

Palladium Books® Presents:

THE

RIFTSER

TM

Your Guide to the Megaverse

Halloween Issue

Systems Failure™ adventure & Bugs

Rifts® Vampires & variant Necromancers™

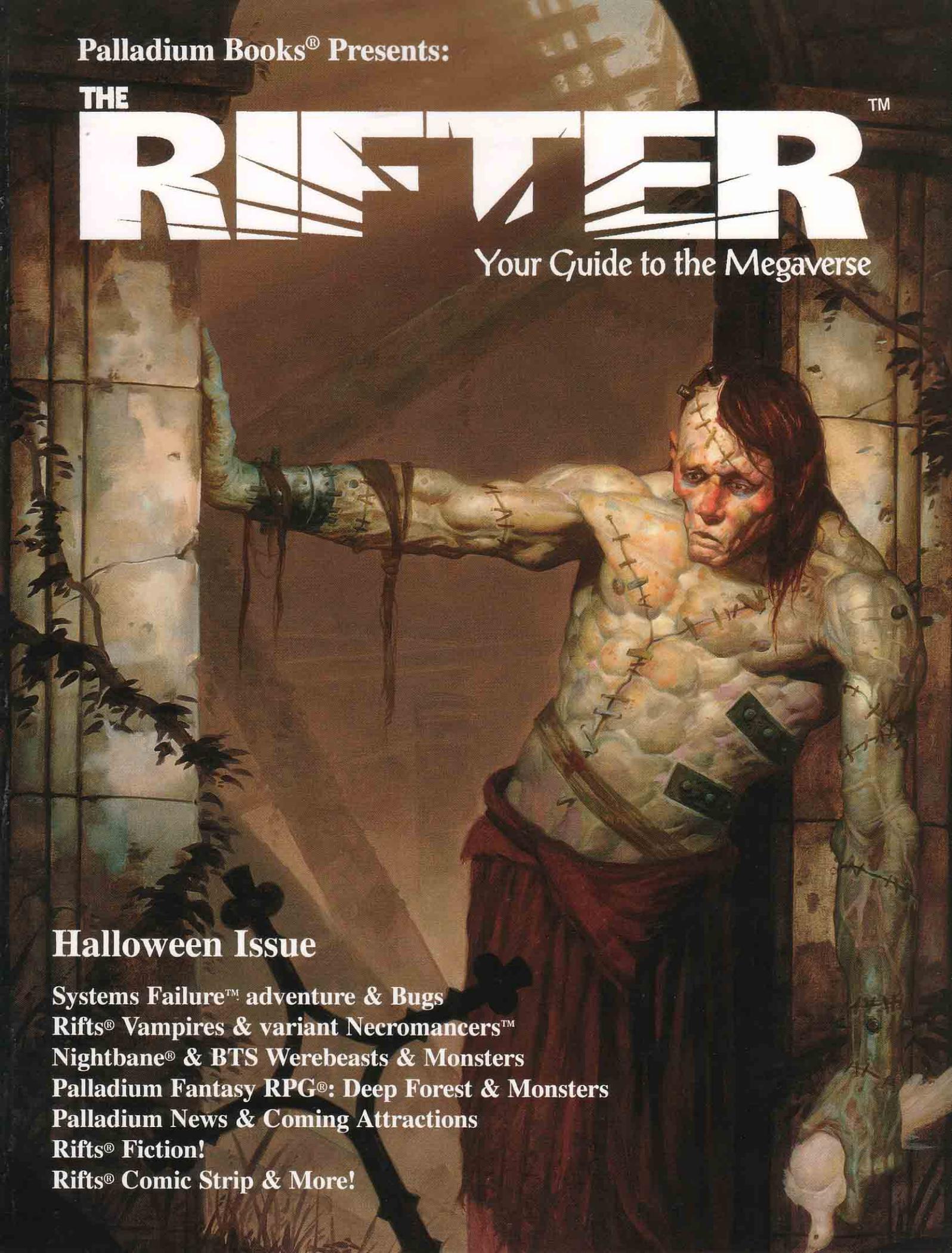
Nightbane® & BTS Werebeasts & Monsters

Palladium Fantasy RPG®: Deep Forest & Monsters

Palladium News & Coming Attractions

Rifts® Fiction!

Rifts® Comic Strip & More!



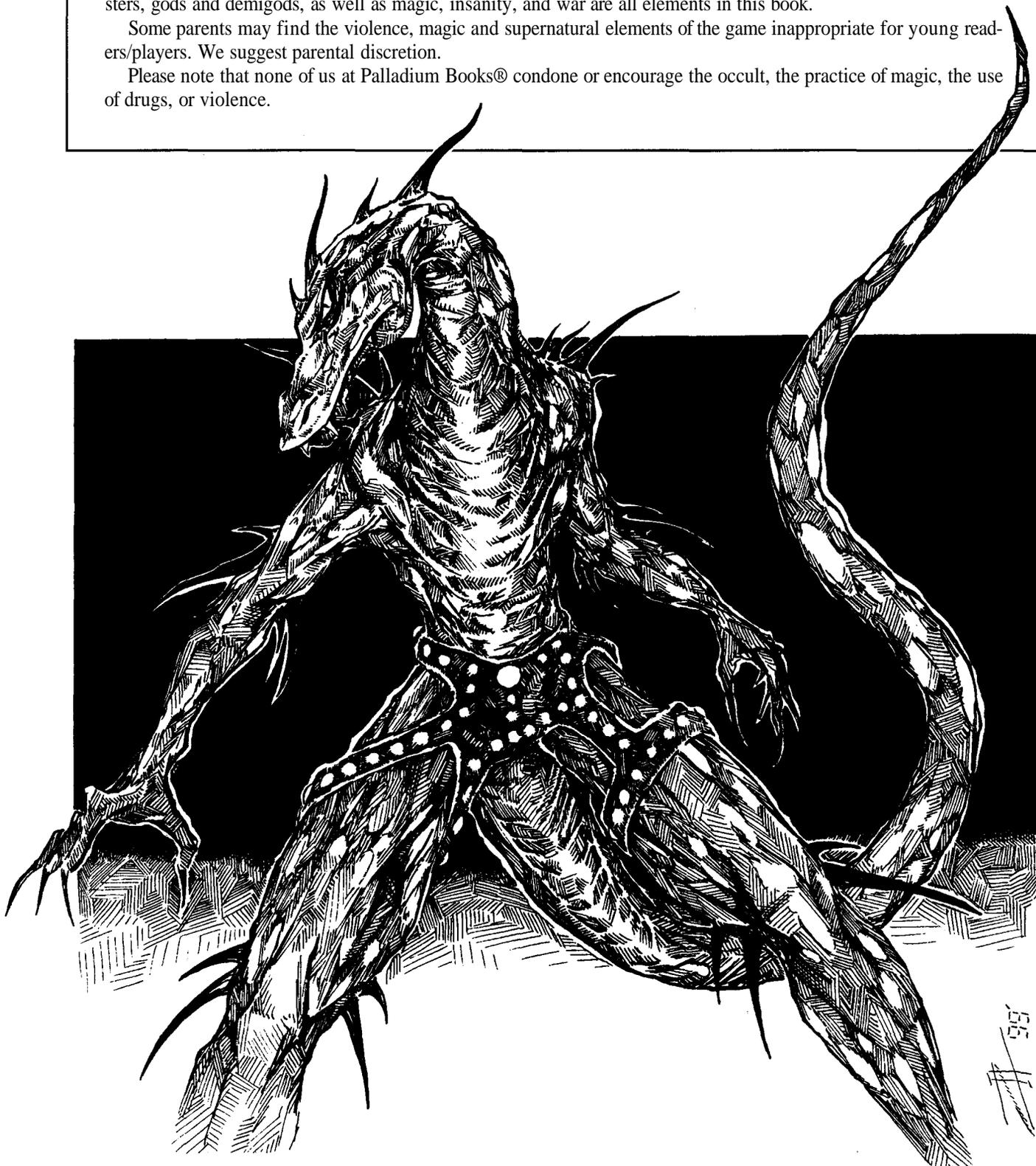
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Violence and the Supernatural

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 this book.

Some parents may find the violence, magic and supernatural elements of the game 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 Eight
Your guide to the Palladium Megaverse®!

First Printing — October, 1999

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The Rifter™ #8 **RPG** sourcebook series is published by Palladium Books Inc., 12455 Universal Drive, Taylor, MI 48180. Printed in the USA.

Palladium Books® Presents:

THE RIFTER™ #8

BRANDT -97

Sourcebook and guide to the Palladium Megaverse®

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

Special Thanks to Brom for his cover painting and to all of our contributors.
Our apologies to anybody who accidentally got left out or whose name was misspelled.

Contents — The Rifter #8

— October, 1999 —

Page 6 — From the Desk of Kevin Siembieda

Publisher Kevin Siembieda talks about how the year 2000 marks the anniversary of both the ever-popular Rifts® RPG series and **Palladium Books**. This causes him to ruminate a bit about the past and talk about the excitement promised by the future (forgive him, he's getting old).

