item. Ironically, since it requires P.P.E. fed directly into it, only Grinling and the TWs can use it for any length of time. The device can cast any of four minor healing spells at will.

P.P.E. Cost: 30

Spells Needed: *Cure Minor Disorders, Cure Illness, Heal Wounds, Negate Poison/Toxin.*

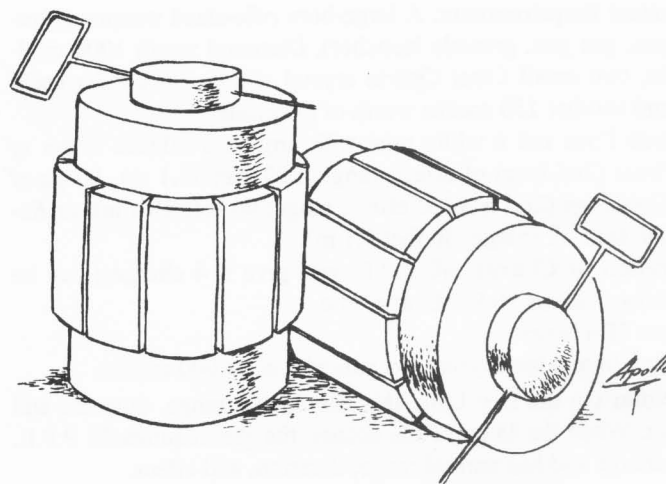
Physical Requirements: A thick wand connected to a small box by a 6-inch (15 cm) coil of wire, small Tourmaline crystal worth 50 credits, small Rose Quartz crystal worth 500 credits, large Clear Quartz crystal worth 1000 credits, and another 250 credits worth of materials.

Duration of Charge: 15 P.P.E. will give it 4 uses.

Time: 3D6 hours.

Cost: 15,000 credits.

Note: On the Ley Line, only 8 P.P.E. is needed to charge it. When the Magic Fade occurs, this machine loses half its remaining charges and when drained can't be recharged until the Fade is over.



TW Paralysis Grenades

These are used by the Militia as well as by one of the Techno-Wizards. They are used to impair resistant detainees as well as for slowing down any hostile forces. A pin is pulled, the grenade is thrown, and it activates on impact; but rather than explode, they emit a mystic field (invisible to most people).

Weight: Half a pound (.22 kg).

Effect: Equivalent to *Paralysis: Lesser*, it paralyzes a random limb of anyone within a 5-foot (1.5 m) radius of the grenade. Standard save vs Magic applies. Duration is 4 minutes (16 melee rounds).

Effective Range: Throwing range is determined by character's P.S., generally 50 feet (15.2 m).

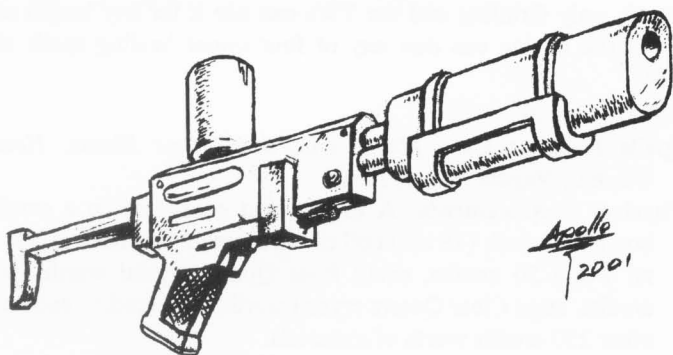
Physical Requirements: A thick cardboard canister, a small cube-cut crystal (any kind) worth 100 credits, a light metal pull ring.

Duration of Charge: 4 P.P.E. (8 I.S.P.) for 1 charge. The canister can be picked up, recharged and re-used.

Time: 1D6 hours.

Cost: 10,000 credits.

Note: On the Ley Line, the grenade has double radius and duration (10 feet/3 m and 8 minutes). When the Magic Fade occurs, these are rendered inert for the duration.



TW Spray Gun

This is a pet device of Myrick Appleton that he created before he came to Goodcourt. He occasionally toys with the idea of building more.

P.P.E. Cost: 25

Spells Needed: *Repel Animals*, *Wave of Frost*, *Wisps of Confusion*, *Energy Bolt*.

Physical Requirements: A large-bore rifle-sized weapon (shotgun, gas gun, grenade launcher), Diamond worth 1000 credits, two small Clear Quartz crystal worth 100 credits each, and another 150 credits worth of materials.

Effect: Fires out a white mist with any of 3 effects: *Wave of Frost* (2nd level of effect, range: 220 feet/67.1 m), *Wisps of Confusion* (2nd level of effect, range: 90 feet/27.4 m), or *Repel Animals* (range: 30 feet/9.1 m).

Duration of Charge: 40 P.P.E. will give it 4 charges; can be fed as little as 10 P.P.E. at a time.

Time: 3D4 hours.

Cost: Unique, but Myrick has valued it at 45,000 credits.

Note: On the Ley Line, this has double range, duration and effect. When the Magic Fade occurs, the gun requires 20 P.P.E. per charge and has normal range, duration, and effect.

TW “Magic Furnace”

Created by the Techno-Wizards of Goodcourt and owned by the High Magus Stetson Wimple (who provided the concept and the needed spell), this is really no more than one of those “gee whiz” devices that Techno-Wizards put together to show off their skills, and is impractical for any large-scale use. Its only advantage is that it reduces the P.P.E. necessary to use the otherwise high-level *Create Steel* spell.

P.P.E. Cost: 25

Spells Needed: *Create Steel*, *Energy Field*.

Physical Requirements: A 2-foot (.6 m) long, 5-foot (1.5 m) wide, 1-foot (.3 m) high light metal box with a lid and latches (carrying handles optional), 6 small Rubies worth 500 credits each, 4 small Rose Quartz crystals worth 200 credits each, and another 200 credits worth of materials.

Effect: Acts as 1st level *Create Steel*. Put the metal scraps into the box, latch, and concentrate on the desired result for one melee round. Transmutes a maximum of 100 lbs (45 kg) of S.D.C. metals or 10 pounds (4.5 kg) of M.D.C. metals per use. Requires 3 minutes per pound or fraction thereof.

Duration of Charge: 10 P.P.E. per use.

Time: 5D6 hours.

Cost: Unique.

Note: On the Ley Line, the device works in half the time. When the Magic Fade occurs, this machine requires 20 P.P.E. to power it and takes twice as long.

Adventure Ideas and Plot Hooks

These are some ideas for filling this setting with adventure. These ideas range from combat, to espionage, to local intrigue. While Goodcourt can be used as an interesting place of origin for some human characters, it is generally assumed that the characters will come to the village initially as strangers.

- The party are wanted criminals in the CS. Since heading north or west would generally be too dangerous with the wars going on, the party has moved into the edge of the Magic Zone. Traveling overland, they come across this paved road that seems to just start in this wilderness. They go down this road and see the sign marking the edge of the town’s “border.” A Fadetown might be a good place to hide out. How do they convince the locals to let them stay? Do they reveal themselves as criminals? Maybe Pate sees turning them in through her criminal contacts as an opportunity to increase the town’s stock of much-needed building materials. Constable Zubok might have concerns about the party being tracked down (this would definitely concern both him and Adina). Can the party talk the Gathering into granting them protection?
- The party has found a paved road (unusual in these parts) and in the middle is a broken-down truck. Two men are under the hood puzzling over the workings. Bren and Somiver know nothing about TW engines, but they don’t want to push the truck the 3 miles (4.8 km) back to the village or leave the cargo alone while they walk back to get help. Does the party stop to help? Do they think the party are bandits? What is wrong with the engine? What is locked in the back of the truck? What if actual bandits attack at that moment? Will the pair’s bumbling land everyone in hot water?
- In the past, someone was double-crossed by Pate and now they want revenge. Maybe the characters will be the instrument of that revenge? Maybe someone who owes a favor to her and is still watching out for her interests decides she’ll need some protection and they’re looking for some freelancers?
- The town the party is in is visited by a merchant in an odd TW truck. She has some TW items and some reams of paper (often in short supply away from civilization) for sale or trade at cheap prices. Wherever these items came from, there must be more. Follow the truck back? Strike a deal? Investigate the trader’s route and contacts?
- Adina Tulliver really is being hunted by her nemesis, a 9th level Necromancer, and his minions. Will the characters assist in hunting her down, help her against this evil member of the Federation of Magic, or do they just get caught in the middle?

- The party has some strange-looking D-Bees in it. This will not assist the party in fitting in while they are in Goodcourt. Maybe the Constable's prejudices are blinding him to the characters' true intentions and only Grinling can be convinced of the good heart under the alien exterior. Will that be enough to carry the Gathering?
- For the scholarly or mystically minded, the unusualness of a Ley Line having two different Fade effects may be worth study. Perhaps Lazlo has gotten word of this and sends a research party to look at and document the Fade effects. The people of Goodcourt might not be happy to know that the name of their town has made it as far away as Lazlo.
- For parties with a Dweomerian member, the Brotherhood of Creation has gotten no satisfactory answers from the "field expedition" they sent out 10 months ago. Because of the mystical connection with the Lords of Magic, they know the young mages are alive and in good health, but the last message they got back was short and explained nothing. Someone needs to go down there and find out what's going on with these prized students.
- Even though the CS is locked into two wars, they are still sending patrols into the Magic Zone. Are the party members working for or with the CS? Or do they happen onto a patrol of 3 SAMAS pilots and their Skelebot squads as they prepare to take the town? This last has played particularly well in previous campaigns. Since the first-rate units are up in Minnesota or lined up against Free Quebec, only reserve units from CS Missouri are available. Have the party enter town and interact with the locals for a while. Then have a squad of eight old-style Skelebots and a controlling SAM pilot in old-style SAMAS enter town to drive out the locals while the other two SAMAS and their Skelebots wait on a hill outside of town. These guys can either be a serious prelude to an invasion by larger reserve forces, or this can be a simple patrol played for comedy, by making the CS guys slacker draftees who would rather not be out in the wilderness. Maybe they are even from Zubok's old unit?

Horlock Robots Inc.



Optional Source Material for Rifts®

By Jeremy Clements

About 2 years ago, the Black Market was looking into making a new line of Robots and Power Armor to increase profits in *legal* markets, rather than continually selling cheap knock-offs or certain hard to sell and illegal items (such as the Sidewinder SAMAS). In this endeavor, they tasked their top Robotics expert, one Richard Horlock. Horlock, a former psychologist, was the one who helped to get the Black Market's hidden Area 51 SAMAS facility working at 100% efficiency, once malfunctions started creeping into the heavily used place.

Intrigued by the idea of such a task, Horlock began immediately, incorporating three main ideas into the system designs. One was competition: The new suits had to be different enough to not infringe on anyone else's designs, and in addition, had to appeal to people usually left out of the standard markets. This

aspect was helped by Horlock's second objective: Make them affordable. With the strange success of Chipwell Armaments, Horlock decided that there was probably a median price that would do well between the two extremes. The third major design concept was that they had to have a *psychological* advantage: In other words, they had to be downright scary one way or another.

Horlock presented his initial concept designs to the leaders of the Black Market, who were impressed with Horlock's findings and initial computer simulations. They gave Horlock the go-ahead to proceed with his initial design prototypes. Horlock's designs performed beyond the Market's expectations in a test against a Coalition scouting force near the Tolkeen border. With that success, the Market authorized full-scale production of all four designs. They decided to name the line after the creator in an effort to help hide the identity of their designs' origins and gain an advantage over the similarly mysterious **Titan Robots** manufacturer. (Even the Black Marketeers who sell the stuff do not know where they come from.) The leaders of the Black Market have never been happier, as profits have increased a full twelve percent in the last three months since the new designs' release.

In addition (just as they had hoped), this has led to a small sales competition with **Titan Robots**, as the new Horlock robots have been eating into their sales. Archie and Hagan, therefore, have probably heard of these new robots, and will wish to acquire a few to investigate some of the more innovative design features.

Abilities and Systems Common to All Horlock Inc. Robots and Power Armor:

See the basic **Rifts RPG®** book for most details. In addition, all Horlock Robots have a minimum Horror Factor of 10 on the field of battle, unless stated otherwise.

HOR-1E “Zombie” Exoskeleton

The Coalition’s “Dead Boy” motif, as well as the psychological effect of Skelebots, had always impressed Horlock. In an effort to expand on the idea of seemingly unstoppable supernatural-like troops, Horlock invented the “Zombie” exoskeleton. It is a heavy suit of infantry armor, designed for protection, not mobility. The most interesting aspect of the suit is its regenerative “Blood” ability and the Horror Factor derived from it. The suit’s gray-green, smooth-metal “body sculpted” appearance and totally blank (silvery-metallic) faceplate help with this “Zombie” concept, along with the suit’s impressive ability to stand up to punishment. Due to its design and weight, anyone wearing the suit is harder to knock down than most others from such things as explosions and rail gun hits. Consider the suit as having a bonus of 20% (subtract bonus from chance to fall) to stay standing in such situations. Watching this suit take hit after hit (with subsequent “bleeding” effects) and keep coming is not only an eerie sight, but also downright scary.

Model Type: HOR-1E “Zombie”

Class: Heavy Armored Infantry Assault Suit

Crew: One

M.D.C. by Location:

Arms (2) — 80 each

* Head — 85

** Main Body — 220

Legs (2) — 100 each

Special Regenerative “Bleeding Wound” System (See Below)

* Destroying the head has a 60% chance to knock the pilot unconscious. Either way, the pilot loses all bonuses to hit, dodge, parry, etc. from the armor, and is personally vulnerable to direct attack.

** Destroying the main body of the suit causes it to shut down, rendering it effectively useless except as scrap.

Speed:

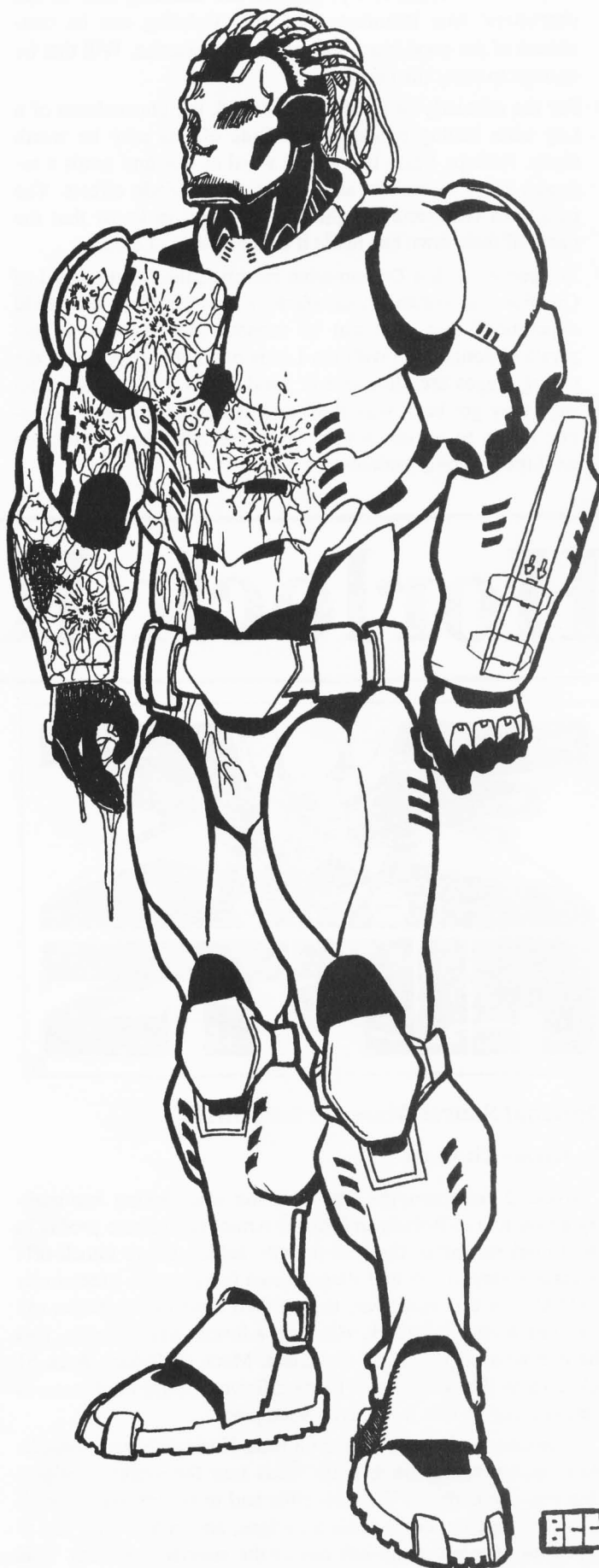
Running: 50 mph (80 km) maximum. Note that the act of running does tire out its operator, but at 20% the usual fatigue rate.

Leaping: 8 feet (2.4 m) high and lengthwise; double from a running start.

Flying: Only possible with a jet pack, but at half normal speed due to its weight.

Range: Has a heavy-duty internal battery with a 20 hour charge, and a hidden E-Clip port that takes only standard E-Clips for additional power. A regular E-Clip provides 4 hours of use. Extended E-Clips will not fit in the port. The standard charge provides enough power for approximately 1000 miles (1600 km) of extended running (non-stop). Typically it is much less, about 250 miles (400 km) or so.

Swimming: Standard paddling motions or walking on the bottom at 10% normal speed.



Maximum Depth: 550 feet (168 m). The suit provides nothing for the bends and requires wearers to decompress correctly when extreme depths are encountered.

Statistical Data:

Height: 8 feet (2.4 m).

Width: 4 feet (1.2 m).

Length: 3 feet (0.9 m).

Weight: 360 lbs (162 kg).

Physical Strength: Equal to a P.S. of 25.

Cargo: Several hidden compartments (4), each big enough to hold one standard E-Clip or grenade. This is to help maintain the suit's "Zombie" appearance.

Power System: Heavy-duty battery with 20 hour life. Can be recharged by any power plant. With no power, the suit is basically too heavy to be moved by the wearer. (No attacks, and cannot un-suit without help, although E-Clip replacement is easy enough — takes all combat actions in that melee.)

Recharge: 6-8 hours are required to fully recharge the battery. (Variation based on recharger's available power levels.) The suit can be recharged with E-Clips but the time required to recharge remains high (8 hours).

Market Cost: 270,000 credits. (This may drop when certain construction considerations are improved upon.) Most are sold with 3 free cans of special fluid.

Weapon Systems

1. HR-13 Regenerative "Bleeding Wound" Armor Reinforcement System: Horlock designed this amazing system from a similar, but more advanced, other-dimensional cyborg/robot found by the Black Market. Not a weapon system, exactly, this amazing system provides the ability for the suit to regenerate slightly from wounds, and therefore keep up the suit's structural integrity for much longer than normal. The system is designed around a high-pressure micro-hydraulic system, which uses a special blood-red hydraulic fluid saturated with nano-bots (similar to those found in IRMSS kits) and small micro-slivers of M.D.C. material. These robots have been programmed with instructions to use the metallic slivers (and even themselves if necessary) to repair structural damage to the suit when needed. Unfortunately this system is not perfected, and the low grade of nano-bots the Black Market has available means the repairing ability is gradual and incomplete.

Primary Purpose: Defense.

Secondary Purpose: Psychological.

Mega Damage: The system activates when the suit takes at least 10 points of damage in a single hit. This causes the suit to leak the specialized blood-red fluid saturated with nano-bots. The suit then repairs 1 M.D.C. per ten points taken to the suit. This takes ten minutes per point repaired. An example: If the suit takes 32 points of damage from a laser burst, the suit will eventually repair 3 M.D.C. (this will take 30 minutes) of the 32 to the main body only. Therefore, the maximum damage that can be repaired is 22 M.D.C. per suit. Further repairs *must* be done normally, as the regeneration stops eventually, even if the suit is refilled with more fluid. Further "Regeneration" can take place if more damage is taken after proper repairs, of course. In the mean time, the suit has the appearance that it is bleeding profusely (often spurting the "blood" out) for a few melees. This

sight, combined with the suit's other abilities, gives it a Horror Factor of 10 on the battlefield. (Increase this to 12 if a squad of 4 or more are wearing the suit and acting together as a team.) This regeneration can repair structural damage only. If specific systems are knocked out (optics, radio, etc.) they must be repaired normally. The fluid will not repair other suits, as the nano-bots are only active *inside* "Zombie" suits and are programmed to repair them specifically.

Rate of Fire: Not applicable.

Effective Range: Regeneration, suit only. Horror effect, visual sight only.

Payload: The fluid must be refilled semi-regularly for the regenerative ability to work. The suit contains enough fluid to repair it once (a full 22 M.D.C.). After this, the suit requires a new batch of fluid. (Reduce the base Horror Factor by 4 if the owner does not replenish this fluid.) One can is enough for a refill and can be purchased for 4,000 credits each.

2. Additional Weapons: The pilot can use any normal hand-held weapons, but plasma weapons and rail guns are the most common. The suit comes standard with back mounts for ammunition drums, jet packs, and similar items.

3. Hand to Hand: See Power Armor combat training in the basic **Rifts®** book for details. Certain skills are reduced while wearing this suit. All "active" physical skills (Prowl, Climb, etc.) are reduced by 25% while wearing this armor!

Final Notes: This suit was designed for the average grunt, not specialty warriors such as Juicers, Crazies, and those not interested in sacrificing speed for protection. The suit's limited mobility is a hard sell on such warriors, and they are not the intended market for the suit. Mercenaries, adventurers, and small kingdoms (especially those run by magic types) love the suit's pseudo-supernatural qualities and have bought several suits for their personal bodyguards and suicide squads. This suit is often considered a minor suit of power armor, and rumors tell of a few people upgrading their armor with small nuclear power supplies (5 year) for the benefit of unlimited power. (This modification would add *at least* 1 million credits to the suit's price tag.) A side note: Demons find these suits funny and often like to equip their "weak" mortal servants with them as well.

HOR-1PA "Medusa" Power Armor

The medusa was designed as a standard type of power armor, with multiple capabilities at several ranges. Its unique female design/profile is enhanced with armor sculpted to look like green scales, a horrible visage, lifelike movement, and a crown of writhing, snake-like tendrils. They will often even move as if to bite those who come too near them (no teeth, however). If active and moving, the power armor has a Horror Factor of 15 to those who have never seen it before.

Considered a close contender to the Coalition's Terror Trooper power armor, the Medusa's combat effectiveness has impressed many. While seemingly sculpted for female pilots, a few men have taken to these suits with enthusiasm. Any jokes at the pilot's expense are offset by the robot's obvious combat effectiveness.

Model Type: HOR-1PA "Medusa"

Class: Armored Infantry Assault Suit

Crew: One

M.D.C. by Location:

Arms (2) — 85 each

* Head — 100

** Head Lasers (10) — 15 each

*** Main Body — 300

Legs (2) — 100 each

Trident — 75

Back Mounted Rail Gun — 150

Left Forearm Mini-Missile Launcher — 70



* Destroying the head has a 60% chance to knock the pilot unconscious. Either way, the pilot loses all bonuses to hit, dodge, parry, etc. from the armor, and is personally left vulnerable to direct attack. This also shuts down the suit's head lasers.

** The head lasers require a called shot to be hit, and any try is at -6 due to their small size and random movement.

*** Destroying the main body of the suit causes it to shut down, rendering it effectively useless except as scrap.

Speed:

Running: 75 mph (120 km) maximum. Note that the act of running does tire out its operator, but at 10% the usual fatigue rate.

Leaping: 16 feet (4.8 m) high and lengthwise; double from a running start. With thrusters, jumps of up to 60 feet (18.3 m) are possible.

Flying: Multiple jet thrusters provide limited jumps and can hold the suit stationary in midair for 2D4x10 seconds. Continuous flying is not possible.

Swimming: Speed is limited to swimming motions, or walking on the bottom at 20% speed, or the thrusters can be engaged to provide an excellent speed and mobility of about 20 mph (32 km).

Maximum Depth: Adequately suited for underwater use, the Medusa is rated for at least 1000 feet (305 m).

Statistical Data:

Height: 10 feet (3 m). Does not include "Snake-Hair." (Approx. 11 feet/3.4 m total).

Width: 6 feet (1.8 m).

Length: 6 feet (1.8 m).

Weight: 1250 lbs (562.5 kg).

Physical Strength: Equal to a P.S. 30.

Cargo: None.

Power System: Nuclear Battery with 10 year life.

Market Cost: 3.2 million credits with complete weapon systems and ammo.

Weapon Systems

1. HR-10 Snake-Hair Laser Defense System: A system designed to mimic the mythical Medusa's snake-like hair. In this case, rather than turn its target to stone, the Medusa's "hair" can be used to fire individual blasts of laser fire. The sculpted head is quite frightening, and the addition of the seemingly individual movement of the hair (until they are targeting something) is quite eerie. These lifelike movements of the snake-hair are intentional, and still continue after the suit is powered down and empty! The snake-hairs are connected directly to the suit's radar, and if not being used by the pilot, can attempt to shoot down incoming missiles and flying enemies automatically (-15% chance for auto-targeting missiles, and considered a wild shot for free attacks), once per melee without taking an action from the pilot! They are also tied into the suit's optical and sensor system, each providing a separate/composite view for the suit's wearer, as well as 360 degree vision.

Primary Purpose: Assault.

Secondary Purpose: Anti-Missile/Defense.

Mega-Damage: Each "snake-hair" can fire a laser blast that does 1D6 M.D., and can be used to increment the damage by adding more hair to the attack. If all 10 are set to fire at a target, the damage increases to 1D6X10 M.D. (If more than one laser is used, it is considered a burst for targeting purposes.)

Rate of Fire: Standard.

Effective Range: 1000 feet (305 m).

Payload: Effectively Unlimited.

2. HR-24 ("Two by Four") Arm Mounted Mini-Missile Launcher: The "Medusa" also has a recessed mini-missile launcher in its left forearm, just behind the wrist.

Primary Purpose: Anti-Armor/Anti-Aircraft.

Secondary Purpose: Defense.

Mega-Damage: Varies.

Rate of Fire: 1, 2, 4 or 8 missiles.

Effective Range: 1 mile (1.6 km).

Payload: 16 mini-missiles.

3. HR-28 Back Mounted Rail Gun: This is a rotary rail gun that folds down over the right shoulder to fire slugs at high speeds. 90 degree arc of fire (up, down, and right only).

Primary Purpose: Assault.

Secondary Purpose: Anti-Vehicle.

Mega-Damage: A 40 round burst does 1D4X10+10 M.D. per hit. Cannot fire single rounds.

Rate of Fire: Bursts only, equal to the number of hand to hand attacks of the pilot.

Effective Range: 3000 feet (915 m).

Payload: 4000 rounds in internal magazine. That's 100 bursts. (Requires 15 minutes and equipment/personnel to reload properly.)

4. HR-33 Vibro-Trident: The "Medusa" also comes standard with a short-hafted Vibro-Trident wielded in the right hand.

Primary Purpose: Attack.

Secondary Purpose: Defense.

Mega-Damage: 3D6+6 M.D. (already includes power armor strength).

Rate of Fire: Not applicable.

Effective Range: Hand to hand only.

Payload: Tied into the suit's internal power supply for unlimited use.

5. Hand to Hand: See Power Armor combat training in the basic **Rifts® RPG** book for details.

HOR-2PA "Harpy" Power Armor

Since the Black Market had been effectively "frozen out" of the eastern market when it comes to selling their Sidewinder SAMAS, it was suggested to Horlock that a similar, but different power armor would help in those markets. Taking this advice to heart (he didn't think he had much choice), Harlock created the "Harpy." The Harpy power armor does not resemble its mythical cousin, other than its ability to fly and its general shape (bird/human-like). Its main advantage (and why it is called the Harpy) is the raucous noise the suit's multiple Vibro-Blades produce. The noise is excruciating, and highly effective against those without any hearing protection.