Page 7 — Palladium News, Info, & Coming Attractions

There is a bunch of news this issue starting with the marriage of Jolly Blackburn, cartoonist supreme. Then there's news about Apollo Okamura doing more artwork for other Palladium titles, Mike Wilson opening a store (a must-read for anybody living in Portland), a call to fledgling artists to contribute to **The Rifter™** and industry news. Be in the know.

Coming Attractions makes note of **Palladium's** many new and pulse-pounding titles planned for the rest of 1999 and what readers can expect in the year 2000.

Page 11 — 1999 X-Mas Surprise Package

It's that time of year again, so here's our 7999 *X-Mas Surprise Package-Grab Bag!* Autographs, a secret surprise, and tons of great stuff from Santa's helpers, Kevin & Maryann Siembieda. We want to make X-Mas for our fans the merriest ever.

Page 12 — Systems Failure™ Adventure & Source Material

Palladium's new shoot 'em up, save the world, role-playing game has taken the market by storm with rave reviews and hot sales. So when author/designer, Bill Coffin, suggested doing an adventure and source material contribution for **The Rifter™**, we jumped at the chance. Besides, it fits in with the Halloween theme of this October issue.

What? You don't know about **Systems Failure?** Here's the nitty-gritty. On the eve of the Year 2000, computers and society around the world "crash." Only strange alien "Bugs" are the ones responsible. The Bugs are stinking monsters from another dimension who have invaded Earth and enslaves its people to manufacture *energy* for them. Anybody who gets in the way is killed or turned into a zombie. But here's the dig. The monsters don't need to do this. They're energy junkies and use the power plants and electricity to get high! America is fighting! Are you in?

This is an "official" adventure and source material for the RPG, produced specially for this issue by the creator, Bill Coffin. Illustrated by the bugged out Scott Johnson.

Flyboy O.C.C. & New Core Material starts on page 21.

Page 28 — Knights of the Dinner Table™

Another hilarious installment of KoDT by creator Jolly Blackburn and Steve Johansson.

Don't forget the KoDT comic books are available from Kenzer & Company, 1935 S. Plum Grove Rd., Suite 194, Palatine, IL, 60067.

Page 30 — Palladium Fantasy RPG® Mysteries of the Deep Forest

Randi Cartier strikes again with a host of new "optional" critters, monsters, a new Warlock spell, and herbs for *The Palladium Fantasy RPG®* — adaptable to most fantasy settings. Artwork by Apollo Okamura (does this guy keep getting better or what?).

Page 40 — Nightbane® & Beyond the Supernatural™ The Charonis

In keeping with the Halloween spirit, James M. G. Cannon presents a new variety of werebeasts — "werebats" from around the world. Optional source material perfect for *Nightbane®* and adaptable to *Beyond the Supernatural™* and even *Heroes Unlimited™* and other RPGs.

Artwork by Ryan Beres.

Page 47 — Beyond the Supernatural™ & Nightbane® The Laughing Man R.C.C.

James Calder gives us a demonic creature suitable for either of Palladium's popular horror games.

Page 49 — Rifts® Lone Star Comic Strip

The next *rockin'* installment of the Rifts Comic Strip. And you ain't seen nothin' yet.

Part Three of six chapters by Ramon Perez (Penciler, Inker, Letterer, and Co-Author) and Coleen Laxalt (plot and Scripiter).

Page 57 — Rifts® Demonwrath

Matthew Burns gives us a suitably scary, demon-stomping adventure set in Rifts Russia. Optional source material.

Artwork by "Drew" from Drunken Style Studios.

Page 60 — Rifts® The New Kingdom

Jason Richards and Nathan Taylor give us a new Vampire Kingdom and menaces to deal with this Halloween season. Not

to mention some cool, optional vampire variants, the Abandoned Vampire, Blood Wraith, and Blood Priest, R.C.C. Optional source material.

Artwork by Wayne Breaux Jr. and Apollo Okamura.

Page 76 — Rifts®

Bring Out Your Dead

Mark Sumimoto presents a number of deliciously evil practitioners of Necromantic Arts — optional O.C.C.s different from the classic Necromancer. They include the **Cursebringer**, Death Walker, Murder-Mage, **Warborn**, and **Warbaby**.

Artwork by the dynamic Ryan Beres.

Page 95 — Rifts® Fiction

Three Words

First time contributor, Jason Marker has written a (very) short story inspired by one of Ramon Perez's illustration in Rifts® **Lone Star**.

Artwork by Ramon Perez (from Lone Star).

Page 99 — Hammer of the Forge

The next chapter in James M. G. Cannon's *Phase World™* story.

Artwork by Apollo Okamura.

Page 105 — The Siege Against Tolkeen

The next four chapters in David Haendler's *Rifts®* saga.

Artwork by Apollo Okamura.

The Cover

We thought this **Brom** painting of a Frankenstein-like Monster fit nicely into the *Halloween* spirit and theme of this issue. Thanks Brom.

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 and things one can include in his campaign or enjoy reading. They are not "official" to the main games or world settings. For example, the story, *Siege Against Tolkeen*, is likely to be very different from Kevin Siembieda's "official" world books coming in 2000. 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 stuff that you can use (if you want) or which might inspire you to create your own wonders.

This issue, the **Systems Failure™** adventure is approved as an "official" addition to that role-playing game.

Palladium On Line: www.palladiumbooks.com



Coming Next Issue ... The Rifter™ #9

- More material for the *Palladium Fantasy RPG®*.
- The Bio-Borgs left out of *Splynn Dimensional Market™*.
- **Arzno**, an army of **Techno-Wizards** dedicated to destroying the Vampire Kingdoms.
- **The Astral Plane Revisited.**
- **Material for Ninjas & Superspies & HU2.**
- The next chapter of the *Hammer of the Forge™*.
- The continuing saga of *The Siege Against Tolkeen™*.
- More *Knights of the Dinner Table™*.
- More of the **Ramon Perez Lone Star** comic strip.
- The latest news and developments at **Palladium.**
- Source material for the **Palladium Megaverse®**.
- And new contributors.

From the Desk of Kevin Siembieda

The Year 2000

Palladium Books® is twenty!! Rifts® is ten!

I can hardly believe that the year 2000 marks 20 years that Palladium Books has been in existence. It sure doesn't seem that long. I don't feel that old (although you'd think the white hair and the 44 candles that will make my birthday cake look like an inferno next year would tip me off). Just the other day an old friend told me my voice held the excitement of a 16 year old (cool).

It has been a great 20 years. *The Mechanoids® Trilogy*, *The Weapons & Armor series*, *The Palladium Fantasy Role-Playing Game®*, *Heroes Unlimited™*, *Ninja Turtles®*, *Robotech®*, *RECON®*, *Beyond the Supernatural™*, *Nightbane®*, *Ninjas & Superspies™*, *Rifts®* and others. Palladium even helped to spark the American Japanimation video industry in the direct market with the release of the *Robotech® videocassettes* back in 1988 and did lots of other innovative and good things too numerous to list. The first 15 years were filled with constant growth, discovery, experimentation and raw excitement. These last four years have seen the role-playing game industry go through dramatic and sometimes frightening changes (at least to us insiders). This has made times a bit tougher and difficult. Many RPG companies have merged, others have gone into bankruptcy, or reduced in size. Through it all, Palladium has managed to persevere and keep its quality high.

1999 has been especially good for Palladium. We have built a network of amazing artists, writers and creators — many of whom have become friends rather than just distant, machine-like freelancers. Some of these folks are only beginning to stretch their wings and be seen. New guys like Bill Coffin, Ben Lucas, Steve Edwards, Mark Sumimoto, Steve Trustrum, Mike Wilson, Apollo Okamura, Ryan Beres, and others. Together, we plan on making the next 20 years better than the first! There is an excitement and energy at Palladium Books that reverberates through the stalwart staff and freelancers alike. An energy that we hope will carry us to new heights. To boldly go where no man has ... um ... well you get the idea.

Of course **The Rifter®** will continue into the new Millennium, bringing you new ideas, new talent, new stories, new comic strips, and optional and official game material (in fact, *The Rifter #9* will include some **Splynn** material that got cut from World Book 21). Our goal continues to be the production of the most fun and exciting role-playing games and game worlds imaginable, and to support our *entire* line of diverse and popular products. That means more supplemental books for **The Palladium Fantasy RPG®**, **Heroes Unlimited™**, **Nightbane®** and maybe even **Ninjas & Superspies™** and **The Ninja Turtles®**. I hope to get around to doing **Beyond the Supernatural™**, **2nd Edition and Mechanoid® Space™**, but no promises. As much as I would like to do both of these titles, my plate is always overflowing with work, but I will try.

With 2000 being **Rifts®** Ten Year Anniversary, we have some big plans and oodles of **Rifts®** books on the schedule. Inevitably, whenever Palladium releases a number of **Rifts®** books, the fans of our other, game lines jump up to complain that we are ignoring them. Actually, that's never really true, although it may seem like it sometimes.

Publishing and scheduling is a juggling act. People don't seem to realize there is a lot more behind creating and publishing **RPGs** than getting a book written and sent to the printer. There's working out scheduling with the cover artists, the interior artists, making changes and adjustments, and scheduling with the printer as well as dealing with any problems and delays that may arise. Then there's my own schedule which is always a nightmare, because in addition to writing 2-5 books a year **myself**, and reviewing and doing minor to major rewrites and contributing to virtually every **RPG** title released by Palladium, I'm cooking up new ideas like **Systems Failure™** (thank god, Bill Coffin is a dream to work with), trying to cultivate new talent, coordinating advertising and marketing, pasting-up books, plus dealing with the day to day problems and issues of running a business. Heck, **Maryann** does the job of three people herself. It's just part of the fun (and not so fun) aspects of running your own business.

In fact, the reason 1999 is ending with four **Rifts® World Books** is because we have been working feverishly to get "non-Rifts" titles out for the first three quarters of the year (*The Mechanoid Invasion® Trilogy*, *Deluxe Revised RECON®*, *The Baalgor Wastelands™*, *Mount Nimro: Kingdom of Giants™*, *Systems Failure™* and the *Heroes Unlimited™ G.M.'s Guide*, plus we experimented with novels and did the four issues of *The Rifter™* — which has good stuff for all of Palladium's game lines). The only **Rifts®** release, until **Canada** hit the stores in September, was **Rifts® Australia**, which came out in February.

More importantly, new **Rifts®** and non-Rifts product was put aside so that I could get several books for **Heroes Unlimited™**, **Palladium Fantasy RPG®** and **Nightbane®** into development for release in the year 2000. This means 2000 should offer a bunch of great books for **everybody!** See the *Coming Attractions* in this issue for details.

— Kevin Siembieda, 1999



Palladium News, Info, & Coming Attractions

By Kevin Siembieda (the guy in the know)

News

KoDT tied up in knots

Um, I mean, KoDT creator/writer/artist and all around nice guy, *Jolly Blackburn* tied the knot.

Yep, the "Jolly One" remarried his old flame in a small but joyous ceremony this past August. From what we understand, this love never died and even after divorce, Jolly and Barb stayed dear friends. Well, the two finally decided their love was, indeed, eternal, and the happy couple remarried. Congratulations Jolly, Barb and their daughter, Amber, from all of us at Palladium Books. Hey, we hear the second time around is better than the first. Be happy.

But that's not all! The **Knights of the Dinner Table comic book** continues to increase its sales and circulation as it appears in more and more "comic book" stores as well as hobby and game shops. Circulation of the monthly comic book hovers near 20,000 copies a month, up from 15,000 copies only this Spring! And there is no end in sight! Monthly sales could top 30,000 or 40,000 copies by this time next year! I also believe that the monthly comic "magazine" won the *Origins Award* for Best Gaming Magazine for the second year in a row.

Congratulations again to our pal, Jolly Blackburn, and to Kenzer Company for their continued success with KoDT and all their ventures. We also want to thank Jolly and his business partners for continuing to contribute a new, two-page KoDT strip in every issue of **The Rifter™**. We love it as much as our readers.

Apollo Okamura steps beyond The Rifter™

Long-time contributor to **The Rifter™**, Apollo Okamura, has gotten work doing illustrations for other Palladium titles. Apollo was discovered through his contribution to **The Rifter™** where his artwork has matured and his professional attitude came to light. We are glad to announce that two of his illustrations appear in **Rifts® Canada™** and he will be making a major contribution to **Rifts® Xiticix Invasion™**, and probably **Free Quebec™** (along with Ryan Beres and others). Fear not, Apollo will continue to contribute to **The Rifter™**.

Hey, you other fledgling artists out there should consider contributing to **The Rifter™**. Sure it only pays \$60 dollars for a full page illustration (proportionally less for small illoes; the original art is returned to the artist), but it is a good way to stretch your wings, get **seen**, and make some money while experimenting with your art and developing your talent. Humorous cartoons to serious art are all of interest to us.

Would-be art contributors to **The Rifter™** should send 8-12 photocopies of their artwork for our consideration to:

Rifter Art Submissions
12455 Universal Drive
Taylor, MI 48180

The RPG Industry Scene

The role-playing game industry continues to convulse with change. **Iron Crown Enterprises**, better known as "I.C.E.," has filed Chapter 11 bankruptcy to reorganize. We wish them well.

FASA and Ral Partha are in the process of being purchased by **Decipher Games Inc.** (the Star Wars Collectable Card Game folks). Three of the biggest games distributors are merging together and with an on-line company (**iEntertainment**). The three distributors, **Berkeley-Topline, Zocchi and Alliance** (collectively known as "BZA") insist this merger will enable them to better service retailers and manufacturers alike, allow them to consolidate their efforts, cut costs, build profits, and perform at maximum efficiency. The principles at BZA seem excited and positive. They are hopeful that the final details of the merger will be completed by September 30, 1999.

Wargames West Distribution quickly dispatched a press release pointing out that they were now the second largest role-playing game distributor in the country. On a more cryptic note, they also said they would have a big announcement to make soon.

Hasbro buys TSR & WoTC

The biggest news was that **Hasbro** (yes, the toy company) is in the final stages of purchasing **Wizards of the Coast** (*Magic the Gathering® CCG*, *Pokemon® CCG*, and *Dungeons & Dragons®*) for an estimated 325 million dollars! **WoTC & Hasbro** expect this deal to be done by September 30th, so by the time you read this, Hasbro will own **WoTC**.

WoTC CEO, Peter Adkison, is very positive about this arrangement, saying that **WoTC** and **TSR** will (more or less) continue to function as it has these past few years and that new and exciting card and role-playing games are in the pipeline. Hasbro seems equally pleased, noting that this deal gives them inroads to a new and exciting market for them (i.e. the Direct Market and role-playing), as well as the potential resources of **WoTC** and the creative forces in place there.

A constant in a changing world

The events noted above were all announced between the middle of July and the middle of September, and they are just the most notable!

Things are hopping like crazy in the ol' role-playing game business. Exactly how any of these things will affect the industry as a whole and other game companies individually, is yet to be seen. Start-up companies and small outfits who we have heard from are nervous because they are the most likely to suffer from any ripple effects that might result, especially with the ever-changing and uncertain picture regarding the direct market game distributors.

Fans of **Palladium Books Inc.** can rest easy. We are doing very well. In fact, 1999 looks like it will be one of our best years in recent history. Plus, we are looking to expand our staff and team of freelancers in order to better satisfy the demands of the market while maintaining our famous level of quality and fun. To this end, Palladium has already added a few new freelancers to our roster, and may be hiring some new "staff employees, part-timers and interns. The last quarter of 1999 will see at least four new *Rifts*® releases (including *Rifts*® *Canada*™ and *Xiticix Invasion*™, already in stores) and onset of the year 2000 will see products for the **Palladium Fantasy RPG**®, *Nightbane*® and **Heroes Unlimited**™, as well as *Rifts*®. In fact, the year 2000 should be Palladium's biggest and most exciting year *ever* (see *Coming Attractions*).

We ain't selling! Inevitably, big mergers and acquisitions spawn rumors that other companies, like Palladium Books, are also up for sale. Consequently, I was not surprised that 48 hours after the announcement of the *WoTC* sale to Hasbro, I personally fielded three telephone calls asking whether **Palladium Books** was going to merge with, or consider selling to, anybody. No. And that is an emphatic, *no!* Palladium is financially strong, our sales are up 20% from last year and we truly love what we do. Moreover, one of the reasons I started Palladium was to have personal freedom over my creations. I don't want to have to answer to a board of directors, stockholders or a boss of any kind. Somebody would have to offer **Maryann** and me an insane amount of money for us to even pause to consider such a possibility. Meanwhile, I have a million ideas for future games, books and projects — things that me and Palladium's wonderfully creative teams of artists and writers will be busy working on for years to come. So rest easy and enjoy our role-playing games, novels, sourcebooks and other fun products we have in store for you.

Good times in San Diego

Just a quick note about the San Diego Comic Convention: **Maryann** and I had a blast, spent too much money on art, toys and junk we didn't really need, and discovered that we know a zillion people in the game and comic industry. We ended up bumping into old friends and acquaintances at every turn and talking for hours on end.

Oh, to the two (or was it three?) gents — Palladium fans — who took it upon themselves to "find the **Siembiedas**" in the crowd of 35,000+ people attending — you have to keep a sharper eye out. You missed us by scant minutes at the *Zeleznik* booth and we walked right by you at one point (at least we're pretty sure it was you, 'cause we heard you guys talking about *Rifts*® and saying nice things about us). Better luck next year.