Harlock discovered this ability of Vibro-Blades quite by accident. While passing through an equipment bay, he passed by an Operator who was fiddling with a Vibro-Blade that suddenly malfunctioned. The screeching produced by the blade (amplified by the small space of the bay) caused everyone nearby to grab his or her head in pain. Some even collapsed or ran. After the pained Operator managed to turn the blade off somehow, Horlock immediately went over to the man and took the blade from him.

Years later, the Harpy was produced. Using multiple Vibro-Blades strategically placed over the entire suit, each with its harmonics offset by the correct variances, Horlock caused the suit to emit such a noise that most unprotected people nearby ran away immediately. Those that remained were in obvious pain. The suit also has several additional capabilities that differentiate it from similar designs. The wings are bird-like, with small Vibro-Blades on the tips. The legs are larger and are designed more like a bird's, talons and all. This provides the suit with a nasty flying claw attack, aids in picking up friends on the move, and allows the armor to "perch" in certain precarious positions that would normally be awkward for such a large suit of armor. The claws have a certain manual dexterity, but are too large to do much but pick objects up. The largest creature the suit could pick up is human sized, and must weigh less than 500 lbs (225 kg). Still, the suit cannot pass 100 mph (160 km/h) while flying someone else, by any means.

The suit's helmet is designed to protect the wearer from the suit's own ability. Therefore, it is also impervious to a Glitter Boy's Boom Gun noise and similar effects. Due to this unit's ability to harass Dog Boys, Tolkeen has looked into buying several suits.

Model Type: HOR-2PA "Harpy"

Class: Armored Infantry Assault Suit

Crew: One

M.D.C. by Location:

Arms (2) — 80 each

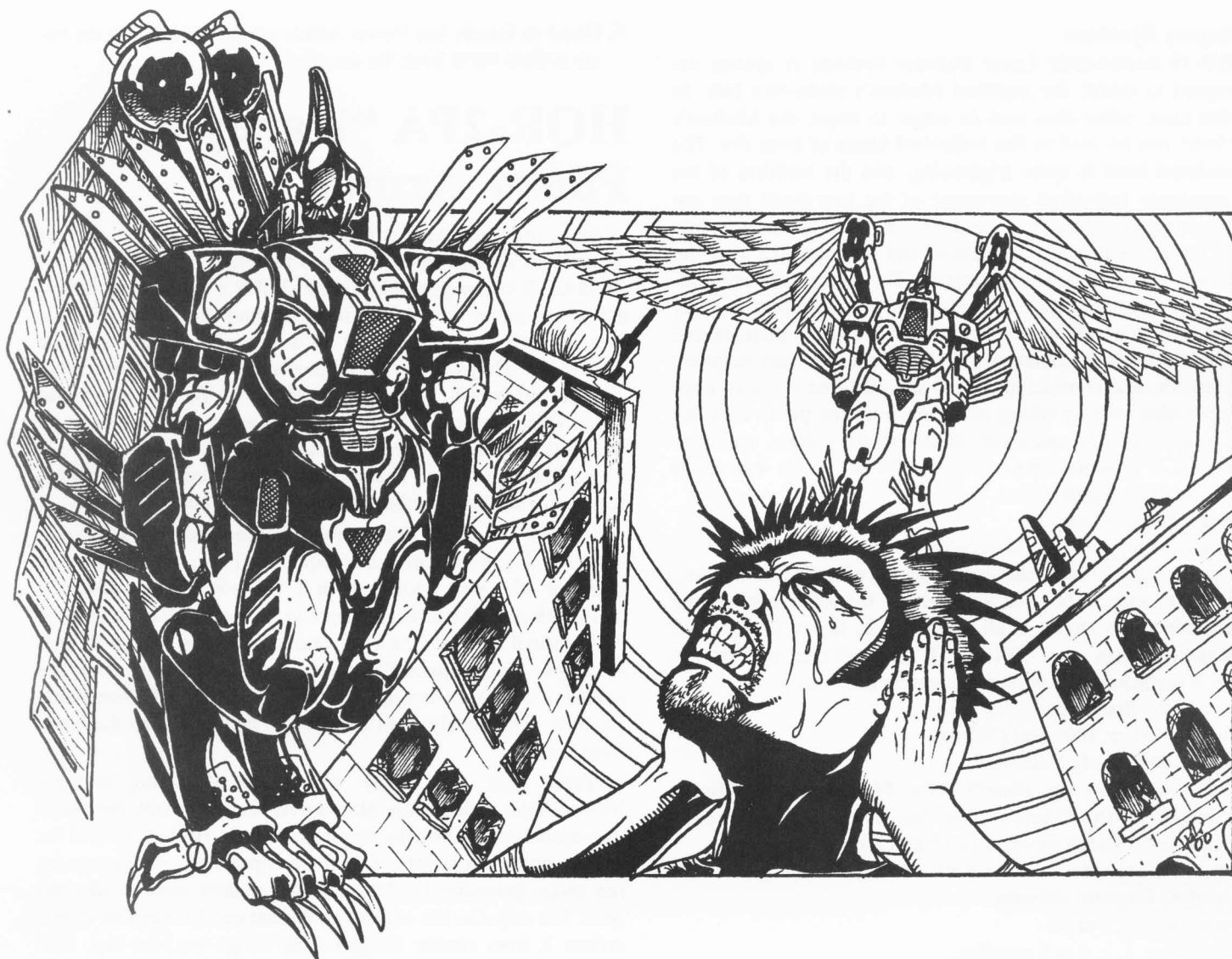
Large Vibro-Blades (2) — 50 each

Small Vibro-Blades (7) — 20 each

Main Rear Jets (4) — 65

Jet Intakes (2) — 45

Legs (2) — 90 each



Taloned Feet (2) — 50 each

Rail Gun — 75

* Large Wings (2) — 100 each

** Head — 85

*** Main Body — 275

* Destroying a wing will make flight impossible, but will not prevent powered jumps, or hovering.

** Destroying the head has a 60% chance to knock the pilot unconscious. Either way, the pilot loses all bonuses to hit, dodge, parry, etc. from the armor, and is left personally vulnerable to direct attack.

*** Destroying the main body of the suit causes it to shut down, rendering it effectively useless except as scrap.

Speed:

Running: Due to the leg design, it is a bit awkward, 40 mph (64 km) maximum. Note that the act of running does tire out its operator, but at 10% the usual fatigue rate.

Leaping: 20 feet (6.1 m) high and lengthwise; double from a running start. With thrusters, jumps of up to 200 feet (61 m) are possible without actually attaining flight.

Flying: 280 mph (448 km) max. Cruising speed is around 120 mph (192 km).

Flying Range: Range is basically unlimited with stops at approximately 6 hour intervals. Max altitude is about 1 mile (1.6 km), but best operating range is below 1000 feet (305 m).

Swimming: Speed is limited to walking on the bottom at 20% walking speed, or the thrusters can be engaged to provide a speed of about 40 mph (64 km).

Maximum Depth: 1000 feet (305 m).

Statistical Data:

Height: 10 feet (3 m).

Width: Wings Folded — 4 feet (1.2 m)/Wings Up — 16 feet (4.8 m).

Length: 4 feet, 6 inches (1.4 m).

Weight: 500 lbs (225 kg) *without* Rail Gun and ammo.

Physical Strength: Equal to a P.S. 28.

Cargo: None.

Power System: Nuclear Battery with 10 year life.

Market Cost: 1.5 million credits with weapons and ammo.

Weapon Systems

1. HR-86 "86-cr" Rail Gun: A disguised/modified version of the CR-40 rail gun produced by the Coalition States (and now the Black Market). Mainly the armor of the weapon has been improved, as well as the rate of fire, making the gun a bit heavier but sufficiently different looking to pass general inspection.

Primary Purpose: Assault.

Secondary Purpose: Anti-Vehicle.

Weight: Gun: 100 lbs (45 kg). One ammo drum: 200 lbs (90 kg).

Mega-Damage: A 44 round burst does 1D4X10+4 M.D. per hit. A single round does 1D4 M.D.

Rate of Fire: Single round, or burst. Each counts as a single melee action/attack.

Effective Range: 3000 feet (915 m).

Payload: 2200 rounds in an ammo drum. That's 50 bursts. An additional drum is often attached to the suit's lower back for long deployments.

- 2. HR-99 Vibro-Blade "Screecher" System (9):** The system, when turned on, produces a noise such that those within 100 feet (30.5 m) of the suit must have some form of hearing protection or be forced away. Those extremely sensitive to such noises (Dog Boys, Wolfen, etc.), and unprotected, are at -2 to their saves. Those who are protected (and immune) are those with no hearing, cybernetic noise dampeners, those people whose helmets are designed to protect from a Glitter Boy's Boom Gun noise, and anyone inside a robot vehicle or tank (this includes most power armor and APCs). Additionally, certain supernatural creatures would be immune to this mundane ability (Game Master's discretion). The only way to completely disable this ability of the Harpy, all of its Vibro-Blades must be destroyed. For every 2 of the Harpy's Vibro-Blades destroyed, the range of this effect is halved, and those within the effect gain a +1 to their saves.

Primary Purpose: Attack.

Secondary Purpose: Defense.

Mega-Damage: Large Blades (arms): 2D6 M.D., Small Blades (head, knees, wings, and shoulders): 1D6 M.D. The noise itself causes no actual damage, but forces those who hear it to make a save vs pain or be forced to move 2D4X10 yards/meters away immediately at their best speed. For the next 1D4 melees, they will be at -4 to strike, parry, and dodge. Those who save can remain close to the Harpy, but are at a continuous -2 to strike, parry, and dodge while near the power armor (100 feet/30.5 m).

Rate of Fire: Hand to hand: Equal to the number of hand to hand attacks of the pilot. Constant until turned off.

Effective Range: Blades: hand to hand; noise: 100 feet (30.5 m).

Payload: Indefinite. Runs on the suit's internal power supply.

- 3. HR-100 Laser Eyes (2):** Mainly a back-up weapon. Simple lasers built over the Harpy's eyepieces.

Primary Purpose: Defense.

Secondary Purpose: Anti-Missile.

Mega-Damage: 3D6 S.D.C. or 2D6 M.D. per eye. Each can be fired singly, or at the same time (6D6 S.D.C. or 4D6 M.D.).

Rate of Fire: Standard.

Effective Range: 2000 feet (610 m).

Payload: Effectively unlimited, tied to the suit's internal power supply.

- 4. Hand to Hand Combat:** Uses the standard SAMAS Power Armor combat skills with the following exceptions:

Foot Talons — add 2D4 M.D. to kick attacks.

Fly-By Rake (over 100 mph/160 km) with Foot Talons — 4D4+4 M.D.

HOR-1AR "Fire-Walker" Assault Robot

Like the Coalition, having heard of the civilized lands of South America from the published reports of Cudbury (formerly of Lazlo), the Black Market sent its own investigative teams there to learn of a possible open market. They were disappointed to learn that the continent had its own version of the Black Market, but one definitely willing to open limited trade with their North American brethren. It was in this exchange of information that they learned many things in South America. One of these exchanges included a video report of an Inca battle with Arkon Aliens. Amazed by the strange weapons and equipment displayed by the aliens, most never noticed the Inca fighters. But when Horlock reviewed the tape he noticed something peculiar. One tape showed several suits of flying armor all wreathed in flames and obviously magical in nature. However, the interesting thing about the formation was that at least two of the suits flying were definitely technological in origin and were *on fire too*. After Horlock realized this, he began acquiring information from one of his South American counterparts. He eventually learned that the technologically advanced Silver River Republics helped the Incas produce a tech version of their magic armor, and he learned the basic ideas behind them. Although the suits were too rare and expensive to have one shipped from South America, the main specs could be sent via standard messaging.

Unable to duplicate the intricate system immediately, Horlock put aside the basic schematics and notes he acquired, and continued his normal work. When the Market asked him to participate in developing totally new robotic designs, he renewed his interest in the schematics on the off chance a breakthrough might occur. Unable to duplicate the small size of the suit's plasma system, Horlock merely applied the idea to a larger robot, with varying degrees of success.

The "Fire-Walker" Assault Robot is the end result. With a demon-like visage, several spikes, multiple plasma emitters (with strong magnetic fields to contain the plasma correctly), and a new dual Ion/Rail Cannon Horlock developed, the "Fire-Walker" is a frightening monster-inferno with legs. On the field of battle, with the plasma system on, the Robot has a standard Horror Factor of 16. To those especially afraid of or affected by fire, the H.F. is 18.

Model Type: HOR-1AR "Fire-Walker"

Class: Assault Robot

Crew: Two: pilot and co-pilot/gunner. Can accommodate 2 other passengers easily. The pilot almost always controls the main cannon and performs physical attacks. The co-pilot/gunner usually uses the plasma emitters and lasers.

M.D.C. by Location:

Arms (2) — 180 each

Legs (2) — 240 each

Hands (2) — 75 each

* Head — 140

** Eye Lasers (2) — 35 each

** Plasma Emitters (7) — 70 each

*** Main Body — 585

Dual Ion/Rail Cannon — 120

* Destroying the head destroys most of the robot's optics and sensors (lose all robot combat bonuses), and eye lasers.

** These require a called shot to be hit, and any try is at -3 due to their small size.

*** Destroying the main body of the suit causes it to shut down, rendering it effectively useless.

Speed:

Running: 75 mph (120 km) maximum.

Leaping: 20 feet (6.1 m) high and lengthwise, plus 10 feet (3 m) with a running start. With a plasma burst (pilot must focus several plasma emitters downward), the robot can achieve heights of nearly 100 feet (30.5 m). (Causes 1D6X10 M.D. damage to everything in a ten foot/3 m radius at launch point.)

Flying: Not possible.

Swimming: Can walk on the bottom at 25% normal movement speed.

Maximum Depth: One mile (1.6 km).

Statistical Data:

Height: 28 feet (8.5 m).

Width: 15 feet (4.6 m).

Length: 14 feet (4.3 m).

Weight: 50 tons fully loaded.

Physical Strength: Equal to a P.S. 50.

Cargo: Minimal. About 4 feet (1.2 m).

Power System: Nuclear Battery with a 20 year average life. (There is a 5% chance per year of "burning out" the power system due to the drain of the suit's weapon systems.)

Market Cost: 55 million credits with complete weapon systems and ammo.