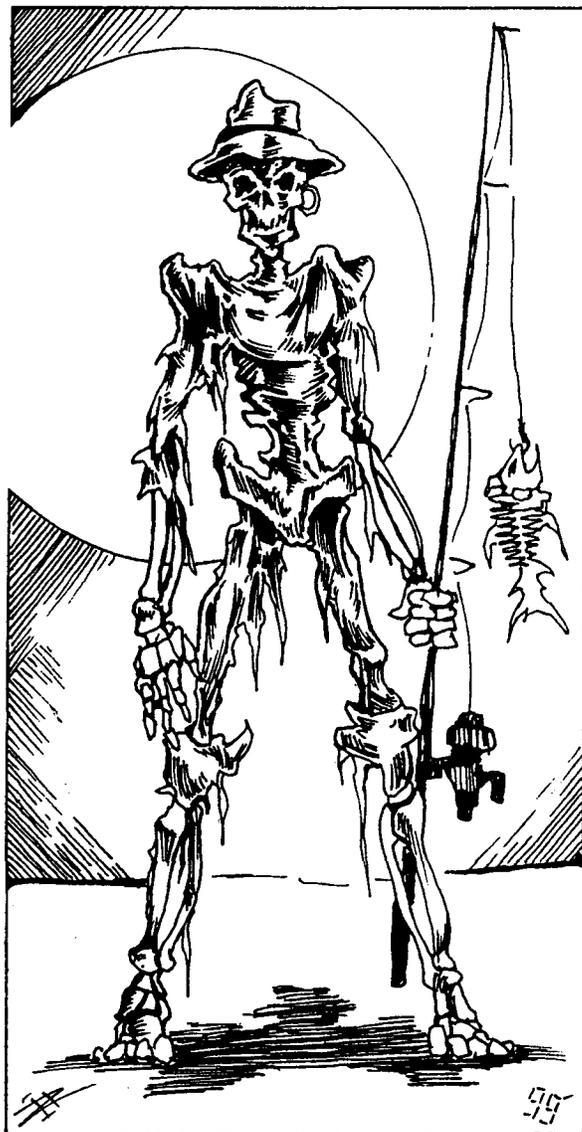
Mike Wilson steps to ... The Other Side

Palladium artist, Mike Wilson and his partner, are opening a game and bookstore in Portland, Oregon, called **The Other Side**. Being new to all this, they are still trying to build shelves, place stock orders and figure out exactly what the store will offer. Science fiction and role-playing games (including Palladium products) are definite. Plus, they are considering comic books, posters, limited editions, and some other good stuff. Palladium fans in the area can get a chance to meet Mike and maybe, if they are *nice*, get him to sign a few of the Palladium products they are buying (please, don't pester him).

All of us at Palladium Books extend our heartfelt congratulations and wish Mike the greatest success. From our own selfish point of view, the best news is that Mike will continue to do artwork for Palladium on a regular basis.

The store should be open by September 24, 1999.

The Other Side
1236 Lloyd Center
Portland, Oregon 97232
(503) 288-1485



Palladium will be at Gen Con® in 2000

Palladium Books® will be 20 years old next year and **Rifts**® will be 10. It only seems fitting that we should attend Gen Con® to celebrate with our many friends and fans.

To help make our appearance fun for everyone, we expect the following Palladium creators to be present at the booth to meet fans, sign books, chat and have a good time.

Kevin Siembieda

Maryann Siembieda

Steve Sheiring

Jim Osten

Wayne Smith

Ramon Perez

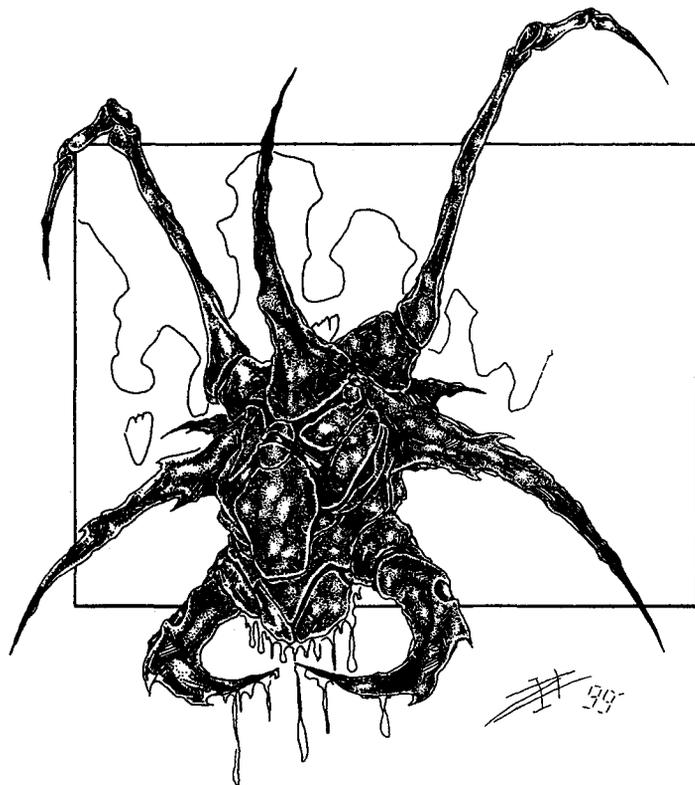
Scott Johnson

Randi & Roger Cartier (yes, of the Cartier-Fury Ranch)

Bill Coffin (tentative)

and probably others ...

Of course, Palladium will offer an Anniversary Poster (depicting all of our games) and some special promotional item or items — maybe a commemorative T-shirt or something.



Coming Attractions

Rifts® World Book 21: Splynn Dimensional Market™

If you haven't seen **Splynn** yet, you missed it! So jump up and run right over to your favorite game store to get a copy!

Kidding aside, **Rifts® World Book 21: Splynn Dimensional Market**, should have hit store shelves between October 8-12, 1999, depending on where you live. We had a lot of fun with this book, filled it with great artwork, and Mark Sumimoto did *fantastic job* writing it (I only pitched in here and **there**!).

Man oh man, this book has everything you might expect from a new **Rifts® Atlantis** book:

- An overview of the Splynn Dimensional Market.
- Notable and bizarre shops and merchandise.
- Exotic people, slaves and products.
- The Splynn Underground Railroad to free slaves.
- The **Splugorth** Authorities and some of their equipment.
- More about Tattooed Men and some new Magic Tattoos.
- A new T-Man O.C.C. — the T-Archer.
- More on **Bio-Wizardry** including new Symbiotes and Parasites.
- **Bio-Wizard** Faerie and Entity weapons.
- The dreaded Bio-Borg.
- Kittani equipment and other good things.
- \$20.95 — 192 pages (expanded from 160).