Weapon Systems

1. **HR-101 "Inferno" Plasma Emitter System (7):** These emitters are what allow the robot to appear to be wreathed in plasma/fire. Emitters are located in the wrists, chest, back, head, and knees. The system is not quite as efficient as the original, but what it lacks in power it makes up for in horrific style. As many as six emitters can be focused on a single target. (90 degree arc in frontal area only), and the emitters can fire in almost any direction with little movement on the pilot's part. While ignited, the pilot must be mindful of the plasma field with its standard 5-foot (1.5 m) radius around the bot. It *can* burn/destroy almost anything nearby, before the pilot realizes anything is wrong. An important safety feature is built into the "Fire-Walker" robot: The plasma system cannot be turned on while the pilot's compartment is open. This was a lesson learned quickly during one of the initial field tests of the robot. It is important to note that this system can be turned off in a flash and will leave no trace of damage/heat on the robot. Therefore, such things as heat-seeking missiles can be more easily avoided and the robot more easily hidden. The robot also illuminates its surrounding area quite nicely when "pumped up." Consider this a flare effect covering almost 100 yards/meters away from the robot. Ad-



ditionally, all fire/cold damage suffered by the bot is negated when the field is on, due to the multiple magnetic fields and protecting plasma. Plasma attacks do only half damage.

Primary Purpose: Assault.

Secondary Purpose: Defense.

Mega-Damage: 3D6 M.D. from each emitter. If more than three are used at a time, (i.e. 4 or more) the range is halved. If at least six are used at once, it creates a wall of plasma flame that can do 2D4X10+20 M.D. — *Anything* caught between the robot and its target in such an occurrence must successfully dodge or take 6D6 M.D. as well. Unfortunately, the down side of this concept is that the plasma system prevents the mounting and use of missile systems of any sort.

Rate of Fire: Each can be fired individually, or several can be fired simultaneously at one target. Equal to the number of attacks of the pilot/gunner.

Effective Range: 1000 feet (305 m). If 4 or more emitters are used at once: 500 feet (152.5 m) due to the power drain.

Payload: Effectively unlimited, tied to the suit's internal power supply.

2. HR-104 "Derringer" Dual Cannon: A combination Ion Cannon/Rail Cannon mounted on the left shoulder. Robot must turn to aim. Has a 45 degree arc of fire (up and down only).

Primary Purpose: Long-Range Assault.

Secondary Purpose: Anti-Vehicle.

Mega-Damage: Ion Cannon: 3D4X10 M.D.; Rail Cannon: 1D6X10+10 M.D.

Rate of Fire: Ion Cannon: Three times per melee due to the power drain. Rail Cannon: Equal to the number of attacks of the pilot/gunner. Fires bursts of 60 rounds.

Effective Range: Ion Cannon: 3000 feet (915 m). Rail Cannon: 4000 feet (1220 m).

Payload: Ion Cannon: Indefinite. Runs on the suit's internal

power supply. Rail Cannon has a large internal magazine of 12,000 rounds. That's 200 bursts.

3. HR-106 Laser Eyes (2): When powered up, these eyes glow with an intense green light that stands out from the plasma's glow.

Primary Purpose: Defense.

Secondary Purpose: Anti-Missile.

Mega-Damage: 3D6 M.D. per eye. Both can fire (6D6 M.D.) simultaneously at the same target.

Rate of Fire: Standard.

Effective Range: 2000 feet (610 m).

Payload: Effectively unlimited, tied to the suit's internal power supply.

4. Hand to Hand Combat: Use the Titan Robot combat skill with the following exceptions:

- Add 3D6 M.D. to all physical attacks when plasma field is on.
- Anyone physically attacking or grappling with the Fire-Walker robot will take up to 3D6 M.D. per melee in contact with the robot.

Final Notes on Horlock Robots Inc.

All of Horlock's Robots are an *experiment*, and only a small run (several dozen) of each type have been made to be sold. However, if these robots continue to sell well (the Zombie is the only one currently back in production), the Black Market might try to increase production. Horlock is already attempting to come up with some new designs, and is eagerly anticipating the go-ahead from the Market. Whether or not these robots become a mainstream item is totally up to the individual G.M., and may possibly be an adventure in itself. The Coalition has become aware of these items and respect their capabilities, but due to their limitations, lower technological level, and slow production, they are not considered a special threat — yet.

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ASYLUM

A NIGHTBANE SHORT STORY

By Anthony Miron



Eric sat in his chair, just staring at the photograph. He didn't know what else to do, if there was anything he could do. In these last few months, it had become his own private obsession. Oh, he knew he was obsessed with it, it may have been unhealthy, but he had a right to be. He didn't know exactly how, but he knew that what he saw in the picture was the cause of all his problems.

Eric had tried every debunking trick in the book, and had even made a few up just to be sure. Nevertheless, the picture itself was real and undoctored. That left the question of whether the source of the photo had been tampered with. The source was a reliable satellite that had only been in orbit for two years, but proved more effective than almost any other satellite in orbit, even some military ones. Besides, the picture had been corroborated with similar ones from other satellites that watched Earth, even some video footage. To complicate the matter, government and military institutions the world over quashed the footage and

later declared it a "hacker hoax." A cruel joke played on the people of the world after the horrific events of that day. However, the denial was more like an official proclamation of validity in most conspiracy theorist circles.

Once, Eric would have laughed something like that off, but not anymore. After all the craziness that went on, and a month of checking and re-checking, the photograph was indeed genuine. That scared Eric even more than what happened, almost convincing him he had been pulled into Hell. But there it was, right there on the printed picture. The Earth, that normally bright, blue and white globe, blanketed in a shadow of pure black. Light wasn't reflected away, sun and starlight looked like it was absorbed into the inky blackness. If not for the unusual texture of the globe, one could almost think it nothing more than a shadow. But it wasn't. It was a void of black covering the Earth, appearing with no rhyme or reason at 6:02 a.m. one day, and vanishing with just as much lack of reason at the exact same time the very next day.

"Dark Day," the media was calling it. The name fit now, though at the time some were calling it Armageddon. According to reports, in the United States alone, more than 20,000 people died, and ten times that suffered injuries afflicting both body and mind. Worldwide, more than half a million people died, among them Eric's wife and two daughters.

He still remembered it perfectly. Everything came to him perfectly these days; he couldn't forget, God help him he couldn't forget.

The sight still frightened him, when those things had burst through the front doors of the church jeering and screaming. Garbed in hideous black shells and looking like devils, the group, no, the pack of them broke in and started slaughtering people left and right. People who were doing nothing wrong. People who had sought sanctuary on this day and thought that it was the end of the world. Eric's wife Anne was one of them. While Eric wasn't a religious man by any stretch of the imagination, Anne had wanted to go, to make her peace with God, almost as if she knew she was going to die. Eric only wished he had paid her more attention.

Those things came in laughing and growling, swinging black metal weapons around, cutting down everything. The priest was first to go; his head came off and landed at the feet of Eric's youngest daughter. She screamed louder than the pack, and it only seemed to encourage them even more. She fell soon after when a spear pushed through the bench she was hiding behind and pierced her chest. She locked eyes with her father, tears in them as the light of life left them, and her lifeless body fell backwards.

Eric screamed. He remembered it so clearly. The sensation of just jumping and screaming like the pack did. Hoping to scare them, to let them know he was going to slaughter them. Strength that he'd never known before had pumped through him as he bounded over the fallen furniture, crashing into the first devil he could lay hands on. He had started beating it with a chair leg he'd found in his hands somehow.

He knew he killed one of them; he had to've. When the chair leg had splintered, he reached out and tore off what looked like a chest plate. Ripping it away and going inside, Eric started tearing things out that looked important. But the cursed thing had no heart! It eventually stopped moving after Eric tore away part of its neck. Black ooze and mashed parts lay on the ground as he just kept tearing into the thing.

With his rage briefly sated, some inner sense had told him there were still more of them around. Then the rush of power came to him again and he grabbed the corpse from the inside and started to swing it around and beat the others with it.

They only laughed harder. The impression that they welcomed another into the wilding permeated Eric, sickened him. But he didn't care; he only wanted to destroy, to kill. Until he turned and got a good look at Anne; their eyes met for a brief moment, and Eric remembered why he was doing this. His daughter. He had to stop them before they could kill everyone else.

Again he turned back into the pack, and saw what looked like the leader. Some big demonic thing with convoluted horns and a tattered cape. Hurling the corpse as hard as he could manage, it crashed into the leader, followed soon after by Eric, moving in to pummel it.

The next thing he knew, he saw the sword sticking out of his chest. As if there was nothing between them both. One minute he was moving in to kill it, the next the two of them were standing up and it was holding the hilt of the longsword pushed through Eric's chest.

Then there was another blade. A spear this time, coming down to finish Eric off so the leader wouldn't have to wait for the meat-thing to die. Eric had grabbed on and fallen back, watching with grim satisfaction as the spear cleaved off the leader's arm at the wrist.

It had barely noticed. Sparing only a moment to use its good arm to bat away the idiot minion that had cut off its other one, it had just grabbed Eric and lifted him up.

"It just lifted me up," Eric muttered, staring at the picture. "Like I was just a rag doll. It picked me up with one hand. I swear I saw the thing smile. Then I heard its voice. Like a dog growling out from the pits of Hell. It said, 'Puny thing. You defy us, even though it means death. Should better you stay put, you live a little longer. Or not.'"

"Then it just threw me away. Sword still stuck in my chest, the hand still gripping the hilt. I slammed into the ground behind the altar, the sword stuck through me enough to hold me pinned to the ground. The impact was hard enough to shake loose part of the roof and collapse it on top of me. There was just enough room there left that I watched in horror as those things moved through the rest of the church, slaughtering everyone else."

The tears welled up in Eric's eyes. "There was so much dust, I couldn't close my eyes. It hurt too much, so I watched as they

tore my oldest daughter to pieces. The dust got into my throat, I couldn't scream, yell. Nothing! I could only watch as they tossed her body parts all over the room.

"Then there was Anne. She was the last one they got before they left. They left her lying in front of the wreckage when they left. Anne was still alive, barely. I remember just staring into her eyes from beneath the roof. Feeling we were both going to die. Anne shook her head, telling me no, it wasn't my time. I cried. There I was. Lying beneath God-knows-how many pounds of wreckage, a sword stuck through me, and my wife was there telling me I wasn't the one who was going to die."

Eric stopped a moment and took a deep breath. "I couldn't believe that, I didn't want to. I just reached out to her, barely able to move. Tried to crawl out from underneath the wreckage. Just enough to hold her hand, just touch it, so that we could be together when we died. I couldn't have been more than a foot or so from her, but it felt like miles. As if I was watching her from across the country. I kept trying to reach her, tearing myself even worse just to say goodbye. The light in her eyes faded with her hand lying in front of me, and I couldn't do anything. Not one bloody thing! I... I couldn't even cry."

"I passed out then. You pick from what, blood loss, shock, trauma, whatever. But I woke up in the hospital. Bandages wrapped around everything, my limbs up and dangling from these slings they'd rigged into the bed frame, or something. I have no idea how long I was laid up there. Doctors and nurses kept coming by, every day looking at the chart, telling me I was getting better and better every day. I don't remember much, only what my friends told me, when they came by telling me how sorry they were that Anne and the kids were killed during the riots."

"Then I ran into Mike. He showed me the picture. The picture of the Earth literally draped in black. Telling me how everyone was calling it 'Dark Day.' How what happened to me hadn't happened to me alone. People were more afraid of the dark now, like it was a living thing. Like there were things living in it. Monsters. Before that day, I would have laughed at them. Not anymore."

The man sitting in the chair nodded and looked at a pad, then at his watch. "Well. You've been going on for more than two hours. Do you feel any better now?"

"You don't understand. No one's going to feel any better! It's not going to get any better. Whatever happened, happened for a reason. Something caused it. It wasn't just some gang wandering around with rubber suits, hyped up on PCP. These things were real." Eric's manner became more serious. He paced about the room like a caged animal. He reached up and wiped away the sweat on his forehead, and brushed back his hair out of his face.

The man shifted in his seat, moving the ends of his coat out of the way. "That may be. But this obsession with the picture. Or the events around what happened that day. I know you lost your family, but it's been more than a year now. Isn't it time to start the healing process?"

Eric turned on the man in the coat and shot him as evil a stare as he could manage. "Would you? Could you? If your entire family was simply ripped to shreds in front of you, could you ever simply forget?"

"No, I'm not saying you should forget, merely move on. Accept their loss and try to live your life again."

Rage burned anew in his eyes. "And do what? Marry again? Raise another family? Watch them get slaughtered before my eyes too? Or should I try and focus myself somewhere? Say, on how what happened in this photo happened. On what caused Dark Day, and what are those things, those monsters that are running around out there. Isn't it best if I do something, anything that could help stop that? I mean, isn't that what a good husband would do?"

The man shifted back a little, not even noticing Eric's ranting. "Let's not be angry here, Eric. This kind of obsession is unhealthy. It's why you're here in the first place." He tapped a pencil against the pad. The clicking sound got just a little bit louder.

Eric backed away and leaned back against the wall. "You're right, I shouldn't have gotten so angry. I'm sorry." He spoke the words, but knew they weren't true. As much a show as the doctor's performance.

"Well, it seems we've made excellent progress today. And with how you've been going for the last few weeks, you may be suitable for release in the next month. But I have other people to see, so if you're finished?"

Eric nodded, "Of course Doctor Whitmane." Two large men dressed in white came into the office when Whitmane pressed a button on his chair. They stood on either side of Eric and crossed their arms. The patient took note of the two of them and thought of how easy those creatures could tear them apart.

"Time to go back to your room, Eric. Before you go, I'll administer your medication myself. The heavier dosage has proven quite effective." Eric nodded numbly as Whitmane lifted up a huge syringe filled with a clear liquid. The orderlies held Eric fast as he was injected. Not fighting back, Eric waited a few seconds, and then fell down, letting the two orderlies carry him. "Take him back to his room; just lay him on the bed." The orderlies nodded and left the room.

A nurse walked in to take the notepad from the psychiatrist. "How is Mister Allston doing, Doctor?" Though her voice almost dripped honey, her face showed no sense of expression. The Doctor sighed and paid the oddity no heed.