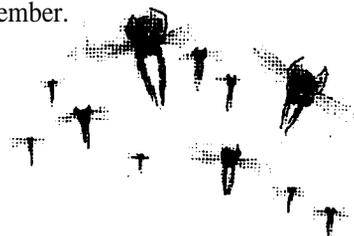
Rifts® World Book 23: Xiticix Invasion™

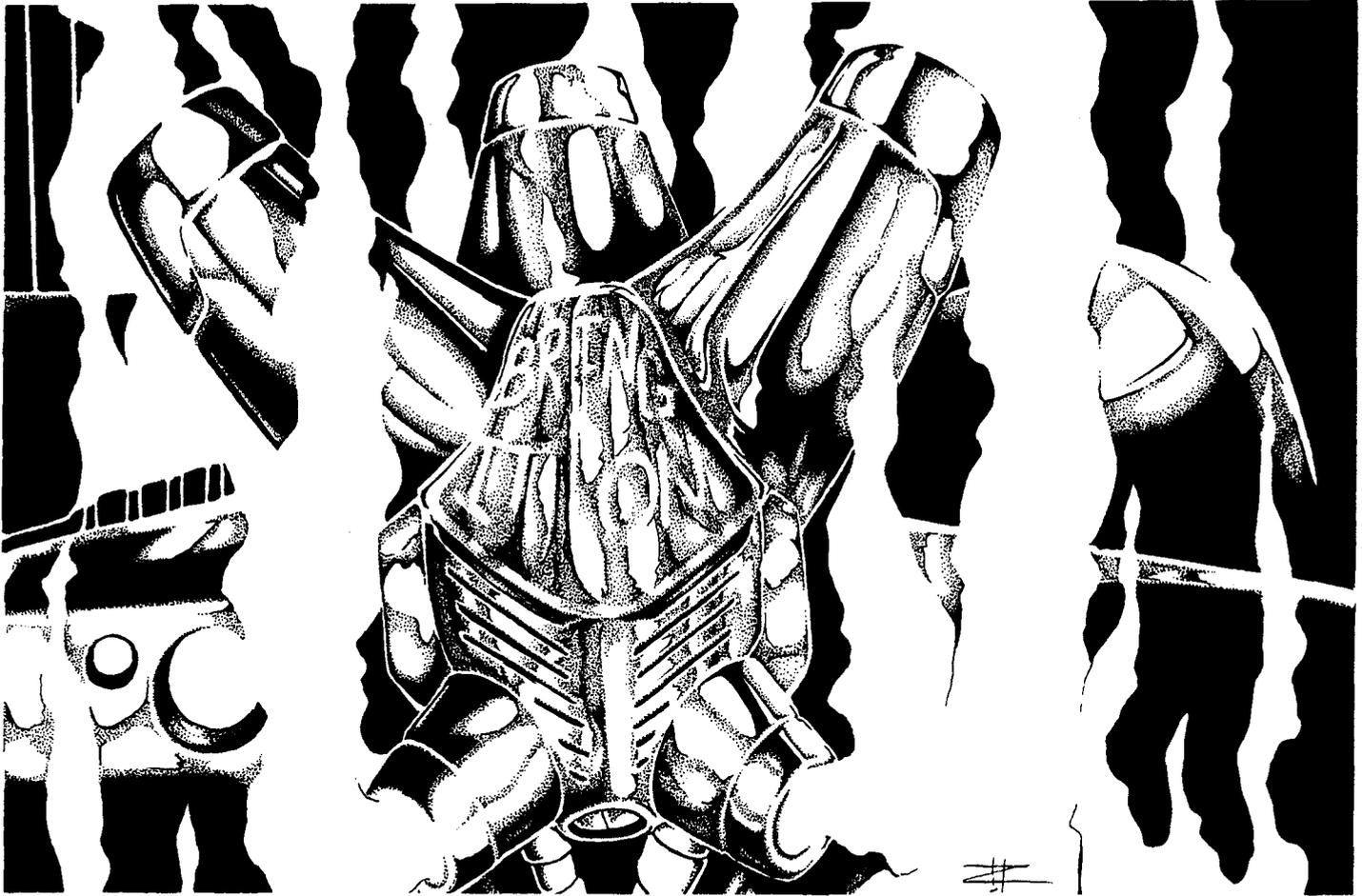
Xiticix Invasion™ should be in stores early to mid-November (as of this writing it is nearly finished and will soon be going to the printer). We decided to release **Xiticix Invasion™** before **Rifts® Free Quebec™** because we did not want to rush the art on **Free Quebec™** and **Xiticix** was nearly done already. It seemed foolish to delay **Xiticix Invasion™** if it was done.

This book dramatically expands on the Xiticix material that appeared in **The Rifter™** #3 and takes an in-depth look at these strange, insect-like aliens, the danger they pose to North America, their society, Hive Networks, and the people who oppose them.

Xiticix Invasion™ along with **Free Quebec™**, are all part of Palladium's efforts to define North America, resolve some story plots and build further excitement.

- An in-depth look at the Xiticix.
- Xiticix society and their threat to all life.
- The City of Lazlo's quest to quell the Xiticix and save the world!
- The Coalition States and their role against the Xiticix.
- Notable Xiticix Hive Networks, CS and other outposts.
- Fun, suspense and adventures as more of North America is described and mapped.
- **Art** by **Perez**, Wilson, Breaux, Okamura, Beres and Buries.
- Written by Kevin Siembieda, with Wayne Breaux Jr.
- \$16.95 for 160 pages!
- In stores early November.





Rifts® World Book 22: Free Quebec™

The War begins here and now! The CS forces face the power and might of Free Quebec, their legion of Glitter Boys and an unshakable will.

Highlights will include:

- The people and society of Free Quebec.
- Key leaders and strongholds.
- The armies and war plans of both sides.
- New types of Glitter Boys and other equipment.
- Art by Perez, Beres, Breaux, Wilson and Johnson.
- Written by Francois DesRochers with Kevin Siembieda.
- 200+ pages — \$20.95
- In stores early December.

Oh, if you missed **Rifts® Canada** you want to take a look at it, 'cause most everybody absolutely loves it. It has gotten rave reviews (don't take our word for it, check out the web) and is selling like **hotcakes** on a cold October **morning!**

Apparently Eric Thompson and I really succeeded in giving the readers what they wanted. **Rifts® Canada** offers tons of world information about all of Canada, presents descriptions for a half dozen key cities and towns, along with a lot of maps, a few bits on **Cyber-Knights** and the Kingdom of **Lazlo**, and other good stuff like the Tundra Rangers, the **Inuit Shaman** (and his magic), spirits, demons and a few new D-Bees and Monsters. I'm proud of this bad boy. It also ties into events surrounding **Free Quebec™**.

Coming in the Year 2000

The year 2000 promises to be truly amazing for fans of Palladium Books Inc. The following is a list of manuscripts that are finished or near completion and scheduled for release in 2000.

- Three **Nightbane®** sourcebooks! One by Wayne Breaux, two by Steve **Trustrum** (and possibly a fourth).
- Three **Heroes Unlimited™** sourcebooks, including Bill Coffin's *Century Station™* (formerly Sentinel City) and Mark Sumimoto's *Anarchy Unlimited™*, plus a third, as of yet, untitled book. Not to mention the possibility of me finally getting around to doing *The Nursery™*, plus there are two other **HU2** projects currently under discussion.
- Three **Palladium Fantasy RPG®** sourcebooks, including Steve Edwards' *Eastern Territories™* and the beginning of a series of books for *The Land of the Damned™* by Bill Coffin. With any luck (no promises because I am more busy than you can possibly imagine) the two *Old Kingdom™* books will finally come out too.
- Due to popular demand, at least one **adventure-sourcebook** for **Systems Failure™** by Bill Coffin! Although originally intended as a one-shot stand alone game, gamers are begging us for more. This deliciously fun, new RPG is the talk of the town and selling like crazy! The adventure-sourcebook will probably be an inexpensive and small 64-112 pager.

- The release of the many Rifts® World Books we've promised, including:

Rifts® **Australia Two** — December 1999 or January 2000

Rifts® **Australia Three**

Rifts® **Scotland**

Rifts® **Dimension Book: The Anvil Galaxy™**

The Siege on Tolkeen™ Epic

The Rifter™ will continue with another year of fun and surprises.

Note that *Chaos Earth™* will be shelved in order to get out all the other titles on this list. I'm also deluded enough to believe I "may" get either *Mechanoid Space™* and/or *Beyond the Supernatural™, 2nd Edition* out by the end of 2000. We shall see.

Rifts®:

Siege on Tolkeen™!

I could not think of a better way to celebrate Rifts® Ten Year Anniversary than finally bringing this long and highly anticipated story line to an earth-shattering conclusion. It just seemed like a natural.

Siege on Tolkeen™ will be SIX books. I guess we could cram it into one or two, but it would be an injustice. I felt the **Siege on Tolkeen™** needed to be "epic." A roller coaster ride of excitement, surprises, betrayal and conflict. Bill Coffin agreed, and will be teaming up with me to create six books that present the progression of the war.

The first book will set the stage with data on **Tolkeen's** defenses, weapons, magic, and notable leaders, as well as the Coalition Troops and war plans. This book will launch the all out, winner-take-all war. It will probably be 160 pages (\$16.95) and should hit store shelves in April or May.

The next four books will present one key adventure, and more war data with sub-plots and ideas for other adventures (maybe even some Hook, Line and **Sinkers™**). Each key adventure advances the war and the story. Each **adventure-sourcebook** will be 96-112 pages (\$12.95). The first will appear one month after the first book. Each of the others will come out every other month.

The final book is the big, grand finale in December, 2000! A truly epic and world altering saga that.

Yeah — don't even say it. I know Palladium is notorious for missing deadlines, but I promise Bill and I will hit these deadlines (we have to or the concept doesn't work). That's why I have spent the last six months of 1999 arranging all the above mentioned titles and working on them this year, so they can come out on time next year. In fact, I won't release the first **Siege on Tolkeen™** book until the second one is completely written.

I don't think any RPG company has ever deliberately done six consecutive **adventure-sourcebooks** in a year to tell one big story. And really, *Rifts® Canada™*, *Xiticix Invasion™* and *Free Quebec™* are all loosely tied into the war too.

Happy 10th Anniversary, Rifts® fans! We couldn't think of a better way to say thanks for ten great years of support.

More information will be in the next issue of The Rifter™.

1999 X-Mas Surprise Package

When we did our 1997 (followed by 1998) **X-Mas Surprise Package** or **Grab Bag** we sent fans wild with delight (no kidding). Nobody knew exactly what they would get. All Palladium guarantees is that \$25 US dollars (plus \$3 for shipping and handling) will get the purchaser at least \$40 dollars worth of product (often \$45-\$50; occasionally more).

Maryann and I always personally fill each order — over one thousand last year (boy, could we have used some of Santa's elves). And we do all kinds of wild and zany things.