He smiled and looked over the pad. "Quite well, actually. The delusions are still there, but I believe the medication is making him quite susceptible to suggestion. Given another month, he'll be rid of the notion some sort of monsters attacked him. Could even be convinced that his family was killed by rioters." The two of them walked down the hall, away from the direction Eric was being taken. The nurse and the doctor traded pointless conversation as they walked down the hall and into the Doctor's office. They went in and shut and locked the door.

The orderlies brought Eric back to his room and simply tossed him inside. He landed roughly on the floor and did not move. Satisfied the patient was unconscious, the orderlies wordlessly shut the door and went about their other duties.

After a little more than an hour, Eric opened an eye, looked around and got up easily. The injection was supposed to have kept him out until the next day. There were no cameras in the room; the administrators had deemed such devices unnecessary for a person in Eric's case. He wasn't known to have violent

tendencies, despite the delusions and even the angry outbursts, and had never exhibited any signs of violent activity.

Getting to his feet, Eric went over to the door and looked through the small portal. There was no one in the hall. Satisfied he wouldn't be seen, Eric took several deep breaths and waited for another moment, to make sure that the serum was completely out of his system. It was something no one had thought of, that no one had considered. Toxins and poisons no longer had any effect on him, at least when he put a little bit of effort into it. Toxins and poisons like the one Doctor Whitmane had tried to inject into him, mind altering drugs that would make Eric susceptible to the good Doctor's suggestions. Make him think that what he saw was not what he saw.

It worked the first time, though only because Eric wanted to believe monsters didn't kill his wife, and hadn't left him skewered like a stuck pig. Of course he wanted his family to still be alive. But he couldn't believe that, not in the lie the drug was so eager to provide.

But the first time he wanted to believe, he looked. He kept them wrapped in the blanket when they brought him here. They didn't check his belongings. No, they thought they checked his stuff; Eric made them believe they did. That was something else Eric could do. Make people think things that weren't real, like the drug Whitmane tried to make him take. They were still there, inside the small hole he'd made in the wall and blocked up with weak plaster. He pulled them out now, being careful to be quiet.

Even with the last of the drugs running through his blood, he almost didn't believe what had happened. But when he took them out of the wall, it was all too real. The monsters were here. The cold realization smacked Eric hard and completely washed the drugs from his system. The hilt still felt cool to the touch. He ran a finger along the ebon blade gingerly, and pulled away when he cut it open on the unnaturally sharp edge. The impression the blade gave him was one of horror, of anger, and rage, all the things that lived on the dark side of the soul. It was as if a dozen souls had died and given their dark emotions to make the blade this sharp. Eric knew there was only one way to make the dark feeling go away, by using the blade against those who forged it.

Then he pulled out another item. The other artifact that made it all too real. The proof that the enemy was real. The hand was still covered in black armor, and as hard as the day when it came off from the thing's wrist, cleaved by the spear that was meant for Eric. He kept it the whole time they worked on him. That inhuman strength that allowed him to survive the onslaught and kill one of those things had allowed him to keep hold of the sword and the severed hand.

Eric would have used those as proof that he wasn't crazy. That monsters did come in and kill on the Dark Day. But that new awareness of his said that it would do no good. The judges, the police, the orderlies, all of them radiated with that sense of evil that he'd not felt since the Dark Day. The strongest sense of evil came from the "good" Doctor Whitmane himself. It bled from the doctor like an open wound.

Eric grasped the hand and the hilt of the blade. He knew these things had names too. They were called Hounds and their leaders Masters. They came from the Nightlands and were the least of the devils from this mirror mockery of Earth. The high-

est of them were the Nightlords, and nothing was done that did not have their hand in it. Dark Day was their fault. Eric didn't know how, and he didn't know why, but it was these dark and twisted things that caused the death of his family, and they would be avenged.

All of this was just the tip of the iceberg. He knew he didn't know everything; he didn't have to. Eric knew the enemy. He had to kill that enemy. Right now, Whitmane was his enemy and Eric had been in the institution long enough. It was time to leave, but not before making sure Whitmane wouldn't be hurting anyone else.

Creeping to the door, Eric took a deep breath and looked around at the room. There wasn't anything of value here, not for him, anyway. The pictures and information they allowed Eric to keep weren't irreplaceable or important. He wouldn't have survived this long if they were. But he couldn't leave anything behind, not for them. Eric smiled and made a quick check of the white material lining the cement blocks of the room. Early on in his stay, he'd chipped away at the plaster and mixed it with chemicals taken from the asylum during his nightly trips through the place. The new mixture was quite flammable, and he'd lined the cement walls with it. All that was needed was a spark, and the whole room would go up in flames, taking everything with it. But he needed one more thing before he could light it up. Just one thing.

Eric walked to the door and tried to open it. As expected, they had locked the door. With a little bit of will, he felt his blood surge and his strength jump to unimaginable levels. With time Eric had learned to use his powers, one at a time, and even learned a few new ones since the first time. He knew he was a psychic, how powerful he didn't know. But right now, he was powerful enough. The lock broke with no effort and the door opened silently. Aside from a janitor, there was no one in the hall. The janitor didn't emit any hint evil, or that he'd seen Eric, so with a quick psychic suggestion by Eric that there was something else down the hall, he left and went away, leaving the psychic to his own devices.

He crept down the hall, padding on just a pair of socks. The boots he would normally have worn would have made too much noise. The halls weren't lit, and the sun had long since dipped beneath the hills. All the more perfect cover for his activities.

First Eric went down to the morgue. Down there were the bodies of others the doctor tested the serum on. Those first few, to whom allergic reactions proved fatal. He found one about his height and weight; the body was of an older man, but no one would notice when he was finished. Slinging the corpse over his shoulder, Eric padded quietly back to his room and dropped the body on the bed. After making sure no one would be looking in on him, he left again, this time to keep one last appointment with Doctor Whitmane.

The doctor's office was at the end of the hall, and there was light coming from the edges of the door. The window that would have let someone see inside was blocked with some sort of blind. But with his strength and the indestructible sword in hand, it was as if the door wasn't even there. Silently Eric slipped the blade between the door and the doorway and sliced through the mechanisms that held the door shut. It started to open when Eric held it by the knob and peeked inside. He gasped, and had to take a deep breath as fear rolled over him and held him frozen in place for an instant.

Inside, the Doctor was standing in front of a full-length mirror. But instead of a reflection, the mirror was hazed and in it was the visage of a devil in black armor. Interlocking plates, reminiscent of the Hound Master who'd tried to kill Eric. But it was much larger and looked more like armor than the black skeleton the Hounds resembled. On its head was a crown of thorns, and his voice, yes, Eric was sure now it was a male, was even more frightening than when the Master spoke. But it was smoother and more convincing. For a brief moment, Eric considered opening the door and pledging eternal fealty to it.

Whitmane bowed. "Yes, Master. That operation is going well. The tests have proven quite effective these past few months."

The demon nodded. "Excellent. How long until we will be able to mass-produce the drug and administer it to the populace?"

Whitmane reached a hand over and looked at the notes. For some reason he looked a lot paler now than he normally did. "Projections place it at another seven months before it can be administered without widespread fatalities. The side effects will have been worked out by then."

The demon waved his hand in a dismissive gesture. "The master does not care about side effects. How long until we can simply give it to the populace to get the desired effect?"

Whitmane didn't look fazed as he reread the notes. "Two months, minimum. Then it can be mass-produced and dumped into the water supply."

The demon smiled and nodded. "Excellent, doctor. Should this pan out, a promotion may be in order for you. You've been quite loyal to us. But, I leave such decisions up to the master."

Whitmane bowed gracefully, breaking eye contact with the demon, who first watched him and then flicked his eyes back to the doorway. For the briefest moment, his eyes and Eric's met, though neither felt fear or apprehension. The demon twitched a brief smile and looked back to Whitmane who was coming back up. "You honor one such as I, my Prince."

The Prince nodded his head, "Of course, Whitmane. But should something happen, should anything jeopardize the operation, such honor will bring death to you."

Whitmane shook a moment and gave an odd look at his master. "Of course, my Prince. I would never do anything to fail you."

The demonic Prince smiled and nodded. "Excellent, Whitmane. Goodbye."

The way the Prince ended the conversation startled Whitmane. Though before he could contemplate the words, the door burst open and in stormed Eric, darkblade in hand and a snarl on his lips. "Eric!" the doctor screamed once, before the psychic leapt across the desk with inhuman speed and knocked Whitmane across the room with a single strike.

When the doctor got back up, Eric was upon him and sliced once across the chest. It opened the chest wide, but did not kill Whitmane. Eric was about to press the attack, when Whitmane shot up to his feet and slammed into his attacker. The doctor's strength was almost as great as Eric's, but not great enough. He caught the doctor and slammed him one-handed into the wall. Then with his free hand and the darkblade, he impaled Whitmane and twisted the blade. Once for each child, twice for

Anne, twisted it for the family they took from him, and tore Whitmane open for daring to make Eric forget.

The doctor gasped once before Eric pulled the blade upwards, splitting Whitmane from chest to skull. The doctor's flesh was unable to stop the upward slice of the invulnerable darkblade. The corpse fell to the ground and he withdrew the blade from the wall, where it left a scar. Not a single mark was on the blade.

There was a clapping sound coming from the mirror behind him. Apparently the demon had not closed the portal. The violent display had pleased it.

"Excellent! Excellent! It has been forever and a day since I have seen such an amusing display of talent and ferocity in an individual. In a way, you remind me of myself when I was young." Eric paused in his rage for a moment; the idea that he could have anything in common with a creature such as this disgusted him. To think he was anything like the creatures that killed Anne, took his family away, was almost more than he could bear.

"I'm nothing like you." Eric bit out through gritted teeth.

The Prince smiled. "So many of you have said that, before joining our ranks. Though the thought may seem disgusting now, the idea of serving us isn't so bad. Just look at the perks." The demon smiled and gestured to himself and made a note of its own power. Then Eric looked back at the dead Whitmane. The demon made a dismissive gesture. "Ignore the Doppelganger, there are millions more where that one came from. For that matter, there may even be one of you." The Prince seemed to take great delight in that little fact. "So you understand what kind of offer I'm making."



Eric nodded. "I cannot accept it. My family wouldn't like it."

The Prince grinned. "I'm sure we could find you a new one of those, too." At that, Eric charged the mirror and swung the blade, shattering it. Eric watched the pieces fall to the ground, content that he had silenced the thing. Again, assuring himself that he was nothing like those things.

He looked down for a moment and saw the Prince laughing from one of the larger shards of mirror. "Well, it seems I've touched a chord. Perhaps we should find you a new family." He laughed as Eric stepped on it and shattered it with his foot. The glass cut into the bottom of his foot, and he limped over to the door. With a gesture, the corpse lifted into the air, as if held by an invisible hand. Another invisible bandage held the parts together and kept the blood from spilling onto the floor, though as he limped he left a trail of bloody footprints behind him. The body floated behind Eric as he went back to his room, and he directed the corpse to fall on the floor. Then he uncovered the corpse on his bed and set it against the wall.

"Doppelganger, huh? That's another name I've got to file away." Eric muttered to himself quietly. He'd read some psychics have the ability to completely and totally recall things. Unfortunately he hadn't developed that ability yet. "Something I've got to work on."

Eric went under the bed and pulled out a few canisters with pins on the top of them. Mementos from a time before he had a family. Then he stuffed the hand into a pouch, and slid the blade into a sheath fashioned of leather at his side. Looking down, he saw blood trailing from where he'd cut open his foot. With a brief moment of concentration and a shot of will, the slices slowly closed as if they'd never been there. The sealing wound even ejected the pieces of glass that had wedged themselves into his foot. Then he put his boots on. There was little he could do about the blood trail.

When he got to the door, Eric looked back at the mutilated corpse and smiled. "Well, doctor, it looks like our time is up. Have a nice time in Hell." Eric picked up a small metal box with a button and a light on it and closed the door, using his last moments of inhuman strength to crimp it shut. No one would be getting inside, at least not without a torch.

Eric went back to the doctor's office and went through his notes. He'd originally planned to simply leave after killing the doctor, but he couldn't do that now. Not after he'd heard Whitmane reporting to that thing about the drug. Eric searched the cabinets and the drawers. If what he knew of the good doctor was correct, that egomaniac would have kept all his notes and samples with him, not wanting anyone to share in his glory.

As luck would have it, inside a solidly locked cabinet lay all the samples of the drug Whitmane was pumping into some of the patients. According to the charts, there were twelve other patients taking this, and they were showing more susceptibility to it than Eric was. He was the only one to show such resistance to it. Taking them out, he smashed the glass vials and spilled everything on the floor, and threw the papers all over the place. Then he pulled out the other medicines Whitmane kept in his office and poured them over the papers, the desk, the pieces of broken mirror, everything. Then he went into the adjacent examination room and lifted a pair of tanks with labels that read, "volatile and flammable materials under pressure. Do not use near open flame." He brought them in and dropped them in the center of the room.

When Eric was about to leave, the nurse came in. As always wearing her expressionless face, though the words of her voice betraying her uncertainty. "Doctor Whitmane, is there a problem? What are you doing here? Where is Doctor Whitmane?" Then she watched as Eric drew the sword and closed his eyes for a second, once again letting his body flood with power and strength. After opening his eyes, Eric could almost swear the nurse was swearing at him in some foreign language, though it was unlike any he'd ever heard before.

The nurse was ready to turn and run, when Eric jumped clear across the room and sliced her open at the abdomen with the darkblade. She made no noise as the blade sliced through. When it didn't kill her on the first stroke, Eric grabbed the nurse and threw her back into the room. Her strength was greater than Whitmane's and more than equal to Eric's own, but he had surprise and leverage on his side. With a quick judo flip, he sent the nurse sprawling to the ground covered in the chemicals, frighteningly near the tanks on the floor.

She came at Eric swinging her bare hands. The first strike caught Eric in the chest. He felt a rib crack with just the barest connection. He barely managed to deflect her next blows. He thrust in only once with the sword and nicked at her neck. The wound did not spill blood, but instead spewed some weird, viscous fluid. When they each readied to strike again, Eric came in low, faking out the nurse. She tried to go high to avoid the sword blow. Eric feinted and brought the sword in a sweeping arc that took her head clean off. As expected it bounced and rolled to the floor, spilling more of the fluid onto the ground.



Looking back, Eric had to hold his breath to keep from throwing up. From the neck of where the nurse's head used to be, out climbed a beetle that looked to be larger than any bug he'd ever seen before. Using a telekinetic burst while it was dazed, Eric took hold and slammed the thing against the wall, but even that strength was not enough to crush the thing's dense carapace. For a moment he could almost swear the thing was begging for its life, pleading for Eric not to kill it. Though only for a moment, before Eric drove the darkblade through the shell and mutilated its insides using telekinesis. The parts dropped sickly to the ground, and the smell was more than Eric could bear.

"No, no time for this," he muttered after losing what lunch he ate that day. Eric walked over to the tanks and spun the knobs, filling the office with their contents. Ignoring the dead beetle and the evacuated nurse shell, he walked outside, pulled the pins on the canisters and tossed them over his shoulder into the office. The canisters broke and flared as Eric headed for the doors. The incendiaries flashed and set off the gas, Whitmane's office exploded in flames, and a gout of fire burst into the darkened hallway. The alarms and the sprinklers blared and sprayed after the explosions rocked the asylum. Orderlies, guards and the like ran around Eric, ignoring him as they ran for the Doctor's office to see what had happened. Eric's suggestion that he simply wasn't there was working, and he walked easily towards the door.

As he got to the main gates, Eric held up the small, black box he carried and pressed the button.

Back in his room, small sparks lit in each corner of the room, causing the place to burst into flames. The new fire compounded the confusion of the first one. With everyone running around trying to figure out what was going on, Eric simply walked off the property and into the woods.

It was almost daylight when Eric stopped and turned around. The fire department hadn't arrived at the asylum for at least an hour, more than long enough for most of the hospital to go up in flames. Eric grimaced. He may have stopped whatever scheme the Nightlords were working on, but they'd already written it off. For a few minutes, he felt sorry for the people inside the hospital. He could feel them from where he was; none of them would be making it out alive. Eric got down on his knees, exhausted; in his quest for vengeance he'd condemned innocent people to die. He cursed himself; he'd become one of the things he'd grown to hate.

"Don't blame yourself, there's nothing you could have done." Someone said from behind him. Eric spun around, darkblade at the ready, expecting to find another demon waiting for him. Instead a young woman sat cross-legged, hands held behind her as she leaned back. Aside from the dark trench coat she wore, she looked like she just walked out of a New Age bookstore, replete with conflicting holy symbols on chains and black makeup. She couldn't have been more than nineteen or twenty years old.

"I'm twenty-two." The young woman said from her seat on the ground. Eric grimaced, ignoring her comment, quickly scanning the area around him wondering when other minions of the Nightlords were going to jump out at him.

The young woman cocked her head to one side, "I'm not working for the Nightlords."

Eric remained skeptical and looked around, she could be lying.

The young woman smiled, "I'm not lying."

Eric backed away, holding the sword between them. "Get out of my head," he bit out through clenched teeth. So she was psychic like him.

The young woman nodded. "Something like that, Eric. Not quite as powerful as you are, just a little more focused."

"Who are you? What are you?" He demanded of her. He'd stopped backing away when he reached the tree line. If anything were to jump out, he'd at least have cover to move to.

"Friends of yours, enemies of theirs." Said another voice near the young woman. This one stepped out of the trees and a cloud of smoke that disappeared as quickly as it appeared. He was dressed as if he'd just stepped out of some old film noir picture from the 1940s. Had the look down pat too: brown long coat, tan colored fedora, suit and tie beneath the coat, lit cigarette in hand. "People like you." The detective continued. "People who had their lives destroyed because of the Nightlords."

"And we've been watching you." The young woman chimed in following the detective, as if they'd done this act before.

"Could you please cut the Three Days of the Condor stuff?" Eric pleaded, his stance lightening slightly. Though the darkblade was still held firmly in one hand.

The woman smiled again, "Sorry, we have to be careful with this kind of thing. We've been watching the asylum for four months now, just after hearing about some of Doctor Whitmane's experiments, and then about you. We did our research."

The detective took a long drag and exhaled slowly. "You were an enigma to the good doctor. Seems of all the test subjects, you exhibited the most resistance to his serums. The end result was supposed to be a powerful narcotic or even hallucinogen, that would cow the populace entirely and make us all easily malleable. We'd learned he was getting ready to implement the serum on a wide scale, and we were going to move in when the opportunity presented itself. That's where you came in."

The woman took her turn, "Our agents told us they saw you padding around the place at night, doing things normal people couldn't do. Before we could do anything about you, though, you stepped in and did our job for us." She gestured to where the last of the burning building was dying out.

Eric looked back, really looking for the first time since his wife and children were killed. Instead of a burning asylum, he saw a burning church, the same church in which his life had ended. He didn't see the dead he didn't know; instead there lay what was left of his daughter, twitching and begging her daddy for help. He watched, horrified, as his eldest child's parts were flung about the church. Finally he saw Anne, his wife, being run through and set on fire. The pleading look in her eyes turned to shock and disbelief, as she looked back up the blade and saw Eric holding the hilt as he twisted the blade in her dying body. Eric let out an evil laugh as he twisted the blade and pulled it out, and looked down at the black armor he wore. Condemning his wife, as he had all the innocent people in the hospital. All those people, who had nothing to do with his vendetta.

This time the young woman's voice was much closer, and she laid her hand on his shoulder. "It wasn't your fault. There was nothing you could have done. They would have ended up either dead, or worse, slaves of the Nightlords."

He imagined a body that wasn't his buried in a grave next to Anne's. Tears streamed down his face as he watched the asylum rubble smolder. "How can you say that? Because of what I did, none of those people will wake up to see the morning. Because of what I did, I killed your agents. Don't you see? I killed them! Not the Nightlords! Me! I did it! Oh God, what have I done?" Eric started to cry. The young woman came forward, wrapped her arms around him, and just let Eric cry.

"Oh I am so touched. Look at him. Doesn't even know us and he's all broken hearted over our untimely deaths. I am touched. I wan this man to deliver my eulogy." The half-mocking, half-bemused voice came from behind the grieving man.

Eric's tears stopped and his sorrow became rage as he spun around to tell this jerk off. Instead of "How dare you?" he instead came out with, "What the... Werewolf!" Eric fell to the ground backwards, his hand groping about for the sword he dropped.

Standing in front of him appeared to be a seven foot tall wolf standing upright like a man, with arms instead of forelegs. And from what he could tell, the thing was smiling! "Were-coyote actually. But I can see how you can get confused. Both are wrong in either case anyhow."

Eric was still sitting on the ground stammering and searching for his sword. "You know something Thomas, sometimes you're a real piece of work. You know that? After what this guy's been through, you make fun of and then scare the devil out of him." Eric turned his head away from the coyote and looked at where the other voice came from. It was strangely accented, as if it sounded like his cheeks were pinched or something, but Eric scrambled back even more when he got a good look at the other thing. Standing next to the were-coyote that wasn't, was an even bigger thing that could have been a spider. Except it had bat wings and armor-like plates attached to its chest, if that was it was, and arms, or legs, or whatever they were. He had eight of them. The face was human, even familiar, except for the black, mandible-like claws that stretched out and extended from the sides of his mouth; they came together and clacked when he talked.

The coyote, Thomas, shot back at the spider-bat thing. "Me? Scare him? I'm not the one with a half-spider face who can spook a room of eight-year-olds just by saying 'hi.'"

Eric was still sitting on the ground, staring up at these two monsters. At this point he was absolutely positive the Nightlords themselves had come for him, and he still couldn't find his sword. That's when the young woman started shouting at them. "And who's brilliant idea was it to come here in your Morpheus forms? We came here for reconnaissance and recruitment, not to play 'who can scare the new guy most!'"

"Geeze Rachael, we were just stretching our forms a little. Do you know how long I've been playing janitor, or how long Sam here was an orderly?" the coyote said, first pointing to himself than to the hybrid next to him. "Besides, what's the point? Someone came through and blew the place up." Eric's look changed from fright to sorrow, just as Thomas realized who they were standing in front of. "Oh, geeze. I'm sorry. I forgot who I was talking around." The coyote got a well-deserved slap from Sam as the spider-thing moved forward and peacefully offered Eric's sword to him. The one he'd been holding in one of his many arms.

"You dropped this."

Eric mumbled his thanks as he took back the sword, still sitting on the ground. He looked up at Sam and asked plainly, "What are you? You're not with the Nightlords, are you?" Thomas, the coyote, started laughing and couldn't stop, while Sam returned with a grim look.

"Believe me when I say we're about as far from the Nightlords as you are from them." Those very words brought to mind the image of Eric garbed in black armor, with a black crown of his own and leading hordes of Hounds against helpless people, laughing and reveling in it all the way. Eric shuddered and almost dropped the sword.

"As for what we are, Thomas and I are Nightbane. And we are more hated by the Nightlords than any other people on this world or in the Nightlands. Many of us feel the same about the Nightlords. You are lucky in that Thomas and I are two such people who feel thus."

"On the other hand, Rachael and I," the detective spoke again, "are humans who possess extraordinary abilities in the form of magic or psychic powers." Once Eric would have laughed off the idea that magic ever existed, and that psychics were anything more than telephone frauds. Not anymore; he was getting used to having his perceptions about reality uprooted and completely destroyed.

"So, what do you want?" Eric finally asked in resignation, no longer caring about what was going on around him.

The detective took another pull off his never-ending cigarette. "I thought it would be obvious by now."

Eric stared up at the four of them blankly. Thomas spoke up, "You, Eric. We want you, buddy boy."

"Me? Why me?"

Sam's eyebrow went up. "Suffering from a little memory loss? That little soiree that took place a little while ago that ended in the deaths of almost a dozen minions and single-handedly putting the kai-bosh on some Nightlord's plan. Sound familiar?"

"And put God-knows-how-many innocent people to death. What good am I? I couldn't even save my own family." Eric looked away. The young woman crouched down in front of him.

"You can do plenty good; despite those who died, you saved thousands and thousands of lives. Join us so you can keep doing that, keep saving people's lives. Join us so that we can do more than just bloody their noses. Show them they can't get away with what they did to those people in the hospital, to your family. Join us so that we can deliver our own bit of divine retribution."

Eric's head snapped around to come face to face with Rachael; his expression seethed with rage. The image of his armored self returned to his mind, laughing as he slaughtered everything in his path. "Retribution? You mean vengeance! Look at the hospital. That's the product of one man's vengeance. My vengeance got those people killed! I don't want to be part of any group focusing on that kind of retribution."

Thomas, the coyote man, got down real close. The armored Eric laughed loud and hard in his mind. "If not retribution, then what about, redemption?" The image fell silent and shattered; Eric smiled for the first time since his family died.

"Where do I sign up?" He asked, holding out his right hand.

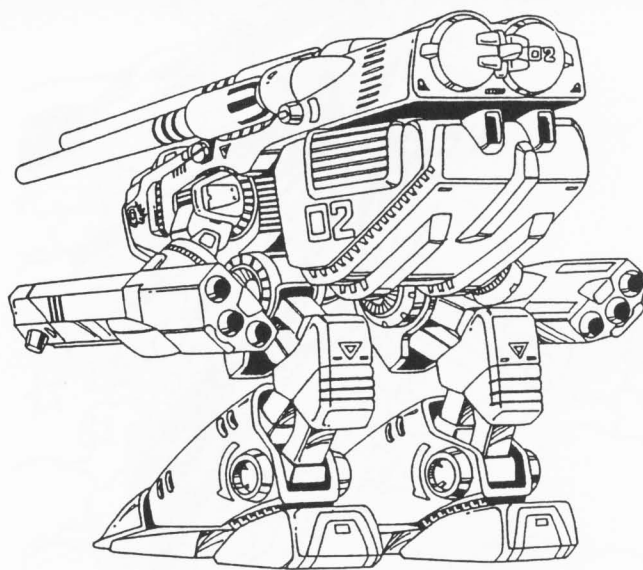
Thomas smiled as he took hold of Eric's hand to pull him to his feet. "Where else? On the dotted line."

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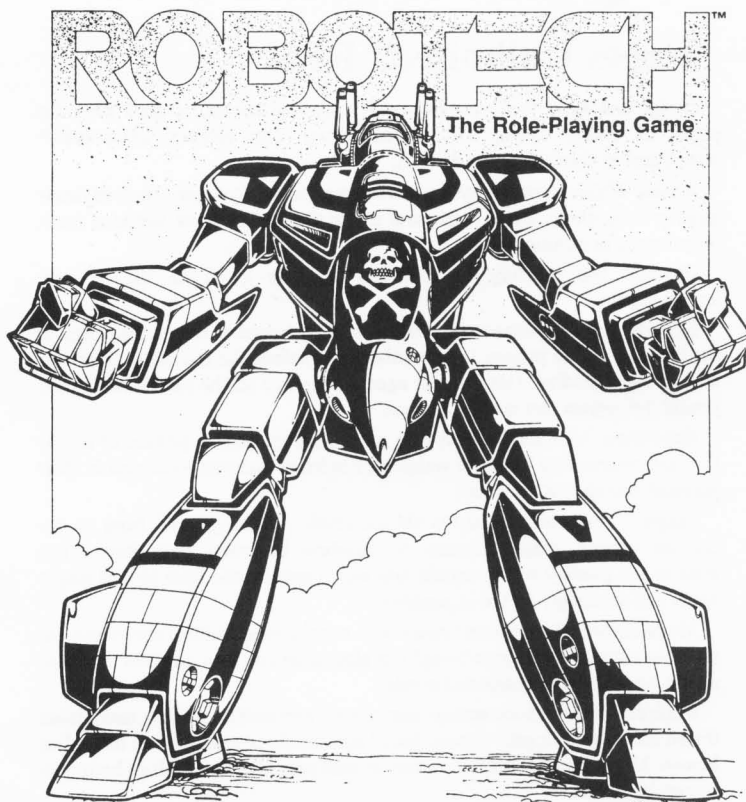
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The Hammer of the Forge

By James M.G. Cannon



Chapter Fourteen Shopping Trip

There are an estimated trillion inhabited worlds in the Three Galaxies, each one of them home to billions of sentient beings, from over a hundred billion different species. These numbers assure the Three Galaxies a vast and varied native population. Sentients as varied as Machine People, Silhouettes, Humans, Wolfen, and Oni evolved within the Three Galaxies, giving rise to cultures every bit as distinctive as their individual biologies. Moreover, as each individual species reached out to the stars, they formed alliances, empires, and a network of intergalactic, cross-species cultures.