We ask those placing their order what they play, their favorite Palladium **RPG**, special wants, etc. Using this data as a guide, we go crazy and try to fill as many "special wants" as possible. We've been known to send people the Rifts® **Silver Hardbound Edition** (signed by the Palladium staff and nearly out of print), out of print back issues of certain titles like **Revised Heroes Unlimited™** (the predecessor of HU2), **Old Ones™ 1st Edition**, or the occasional other out of print book (although we have virtually nothing left other than the two books noted here), miniatures, books they missed, new books they haven't gotten yet, Palladium **RPGs** they haven't tried yet, old black & white fantasy prints by Siembieda, and even the occasional piece of original artwork by Siembieda, Johnson, Long or Perez (never a specific illustration — just whatever is laying around and donated by the artist), one of our T-shirts, etc.

There is always one or two specific "special" items that all **Palladium Grab Bags/Surprise Packages** get. Last year it was a Palladium T-shirt of choice and *The Collected Mechanoid Invasion® Trilogy* (still available).

We are doing it again!

How to get your Palladium X-Mas Surprise Package

This offer is only being publicized to readers of **The Rifter™** and on **Palladium's Web Site** — www.palladiumbooks.com — but feel free to spread the news by word of mouth to friends and family.

Deadline for this limited offer: The orders for the 1999 *X-Mas Surprise Package* will be accepted starting now and running up to December 21st. **Note:** Orders received by Palladium after December 10th cannot be guaranteed to arrive *before Christmas*. Likewise, Palladium makes no promise that foreign or military base orders will be received before Dec. 25th regardless of when they are placed. The first orders **WILL NOT** be filled until November 1st (we have to wait before we get one of the special "surprise" items).

The Cost: \$25.00 US dollars plus \$3.00 shipping and handling. Credit card orders are accepted (**Am-Ex**, Visa and Mastercard).

Overseas Orders will require additional postage (call to inquire) and will take extra time to arrive.

All orders are shipped *4th Class Special Book Rate*.

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Or E-Mail using the ordering info on our web page at www.palladiumbooks.com

What you get ...

The rock bottom minimum of \$40.00 US dollars worth of product, probably more.

This year, we are keeping the "special surprise item," well, a surprise. Each 1999 X-Mas Surprise Package/Grab Bag will have one of this item, so multiple orders *will* result in duplication.

Each Grab Bag/Surprise Package also includes one of Palladium's T-shirts of your choice (indicate size and which one you want, otherwise you'll get the Coalition X-Mas shirt; all T-shirts have a \$15.95 value), plus promotional posters, some mystery Palladium product(s) — something good, and possibly other goodies.

Plus most everything is signed by Kevin and Maryann Siembieda (and sometimes other available staff members), especially if the purchaser requests autographs.

When ordering Palladium's 1999 X-Mas Surprise Package, include the following information ...

- Favorite Palladium games.
- Palladium games you have not played but always thought looked fun and interesting.
- Special Wants (specific books — new and old, T-Shirts, Rifts miniatures, Rifts Silver Edition Hardbound, Palladium Fantasy Crimson, etc.).
- Preferred T-Shirt Size.
- Preferred T-Shirt: Rifts® Logo, Rifts® Dog Pack, Coalition X-Mas, Ley Line Walker, **Nightbane™**, or Palladium Fantasy™.
- Would like Autographs.
- Comments and suggestions.
- Accurate Mailing address!

Note: Credit Cards are accepted (Visa/Mastercard & American Express). Multiple orders of the 1999 Surprise Package *will* result in the duplication of items.

Orders can be sent by mail, through our web-site (www.palladiumbooks.com), or telephone (734-946-1156; this is an order line only).

Happy Holidays from all of us at Palladium Books

SYSTEMS FAILURE™

Adventure

The Guns of Sulfur Gulch

By Bill Coffin

This is the very first adventure for Palladium's new game, Systems Failure™, a quirky romp through a post-

apocalyptic world laid low by both the Y2K Meltdown and a full-scale alien invasion by a race of diabolic, energy-eating insectoids called the "Millennium Bugs." Hopefully, anybody unfamiliar with the game can still have fun reading this adventure and even adapting it to another Palladium game. Or, you could always just pick up a copy of Systems Failure™ (hint, hint) and use this adventure for your campaign's maiden voyage.

Synopsis

NORAD just ended up on the wrong end of a deadly double-cross, and now the outlaw town of Sulfur Gulch has scored a small arsenal of **Organotechnology** energy weapons. But before

NORAD comes looking for its lost hardware, our heroes (and a few other interested parties) are gonna give it their all to cut themselves in on the action. So saddle up and lock and load, people, **'cause** we got ourselves a little treasure hunt here, Systems Failure™ **style!**

Part One: Roadkill

This adventure takes place somewhere between the Four Corners and Bunkerville regions in what was once **known** as the Western U.S. of A. As the curtain rises on our story, we find our heroes holed up somewhere in the vicinity. Exactly where that may depend on the players' campaign so far, **and/or** the G.M.'s discretion.

Late one night, as the group bunkers down for a spell, they turn on their radios and scan the airwaves, as is common for **trav-**

elers and adventurers to do. Considering how wild and uncivilized vast stretches of Free America are, a trusty radio often is the only safe and reliable way to find out what's going on. What one might hear out in the boonies can range from some pirate transmission reporting local news, to a free militia broadcasting known Bug and Zombie Squad movements, or even Bug stations piping out lots of unbelievable propaganda.

Of course, that's just the usual stuff. What any adventurers worth their salt really scan the airwaves for is the good stuff. Something interesting. Something dangerous. Something that's bound to get you into a truckload of trouble. And that's exactly what our heroes are going to get.

Shortly after midnight, the group hears the following conversation between what sounds like a somewhat panicked young male voice and a much more reserved, calm, female voice:

"...attack! I say again, this is **NORAD 125**, headed due west on interstate 73, just past mile marker 32. Under heavy attack by numerous **hostiles**. Count two Cobra gunships, and I swear **there's** some airliner shooting a howitzer at **us!** We've got heavy losses here... whoa! Just lost Alpha Leader! **I'm** at the head now, I'm gonna try to make it **as** far as I can before they get me, **too...**"

"**NORAD 125**, **NORAD 125**, what's your status, over?"

"What? Is somebody there? Yes! I'm saved! **Uh**, this is **NORAD Convoy Leader**, headed north out of Colorado Springs. Uh, I think we crossed over into **Bunkerville** like an hour ago? Where does that put me? Who are you **guys?**"

"**NORAD Convoy Leader**, this is Sulfur Gulch Perimeter Authority. Deviate from your present course. I say again, deviate

from your present course. We have you on inbound radar and do not authorize your **approach.**"

"What the hell are you talking **about!?!?** We got hostiles all over, shooting my **truckfull** of holes! We got trucks down, we got bandits in every quadrant! I can't stop for **nothing!**"

"**NORAD Convoy Leader**, I say again, deviate your present course **or** face immediate defensive **action.**"

"What do you mean, '**defensive action?**' You know this is a **NORAD truck** you're talking to? Look, I'm coming in whether you like it or not, and if you don't open your **freaking gates**, I'm gonna ram through them, you got me?"

"Reading you loud and clear, **NORAD**. You have been warned. Initiating defensive **action.**"

"What is that up there? Is... oh, no. Oh, **NO!!!**"

After that, there is no further radio transmission. What exactly has unfolded here is tough to tell without investigating the scene itself. Thankfully, the player characters are only about 10 miles (16 km) from Sulfur Gulch. If the player characters are riding in motorized vehicles or riding horses, the trip should be a snap. If they're walking it, it still won't be a hard march.

Time is of the essence here. Any Freebooters, **Splatterpunk**s or other seedy sorts in the group will recognize this battle for what it is — a prime chance to scavenge some great military hardware. The trouble is, scavengers descend on a dead vehicle faster than vultures land on roadkill, and given how far and wide that **NORAD** trucker broadcast his mayday, it's a sure bet that every party within a 20 mile (32 km) radius (at least) will know about this scene and will come calling. Of course, the locals from Sulfur Gulch will have first dibs on anything and will probably strip the vehicles clean, but still, it can't hurt to look.



Actually finding the battle site should not be difficult, as any character with the Radio: Basic skill can triangulate the rough location of the convoy by making a successful skill roll at -10%. Once the heroes are within five miles (8 km) of the battle site, tall, thin plumes of smoke will make the final resting place of the **NORAD** convoy plain as day. Of course, with the burning wreckage advertising the site like this, the place will be crawling with Freebooters, **Splatterpunks**, and all sorts of other folks looking to snag some salvage. The heroes had better hope they get there first.



The battle site itself is a stretch of highway on the way to Sulfur Gulch, one of the few fortified towns in the area. About ten miles (16 km) west of the town, the road is blocked by three wrecked tractor-trailers, which still flame slightly. Judging by the blast marks on the roads, and that the trucks themselves are flipped over, it seems that whoever wanted to hit these trucks mined the highway, waited for the trucks to flip, and then sprayed the occupants with machinegun fire. The bodies in the trucks are wearing **NORAD** uniforms, but aside from that, they have no gear or equipment on them. Moreover, the remains of their trucks (including their cargo trailers) have **been** emptied and stripped already.

However, the **NORAD** truckers did not go down without a fight, it seem, since several of them died a few **yards/meters** from their vehicles, lying amid numerous shell casings. Their weapons and gear, of course, have been taken by whoever killed them. Player characters with the Tracking skill will notice that there are numerous drag trails in the killing ground, clear evidence of soldiers dragging their dead away. Moreover, whoever ambushed the convoy did a poor job of concealing their tracks, as numerous

trails of booted footprints, not to mention tire tracks, all lead from the battle area along the road to the crater, and from there to Sulfur Gulch.

Right before the heroes make their move to leave the area (either to vacate the premises entirely, or to check out the rest of the battle site), they come across a 50-year-old man who sits propped up against the undercarriage of one of the flipped over trucks. During the **firefight**, he took a round to the stomach which severed his spine, paralyzing him from the waist down. Since the battle, he has been slowly bleeding to death, despite his attempts to staunch the flow of blood. When the characters reach him, he will be semi-conscious and on the verge of death. Player characters making a successful First Aid or Paramedic skill roll will be able to relieve his pain enough so that he can speak for a few minutes.

The trucker will tell the heroes that his name is Jethro **Elkie** from Colorado Springs, and he was one of the drivers in the convoy. All he can tell the heroes about the battle is the convoy was ambushed, and that some foot soldier nailed his truck with an anti-tank missile. He got out, but the four **NORAD** Exterminators riding in the sleeper cabin died in the explosion, as did the fellow riding shotgun in the cab. **Elkie** figures there were a good 20 or 30 foot soldiers surrounding the trucks; there were helicopters and tanks involved, too, but they all took off to pursue the other **NORAD** trucks that didn't get hit in the initial attack. **Elkie** himself capped off four enemy soldiers with his **M-16** before getting hit, but by that time, just about everybody else was dead, and the fight was continuing down the road. **Elkie** saw lots of explosions on the road leading to Sulfur Gulch, including "one really big one" near the end of the whole thing, but can't offer any more details on the fighting.

If asked about what was in the trucks, **Elkie** will refuse to tell the heroes anything unless they swear on their honor to carry out his dying wish. Assuming the heroes do this, the driver says that the trucks were hauling supplies, weapons, and trade commodities (mostly bulk containers of sugar, grain and alcohol) to Sulfur Gulch as part of a diplomatic mission. The Gulch is a free town that offers help to nobody, but **NORAD** figured if they showered them with gifts, the town would join in the Great American Bug Hunt — the nationwide guerilla counteroffensive against the alien Bugs.

The important part about all this, is that in one of the trucks was a case of what **Elkie** calls "**splatterguns**," new high-tech energy weapons designed by the Eggheads back at **NORAD**. "**These** are like those phaser guns you saw in the old movies. Blast a Bug to bits with one shot, man. And they don't need ammo, neither. Just let 'em recharge, you know?" **Elkie** coughs up some blood before continuing — it's clear that his death is imminent. "My truck had three cases of splatterguns in the back. About an hour after the attack, gunners from the Gulch came out, took the guns, stripped the hell out of the trucks and capped off anybody who looked like they was moving. I played dead, which I tell ya, ain't that hard right now. Look, I been dealing with **Gulchers** for years, and those guys who came out after the attack, they ain't Gulchers. Something funny's going on with that town, I know it. Look, **NORAD** ain't gonna be eager to send any more people up here after what happened to this convoy, so you gotta **figger** out what happened, okay? I can't die with something like this hanging over me."

Principled, Scrupulous, and maybe even some Unprincipled or Aberrant characters will find it hard to turn **Elkie** down on his request. However, to sweeten the deal for those unwilling to go along with his request, Elkie adds the following. "You know those splatterguns I told you about? Okay, look... the cases they were in are rigged with about **10** pounds of **C-4** each. If you try to open them without turning off the self-destruct, then you and I are gonna be seeing each other sooner rather than later, know what I mean? If you promise to get to the bottom of this ambush, you can have the codes. What do you say?"

Good, Unprincipled, and Aberrant characters, again, can probably be trusted to hold to their word, whereas Anarchist and other evil characters probably would be happy to lie to Elkie in order to get the codes. Elkie has an uncommonly good sense of character, and he can tell when he is being lied to. To those characters who honestly pledge to bring justice to those who hit the convoy, Elkie will provide the codes to the Bug Zapper cases. To those simply lying to him to get the cases but do nothing else, Elkie will *give false* codes that will not unlock the cases, but will cause their self-destruct features to activate instead! Hey, Elkie is no dummy. (Note: Characters with the Demolitions Disposal skill can try to bypass the self-destruct mechanism, but they only get one chance at it — a failed roll means an accidental detonation.)

After that, Elkie will become delirious and unable to answer any other questions. He will probably linger for another hour or two unless one of the characters finishes him off, a notion which at this point, most heroes will find themselves entertaining.

Further down the roadway, the characters will find the remains of the other four trucks. It looks like one took a tank cannon shot right on the cab, which is almost entirely destroyed, but left the trailer unscathed. Another one of the trucks lies in fragments, apparently peppered by rockets from above, as if from an armed helicopter. The third truck lies in its side, having flipped over when its tires were blown out by either a grenade or some other small explosive. The cab of the truck is intensely bullet-riddled. The fourth and last truck lies at the bottom of a large crater, the kind normally left by a **500 lb** (227 kg) aerial bomb. Anybody with the Weapons Systems skill will know, however, that the kinds of jets needed to drop munitions of that strength are very much few and far between, so it is more likely that Sulfur Gulch has had this bomb (and perhaps others like it) buried along the roadway leading into town that could be detonated remotely to repel invaders. The last truck in the NATO convoy was not blown to bits by the bomb; it appears that the bomb went off and then the truck went into the crater. The driver is still lying halfway out the windshield, on the hood of the truck. The cab and parts of the trailer were machine-gunned for good measure before the entire vehicle was picked clean.

On the other side of the crater, the highway continues for another few miles, feeding right into the main gate of the bunker town of Sulfur Gulch. If the heroes continue on to the town, they will be contacted by radio that their presence has been detected and that for the time being, the town is accepting no visitors. If the characters come any closer, they will be destroyed! If the heroes do not acknowledge the transmission or simply do not have their radios on, they will be met by a very well armed "courtesy patrol" consisting of four armed **Hummers**, two armed with a 7.62 machinegun, one armed with a Mark-19 automatic grenade launcher, and the last one armed with a TOW anti-tank missile launcher. Each Hummer carries four militiamen from the

town, all of whom are armed with a variety of small arms, ranging from automatic shotguns to assault rifles with barrel-mounted grenade launchers. The lead driver will use his vehicle's loudspeaker to wave off the heroes one final time. If the heroes attack or ignore the order, they will be fired upon. The militiamen will try to shoot to wound, or merely to scare the heroes into surrendering without a fight. But if they have to kill the heroes, they will do so without a second thought. After all, these guys just blitzed a NORAD convoy. Capping off a few drifters won't cause them to lose any sleep.

If the heroes are killed, then chalk this up as one of the shorter adventures in your G.M.-ing career and hope that the movie rental place down the street is still open so you'll have something to occupy your evening. If the heroes are captured, then refer to the setting information detailing Sulfur, cross-reference it with what **you'll** soon know about the other parties interested in capturing the stolen NORAD Bug Zappers, and take it from there. If the heroes do the sensible thing and turn away from the town, they keep both their lives and their freedom, but are faced with a heavily fortified city that they are charged with infiltrating. Naturally, the players should determine their own course of action, so if they feel they are not up to the task of raiding Sulfur Gulch, then let them — no need to railroad the players into what they perceive as a suicide mission, after all. Simply allow them to walk away from this particular adventure, but feel free to keep this unresolved situation as an element in future adventures. Will good and honorable characters be able to live with themselves, having broken their promise to Elkie? Will selfish characters be able to rid their minds of the incredible treasure waiting to be won in Sulfur Gulch? Will evil characters stop thinking of the power they would command if only they could get their hands on those NORAD Bug Zappers? In most cases, it shouldn't be hard for players to find the motivation to continue their quest to take back what the militiamen of Sulfur Gulch stole in the first place. The trick is... how?

There are three basic ways for the heroes to do it. The first is to infiltrate the town on their own, using a variety of methods. This will not be easy, since the town walls are studded with watchtowers where armed guards scan the surrounding area through the telescopic sights of their rifles. (At nighttime, the guards use nightvision gear.) So, any approach to the town walls will have to be quick and stealthy, lest one of the guards spots the party and raises a general alarm. The players could increase their odds of success by sniping one or two of the guards as they approach, but this will make their detection inevitable. The only question will be: Can the characters sneak into the city, locate the Bug Zappers, steal them, and escape before the guards lock the settlement down?

The second is to recognize that chances are, other parties will be interested in hitting the Gulch for those Bug Zappers. If the heroes let some other group do their dirty work, perhaps they can slip in during the confusion, get the guns, and get out without doing much of anything except being stealthy. Of course when the fit hits the shan and Sulfur Gulch goes on high alert, the chances are good that the heroes will get caught squarely in the crossfire.