The story of life in the Three Galaxies is not confined to native species, however. There are many places in the Three Galaxies where space and time converge to create holes in the fabric of reality — holes which lead to other realities. Phase World is only the largest and best known of these convergences, but they are scattered throughout the Corkscrew, Anvil, and Thundercloud galaxies. These convergences have opened the way for Atlanteans, Splugorth, Metzla, Gargoyles, and thousands of other species to cross over to this reality from others.

For the most part, these aliens have enriched the Three Galaxies. Others have brought nothing but danger. In particular, the Splugorth have threatened the life and liberty of sentients throughout the galaxies. Their battles with Cosmo-Knights have become legendary, and in some cases have entered the mythologies of transgalactic cultures. The Splugorth are hardly typical, however. Given the vast and unplumbed depths of the Megaverse, it is far more likely that visitors to the Three Galaxies from other dimensions will be individual beings, unique in

their adopted home. Indeed, the one thing one can expect from inter-dimensional travelers is the unexpected.

— Travelogues of a Journeyman, by Fraktyn Quint

The Garouk system was a remote one, and as it turned out, the nearest “living planet,” per the alien’s request, was a backwater world named Koola, located a short psi-jump from Garouk. Koola proved to be mostly desert, save for a ring of riverine networks around the equator, but it did have a native sentient species as well as a number of thriving communities settled by offworlders.

Joriel remained unimpressed. As a Celestine, one of the biosynthetic enforcers of the S’hree Vek Confederacy, he had crossed from one end of the Three Galaxies to the other, and very little he saw on Koola impressed him. As Koola was within Consortium space, the fact that Joriel’s vessel, the *Vigilance*, had sent a landing craft to the planet’s surface technically made them an invasionary force and could be interpreted as an act of war. Relations between the Consortium of Civilized Worlds and the S’hree Vek Confederacy were currently at an all time low, but that was something of which the *Vigilance*’s commanding officer, Commissar Lor Koushak Dail, seemed unaware.

Joriel frowned inwardly. It was hardly the first time he had disagreed with the Commissar’s decisions, and he doubted it would be the last. Her rash actions had initially brought them into Consortium space, and into an engagement with a Consortium Warshield cruiser which had nearly crippled the *Vigilance*. Only a desperate psi-jump to a random system had saved them from certain destruction, a move which had nearly fractured the psionic drive that powered the ship and almost killed the Commissar herself, whose psionic abilities fueled the device. While the crew had rushed to effect repairs, the *Vigilance*’s sensors had detected a strange energy signature orbiting the gas giant Garouk-9. Joriel and his fellow Celestines had discovered the source of that signature to be a humanoid, and after bringing it aboard, the being had come to an accord with the Commissar, offering wealth and a means to reach pan-dimensional markets in exchange for help searching for one of his lost brethren.

Which brought them to Koola.

Joriel stood on a rocky promontory overlooking a sandy valley. Behind him stood his two wingmates, fellow Celestines Kael and Kariel. All three Celestines stood an even two meters tall, resplendent in form-fitting blue-black armor over red uniforms. Long, fine maroon colored hair was tied into warrior’s braids, with Joriel’s being the longest and most elaborate. All three of them possessed striking, aquiline features with finely drawn brows and bright blue eyes. Their most impressive feature by far, however, were their wings. Erupting from their shoulders, the wings were composed of bright crimson feathers,

and each wing could extend out to a length of four meters. The Celestines were beautiful by the standards of the humans and Noro of the Consortium, resembling the angels of human mythology. But the Adinum, Haakon, Tooranimoor and other species that made up the S'hree Vek Confederacy had different standards of beauty; they had designed the Celestines to be warriors, to be creatures of terror and destruction.

Joriel sighed, a sound that was lost in the strong desert wind. Kael and Kariel, their senses as acute as Joriel's own, turned as one to regard their commander. "Something wrong, Sir?" Kariel asked.

Joriel adjusted his wings and turned to face his wingmates. "I don't trust this Hazmat of the Shaar," he said, referring to their guest. All three wordlessly regarded the alien, who was picking his way down the hill into the valley. Hazmat wasn't hard to see, given that he — or it — appeared to be an ambulatory shadow, its features indistinguishable save for a pair of orange lights that might have been eyes. Hazmat claimed to be a representative of a pan-dimensional society called the Shaar, and further claimed to be able to share the Shaar's wealth with the Vigilance. Joriel didn't know much more about the creature, save for the fact that it could survive unaided in the vacuum of space, like a Celestine, and was resistant to Commissar Dail's psychic probes. Also like a Celestine.

Joriel unconsciously summoned his blazer, the most potent weapon in a Celestine's arsenal. A span of blue-white light erupted from Joriel's hand, forming into the shape of a sword. Kael frowned, while Kariel made an understanding face. On the crest of the hill, surrounding the crab-shaped shuttle, their escort of marines suddenly snapped to attention, eyeing the landscape and pointing their weapons at nothing. Joriel sighed once more, dispelling his blazer.

Kael and Kariel exchanged looks. "We don't trust him either, Sir, but that is still no justification for your agitation," Kariel said. "We've handled worse odds than this, Sir."

Joriel shook his head. "I don't think so. This shadow-man is an entirely unknown quantity. Already he has insinuated himself into the command structure of the ship. What more can he do once he's accomplished what we came here for?"

Kariel was about to reply when the marine sergeant jogged up to the trio. A massive, red-furred conaigher, the sergeant was bristling with armor plates and weaponry. "We've picked up something on the scanners," he said through sharpened teeth. "Several craft, rapidly approaching from the southwest."

Kael grimaced, his wings expanding to their full length and his blazer igniting. Kariel and the sergeant ignored him, waiting to see Joriel's reaction.

Joriel narrowed his eyes and shifted his stance on the rock, looking down into the valley. Hazmat had almost made it to the valley floor. The alien had apparently not yet reached his objective. However, if the inhabitants of this planet discovered a S'hree Vek squad on the planet's surface, the results would be disastrous.

"Get the shuttle ready," Joriel ordered. His Celestine eyes were picking up the approaching craft; five stinger class fighters and a hunter warcarrier. Too much firepower for the shuttle to handle, even with three Celestines aboard. Joriel wasn't about to risk deactivation for the alien. "Everyone aboard. I'll recover our guest." Without another word, Joriel took to the air, his

wings expanding to catch the wind and his internal grav systems coming on line.

He landed on the ground in less than fifteen seconds, raising a cloud of dust that swirled around Hazmat as the alien looked up. "Trouble, lad?" Hazmat asked dryly.

"We're getting out of here," Joriel snapped.

"Not quite yet, I'm hoping. We don't want this to be a wasted trip, do we?" Hazmat said. His orange eyes twinkled in the depths of his shadowy face.

"There is some kind of planetary defense force headed this way, and we are not staying to see what they want from us," Joriel told him, his voice rising.

Hazmat regarded him for a moment. "Hmmm, well, I won't be a moment then."

"Now, alien," Joriel snarled, reaching out to grab the shadowman. Hazmat swatted his hand away, his eyes sparking. Joriel could only stare, surprised at the alien's strength.

"It isn't wise to cross me, angel," Hazmat growled. His statement was punctuated by the roar of five stinger class fighters as they blasted by overhead. The warcarrier followed at a more sedate pace, its cannons eyeing the shuttle and preparing to fire. "Watch, and learn," Hazmat added.

Hazmat dropped to one knee in the sand, placing his palms flat on the ground. Joriel took a wary step backward, shuddering involuntarily as he heard the stingers and warcarrier begin firing on the shuttle. Despite himself and his responsibilities, Joriel could not bring himself to look away from the alien. Hazmat shuddered as well, a low moan coming from his invisible mouth. The shadowy substance of his body grew darker, and darker still, until it seemed as if he were drawing all the light around him into his body, photon by photon. "This world... untapped potential," Hazmat gasped, his voice sounding as if it came from very far away. "Ley lines... possess a purity I've rarely seen." Joriel felt as if a black cloud had fallen over the desert sun, creating a pocket of night in the middle of the day. Explosions echoed in the distance, dimly heard.

And then suddenly the spell was broken. Hazmat lurched to his feet. Joriel blinked back tears as light flooded his vision once more, and he looked up sharply as the shuttle swerved past them over head, two stingers flying rings around it and the warcarrier sending beams of light to splatter off the shuttle's shields.

"They're doomed," Joriel said grimly. "And I hold you responsible."

Hazmat laughed. "Angels shouldn't be pessimists, lad. As I said, watch and learn." The shadowman stood with his legs spread, and raised his arms overhead, orange eyes flickering. A web of black light erupted from Hazmat's fingers, rising and spreading with preternatural speed. The black web filled the air in the span of a few heartbeats. While the shuttle and its "escorts" had already flown clear, the other three stingers weren't so lucky. They tried to veer out of the way, but either the pilots or the ships themselves couldn't handle the speed and the stingers slammed into the web, enmeshing themselves in its inky strands. Hazmat waggled his fingers, releasing the web and allowing it to collapse into a tight ball, smashing the three fighter craft together with a dull explosion that was mostly absorbed by the web of darkness.

"Three ships down in less than fifteen seconds," Joriel rasped. "Impossible."

"Hah!" Hazmat exclaimed. "You've seen nothing yet, lad."

The warcarrier began to turn, searching for the source of the fighter crafts' demise. On the other end of the valley, the shuttle practiced evasive maneuvers while the remaining stingers whittled away at its shields. Joriel could only watch, rooted to the spot. His blazer was in hand, though he couldn't recall igniting it, and he knew it would prove no help against the warcarrier's heavy weapons.

A dozen streams of crimson light stabbed toward them from the assault craft's cannons. Joriel braced for the impact, expecting to die. But the lasers balked a dozen feet away, slamming harmlessly into an invisible screen erected by Hazmat. Ripples of darkness punctuated the impact of each blast, but nothing touched either Joriel or the shadowman. The barrage did not lessen, instead increasing in intensity as the warcarrier advanced. The screen held.

Hazmat was laughing, a harsh sound that could not be drowned out by the sizzle of heavy lasers. He gestured, his eyes flashing, and the ground shuddered beneath Joriel's feet. Rocks clattered down the slope, echoing throughout the valley. Cracks appeared in the valley floor, and Joriel saw a massive hump rise out of the ground, directly beneath the warcarrier. The rumbling in the valley increased, and Joriel's vision blurred as his body shook. His internal grav systems kept him on his feet, but just barely.

crushed it like a tin can. The carrier detonated, blasting the stone hand to pieces and sending a shockwave across the valley that lifted Joriel off his feet and sent him spinning on the dusty ground.

Hazmat stood unmoved, his head thrown back, his body once more absorbing light.

As fragments of warcarrier and stone clattered to the valley floor, Joriel lurched once more to his feet. On the horizon, the shuttle doubled back towards Hazmat and Joriel, trailing smoke and weaving through the air. Its pursuers veered off from their attack, buzzing in the direction of the warcarrier's flaming wreckage.

"This is an old favorite," Hazmat declared. "Watch closely." Once more he held his hands aloft, and wove patterns in the air with them. The darkness around him deepened, and Joriel had to switch over to nightsight in order to penetrate it.

A black oval appeared before one of the stingers, and before the pilot could react, the fighter flew directly into it, disappearing as it did so. For a moment, the remaining stinger hung in the sky all alone, but the black oval manifested above it. Out of the oval flashed the other stinger, slamming into the second one at high speed. Both fighters disappeared in a bright flash.

The shuttle circled close, venting black smoke and shuddering as it tried to land.

"Amazing," Joriel said breathlessly. He eyed Hazmat warily, realizing he would never be able to trust the alien. He couldn't trust anyone he feared so much.

Hazmat snorted, an odd sound from his featureless face. "Child's play," he said.

* * *

Caleb Vulcan, novice Cosmo-Knight, went shopping.

His friends Kassiopaea Acherean, the Atlantean Undead Slayer, and Doctor Abbot, the shadowman wizard, insisted that the three of them buy a starship if they were to start gallivanting all over the cosmos. Abbot, who had recently learned that another being like himself existed in the Three Galaxies, wanted to leave the planet Alexandria as soon as possible to search for the other shadowbeing. Kassy and Caleb, willing to go along with their friend, were more concerned with hunting down and bringing to justice the Draconid wizard Quajinn Huo, who had recently killed Caleb's mentor Lothar.

While Caleb himself was capable of surviving unaided in space and even traveling at superluminal speeds, his friends were not. They needed a ship. Unfortunately, all three of them were broke. Caleb had made a few credits working with moisture farmers on the desert world Koola, but had left that behind when Lothar came to get him. Abbot had a couple thousand creds stashed in banks all over the Three Galaxies, but nothing handy, and nothing close to the amounts they would need in order to purchase a worthy vehicle.

Luckily, Kassy was rather well off. More appropriately, her parents were well off. Which was why Hiram and Kornelia were joining them on the shopping excursion. Hiram and Kornelia were both striking individuals, with the same straight black hair and blue eyes Kassy possessed, both marked with blue-white tattoos, similar to the ones Kassy wore on her arms. Like all



The hump unfolded itself, expanding geometrically and reaching upward into the air. It took on the rough outline of a colossal hand that plucked the warcarrier out of the sky and

Atlanteans, Hiram and Kornelia were long lived and continued to grow throughout their lives, and as a result both of them were nearer seven feet than six, well proportioned and well muscled. To Caleb, they looked like Greek statues come to life, especially in their flowing togas and cloaks. As the scrawny, red headed kid from Arizona, Caleb felt thoroughly out of place and more than a little intimidated by them.

If he had been able to spend more time getting to know them, he might feel more comfortable in their company. He hadn't had much time for visiting on Alexandria; instead, shaken by Lothar's death, he had spent his time rushing from one dangerous situation to another. Though he had come to his senses and realized he could not save the world, or the Three Galaxies, single-handedly, he had still to spend a significant amount of time with his hosts.

The fact that he had to borrow money from the Achereans made him even edgier. Growing up in a single parent household on the grounds of Fort Bliss, Arizona, Caleb hadn't met too many villa-owning patricians, or even any garden variety millionaires. Though Kassy's parents had graciously offered to pick up the tab, Caleb was too self-conscious to take them up on their offer. Kassy could have taken charge, but she enjoyed watching Caleb squirm, a petty way to get back at him for abandoning her in the wake of Lothar's death. Abbot, on the other hand, simply knew nothing about spacecraft. It was one of the few topics he could not wax verbosely upon, and he claimed to prefer public transport.

"I'm not much of a pilot," Abbot had confessed in his dry, British tones. "Growing up in a monastery didn't give me much chance to go hot-rodding around the galaxies. I've used Planetary Spacelines for years, when I wasn't hitting up my friends for rides." Abbot's shadowy features lightened in what Caleb thought of as Abbot's smile, as the wizard twirled his cane. "You'll find Kassy isn't much better than I. She's a grunt, after all. Dump her planetside in the middle of nowhere with nothing but a penknife and an empty canteen and she's fine, but put her in a pilot's chair and she's useless. Odd as it may seem, though you've been a citizen of the Three Galaxies for only a few months, you've logged more flight hours than either of us."

Caleb forced a chuckle. "Lothar didn't let me fly much," he said. "But I enjoyed every moment of it." He ran a hand through his raggedly cut, blood red hair. "And, uh, I've been checking the WorldNet for ideas. We need something fast and light, I figure, and there's an Orion Industries Comet in a lot in Hymaeria. Lightly armored, no weapons, but it has a jacked-up contra-gravitonic drive that can hit ten light years per hour. It's a little dinged up, but according to the dealer's site it's in great shape. The thing is, I don't know exchange rates or any of that stuff. I don't know if thirty-four million credits is too much or dangerously little. But I do know that's far too much to be asking from Kassy's parents."

Abbot adjusted his fedora. "Perhaps," he admitted. "But they have offered to purchase a ship for Kassy in the past. And you've seen their mansion; the Acherean clan owns most of the real estate on the planet, and Hiram and Kornelia are highly ranked members of the clan. Thirty-four million credits would probably be pocket change to these people."

Caleb sighed. "That doesn't make me feel any better."

Abbot patted him on the shoulder. "You'll have to get used to moving in these kind of circles, Caleb. Cosmo-Knights rub shoulders with the rich and famous all the time."

The young Knight grinned ruefully. "Until I do, why don't *you* ask Hiram and Kornelia for the money?" Abbot laughed, but before he could say anything, Kassy had approached to let them know they would be leaving soon, and that was the end of the conversation.

Hymaeria served as Alexandria's largest spaceport, billing itself as "Atlantis' Gateway to the Stars," and it was also home to a dozen dealerships specializing in starship sales. Most of them sold Atlantean, Dwarven, or Elven designed ships. Hiram and Kornelia had already made their preference for an Atlantean ship known, though the adventurers remained uncommitted. And as always, the Naruni had weaseled their way into the market as well, their wares heavily armed and armored, and better suited for the use of a mercenary band or militia rather than a trio of adventurers.

"Naruni, pfeh," Hiram muttered. He had a full beard and shoulder length hair tied back with a leather cord. The five of them were standing outside the Naruni lot, on a wide flagstone boulevard separating the dealerships. In the distance were the rising domes of starships, and beyond that the pyramids and skyscrapers of the city proper. On the other side of the Naruni lot lay the port, where hundreds of ships could be seen landing and taking off. "I still think you'd be better off with a Gryphon," Hiram continued. The Gryphon was a twenty year old design, little more than a cab and an engine, but like most Atlantean craft it was sturdy and aesthetically appealing, with a sleek fuselage and delicate looking wings. "Gryphons have managed to get me out of more than one dangerous situation."

"I'm sure they have, Dad," Kassy supplied. "But I think we're looking for something a little more modern."

"Are you implying that I'm old?" Hiram asked, mock serious. "Do you hear that, Kornelia? Your daughter thinks I'm just a nattering graybeard."

Kornelia Acherean, herself well into her second century and yet looking more like Kassy's older sister than her mother, told her husband, "You should expect that when you leave an opening like that, dear. You've been nattering away about old model craft, when it's obvious the kids want something with a little more kick. Isn't that right, Caleb?"

She looked right at him, smiling warmly, and Caleb blushed, trying to mutter something in reply.

"Actually," Abbot interjected. "I believe Caleb does have a particular ship in mind. Don't you lad?"

"Really?" Hiram rumbled. "Then why are we stumbling around from ship to ship? If you're looking for something specific, speak up, by Zeus."

Caleb winced. "Well, uh," he started to say, but was rescued momentarily from the embarrassment by the arrival of Ogretopian terrorists. They came in from the west, from the direction of the spaceport, piloting a screaming hover-car loaded down with cannons and nearly a dozen snarling Ogres, some of them hanging on to the sides of the craft, weapons in their free hands. Caleb and his companions almost missed them entirely; the piercing whine of the hover-car was largely lost in the background roar of the port, and even the war-cries of the Ogres were covered up by the hover-car itself.

Luckily, the Ogres had terrible aim. Just as Caleb began prevaricating, a sizzling bolt of laser fire flew by overhead to splatter harmlessly on the flagstones of the boulevard. The five of them stood frozen for a moment. The hover-car roared past them, barely fifteen feet off the ground, depositing seven snarling Ogres as it flashed by and prepared for another run. The Ogres landed lightly on their feet, only one of them losing his balance and sliding across the road on his armor, their weapons drawn and ready to fire.

Caleb aimed a silent prayer of thanks towards heaven, and then sheathed himself in his metallic red cosmo-armor with a crimson flash. Kassy touched her wrist with two fingers, and a bow of blue-white fire manifested in her hands. Abbot gestured with the head of his cane and a shadowy wall appeared in the road, separating them from their attackers. Hiram and Kornelia appeared unperturbed, sharing a brief look and then turning their attention to the fight. The handful of other people in the streets scattered, looking for cover.

The Ogres opened up, beams of energy flashing from the muzzles of their guns, the stink of ozone filling the air. Abbot's wall reflected the barrage, the screen dimming with each impact. Kassy aimed her bow at an angle, sending four flaming arcs over the wall to slam into the Ogres with an explosive crash.

Caleb took to the air, aiming his armor clad body towards the hover-car, which was just coming around and aiming its cannons at his companions on the ground. A flash of red light erupted from Caleb's visor, and one of the cannons melted to slag before it could fire. The Ogres in the open cab hooted and growled, pointing the nose of the car in Caleb's direction. Caleb's laugh echoed in his own ears, and then he slammed into the hover-car, crushing the front end like an aluminum can. The Ogres howled in surprise and fear as their craft's engine died. Caleb wrapped his arms around as much of the hover-car as he could reach and guided it to the ground, letting go just before it landed with an echoing crash. The Ogres bounced on the pavement, but their body armor kept them from taking any serious injury.

Caleb landed lightly on his feet, surveying his handiwork. The Ogres were dazed but uninjured, and already drawing melee weapons and blasters, prepared to continue the fight. "If you get up, I will get lethal," Caleb boomed in his best imitation of Lothar. The Ogres stopped moving for a moment, and then one of them brought his weapon up. With a look, Caleb burned the Ogre's weapon hand away, and the fight went out of the others.

Caleb spared a glance behind him, to see if the others needed help, and saw that Kassy had the Ogres pinned down, while Abbot was sealing them off with more screens of shadow energy. Hiram had a communicator in hand, and the sound of sirens in the distance told Caleb that the authorities were on their way. In moments, Caleb would be trying to explain himself to Hiram and Kornelia once again.

Caleb turned back to the dispirited rabble littering the street. "Doesn't anybody still want to fight?" he asked.

In short order the mess was cleaned away, with Inspector Diomedes dragging the Ogre terrorists away in chains. Caleb actually welcomed Diomedes' angry lecture about Caleb involving himself in police matters, but the lecture was cut short by a word from Hiram. Diomedes shot Caleb a glare, apologized to Hiram, and then stalked off to interrogate his new charges.

Caleb dispelled his armor. "Thanks for the assist," he said.

Hiram nodded. "Diomedes can be a bit of a martinet," he said. "And he's had it in for you since you started playing superhero a few weeks ago. But I wouldn't worry about him. As soon as you and my daughter have picked out a ship, you'll be out of his hair."

Caleb wasn't sure how to respond. All he could muster was, "Uh, right."

Hiram's piercing blue eyes bored into Caleb. "I originally agreed with Diomedes, you know. I thought you reckless and dangerous, too trusting of your Forge-given abilities. But I didn't see that today. You acted quickly and cleanly without any grandstanding, and you trusted your friends to back you up." Hiram's features softened slightly. "You're unlike any Cosmo-Knight I've ever met."

"Thank you," Caleb managed to spit out, lost for anything else to say.

Hiram nodded. Kassy approached, wearing a half smile, and threaded one arm through her father's. "Are you giving Caleb a hard time?" she asked.

Hiram smiled, exposing white, even teeth. "I was congratulating him on a job well done, actually."

"Good," Kassy said, reaching out and hooking her other elbow around Caleb's. "I would prefer it if the two of you got along." She gave her father a meaningful look, and then smiled at Caleb. "What were you going to say before we were distracted?"

"Huh?" Caleb said. Kassy's smiles could do that to him.

"What ship are you looking for?" Hiram asked, a sharp note in his voice.

"An Orion Industries Comet," Caleb told him, unconsciously straightening his back. "Dealer's asking for thirty-four million." He winced inwardly as Hiram's eyes widened at the number.

"That doesn't sound too bad," Kassy said, giving Caleb a knowing wink. "Dad?"

Hiram stifled a cough. "No, not bad at all. But let's see if we can talk the dealer down a bit anyway."

* * *

Elias Harkonnen stepped off the boat into another world.

Hala, a grim block of ice and rock floating in the void, served as one of a dozen prison planets for the Consortium of Civilized Worlds. The planet had no indigenous life, very little atmosphere, and a heavier than standard gravity. A network of tunnels ran beneath the surface, connecting the prison facilities proper. A hundred thousand sentients stalked the prison halls, carefully watched over by a force of automated guards.

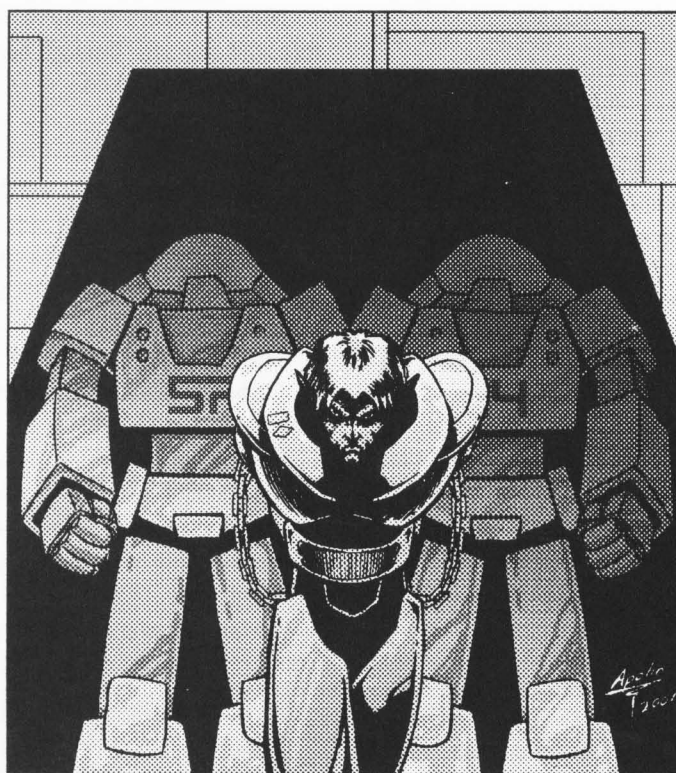
Harkonnen was crippled by a power dampening harness, a set composed of a collar, belt, bracers and greaves. When the circuit of components were completed, they stole Harkonnen's super-human abilities of strength, flight, and invulnerability, leaving him easy prey for the other prisoners filling Hala. Or so the authorities believed; even without his bio-engineered abilities, Elias Harkonnen possessed the training and bearing of the Kreeghor Invincible Guard. The other convicts were in for a surprise or two, as were the drones in charge of the prison. This

planet could not hold Elias Harkonnen for long. Eventually he would make his escape. Eventually he would be free. Eventually he would have his revenge.

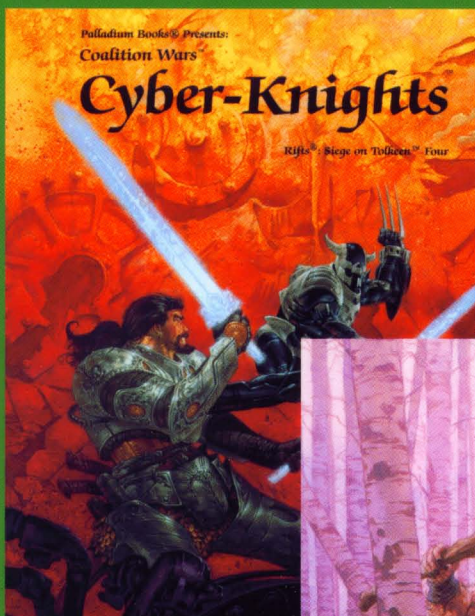
Caleb Vulcan would pay for every indignity Elias Harkonnen was made to suffer. He would pay for it a hundredfold. So Elias swore.

"Get moving, creep," a metallic voice ordered. Elias gritted his teeth as an android guard jabbed him with a powerlance.

"Revenge," Elias whispered darkly, walking down the ramp and joining the prison population. "Revenge."



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