The third way is a combination of the first two approaches: planning on raiding the Gulch themselves, but getting some help in doing it. This is where the other interested parties in this drama take the stage.

Of course, these are not the only ways the heroes can go about this adventure, and if they come up with an alternate plan, then by all means, accommodate them! I have always felt that the mark of a good G.M. is not one who forces the players to adhere to a **pre-determined** storyline, but rather can bend and flex to provide adequate challenges and drama to whatever plan or direction the players themselves feel like following. Taking a kind of **freeform** approach to being a Game Master, I feel, makes for more natural and enjoyable role-playing. This adventure should be no exception. So before you push your players into following one of the three "adventure options" mentioned above, give them a chance to figure something out on their own. Better yet, leave the room for a few minutes and let the players hash out ideas without the pressure of a G.M. being present. By the time you come back, the adventure might take a wholly unexpected turn, but if you're prepared for that, the turn could definitely be one for the better.

Part Two: Friends in Low Places

Even if the heroes are not in the market for some extra help in raiding Sulfur Gulch, they still must compete with a number of other groups who are just as eager to get their hands on some brand-new Organotechnology, and are willing to do just about anything to get it! For the purposes of this scenario, there are four main contenders besides the heroes who are going after the stolen Bug Zappers: **The Parliament of Crows**, a newly formed **Splatterpunk** army that has more numbers than brains, but still is a dangerous foe; the **Ridley Ridge Regulators**, a free militia out of Billings, Montana; **Rizzo Thatcher**, an unscrupulous Freebooter with the uncanny ability to bluff his way into anywhere, rob it blind, and finagle a goodbye party for himself before leaving; and **Spider Zulu Team Bravo**, an elite squad of NORAD commandos charged with infiltrating Sulfur Gulch, retrieving the stolen Bug Zappers, apprehending the mayor of the town, and causing as much collateral damage to the place as possible.

The Parliament of Crows

This vicious band of killers is the newest Splatterpunk Army to terrorize the wildlands of Free America. Consisting of over 500 **Splatterpunks**, the Parliament of Crows represents a serious threat to all but the mightiest of free militias, NORAD outposts, and fortified Bunker Towns. The darkly charismatic leader of the Parliament, a mysterious villain named **Brother Wingfoot** (5th level Warlord Splatterpunk, I.Q. 15, M.E. 12, M.A. 23, P.S. 19, P.P. 18, P.E. 15, P.B. 14, Spd. 16, H.P.: 35, S.D.C.: 70, Weapons: **M-16 w/M-203** grenade launcher; 10 clips for **M-16**, 8 **M-203** grenades, 4 rifle grenades. Also has a Tec-9 SMG with 3 clips and a .45 pistol with 6 clips.). Wingfoot has dreamed of conquering the town ever since it was founded, and in part, he assembled the Parliament for just that purpose. Part of his motivation comes from pure greed — Sulfur Gulch is a rich place relative to most of the miserable squatter towns and crossroads in Free America. And it's surely a lot better off than most places back East, where the much higher Bug presence seriously threatens the safety of any established settlement. Thus, whoever commands this town commands great power, and all of the privileges that come with it. The Gulch is known to have some kind of fuel refinery on the premises, as well as other great treasures.

But, **Wingfoot's** biggest reason for wanting to take on the Gulch is ego. Wingfoot considers himself the greatest leader in the region, but unless he defeats an opponent worthy of his power, how can he be sure if he indeed is the greatest Warlord alive? For that reason, Wingfoot has decided that Sulfur Gulch must fall, its people to squirm under his boot.

For months, Brother Wingfoot has been recruiting Splatterpunk crews into his rapidly growing army, all in preparation for a massed assault on the town. When Wingfoot's scouts were massacred by the Gulch's crack perimeter defenses, most of the Parliament began to wonder if bum rushing a fortress was such a good idea after all. Sure, these bandits were well armed and had lots of combat experience, but they drew the line at a suicide charge against fortified walls, machinegun bunkers and who knew what **else!**

Wingfoot needed a plan, and he needed one fast, if he was going to salvage his dreams of conquest. Thankfully, his radio men caught the frantic broadcast from the NORAD Convoy as it got hit. Wingfoot seized the opportunity and fired up his troops with talk of capturing the NORAD Bug Zappers and using them to secure their destiny. Armed with the NORAD energy weapons, there would be virtually no bunker town in Free America able to resist the Parliament's demands. When Wingfoot's Splatterpunks heard this, they put aside their fears and were again ready to follow their leader into the jaws of Hell. Wingfoot knows that his latest pep talk will only work for a short period of time, and he must capture Sulfur Gulch before his troops lose heart again.

Wingfoot is a dangerous and cruel man, but he is not without honor and he will be willing to cut a deal with adventurers who can prove their worth and superiority to him. If the heroes can do that, then he will deal with them as equals. If the heroes can not impress Wingfoot, he will simply order them captured and shanghaied to fight in his bandit army.

The Parliament of Crows tool around in a variety of combat vehicles, including: eight **Gun Buggies**, six **Hummers**, and Big Bad **Mama**, a huge industrial truck converted into a kind of tank. For information on these vehicles, refer to the New **Core Material** section at the end of this adventure.

But the Parliament's real strength is its sheer numbers. Wingfoot commands some 500 foot soldiers, all of whom are willing to lay down their (albeit meaningless) lives by his command. The vast majority of these guys are 1st or 2nd level Vulture Splatterpunks with around fifty 3rd or 4th level "officers." Individual arms and gear varies widely, as most of these guys live off what they scrounge and steal from others. All possess some kind of firearm, usually a shotgun, rifle, or sub-machinegun. A few of them might have a grenade launcher or a rocket launcher, but chances are, they also have precious little ammo for it. Parliament Splatterpunks generally don't wear body armor, largely because they haven't found anyplace to get some.

The parliament is based out of an old underground Atlas **IBCM** launch facility that a bunch of **Survivalists** (led by the moderately well-known Ziggy Sputnik) bought before The Meltdown, cleaned up, and converted into a massive and well-defended living space. Through trickery and some fierce fighting, the Parliament overran the place and took it over (Exactly what happened to poor Ziggy is unknown; some think he's trying to figure out a way to take his old home back, while others insist he and his **compadres** got captured by a Zombie Patrol and were sent to the St. Louis Bugtown for Silkworm implantation). The **facil-**



ity's 10-story missile silo provides more than enough room to bunker all of the Parliament's foot soldiers and store their gear. The launch center, a smallish two story structure attached to the silo by a long passageway, is where Wingfoot and his officers live. On the surface are a few Quonset huts, a few other small buildings, guard posts, the fuel depot, and the motor pool (basically a large piece of flattened landscape where everybody parks their ride).

The Ridley Ridge Regulators

This is one of the numerous Free Militias operating in **Bunkerville**, Four Corners and Flatland. While hardly as famous as the Wyoming Free Irregulars, the Ridley Ridge Regulators have earned a decent reputation as Bug-busters in their own right. They are responsible for the Raid of Kansas City back in 2007, and the infamous U.S.I Ambush in 2008. The Regulators would be a bigger and more powerful outfit if they weren't so hell-bent on proving to the world that they are the most dedicated Bughunters on the planet. What this means is when the group isn't fighting Bugs or Zombie patrols, they are busy ambushing other militias, which they see as competition. The Regulators have already taken out two smaller militias in the area, and they have tangled once with the Wyoming Free Irregulars, although the Irregulars clearly were the victors of that particular skirmish. The end result of all this roughnecking is that no self-respecting militia or adventuring group will even try to work or trade with these yahoos, and NORAD won't touch them with a 10 foot pole.

The Triple R, as it likes to call itself, consists of about 200 Militiamen **Survivalists** and Vulture **Splatterpunks**, with the odd

Freebooter, Peacekeeper and AWOL Exterminator thrown in. On average, these militiamen are 2nd or 3rd level, armed with a motley collection of rifles, shotguns and a smattering of sub-machineguns and assault rifles. They have very few heavy weapons of any kind. Their leader, **Hamish** Starling, is a 7th level Militiaman Survivalist (I.Q.: 10, M.E. 13, M.A. 13, P.S. 16, P.P. 13, P.E. 22, P.B. 10, Spd. 14, H.P.: 55, S.D.C.: 50, Weapons: McMillan M87R Rifle, 12 Gauge Shotgun, Anaconda Revolver) who has somehow picked up all of the Energy Weapon W.P.s, which explains why he is so interested in hitting Sulfur Gulch. Armed with NORAD Bug Zappers, The Triple R will be much stronger than most of its perceived "competitors," not to mention superbly equipped to bring some major pain down on those energy-sucking Bugs.

The Triple R rides on horseback exclusively, since they feel that motor vehicles are too difficult to maintain, too easily detected, and really are not worthy of true guerilla warriors. Most of the horses these fighters use were captured from the wild (since The Meltdown, large herds of wild horses have sprung up over much of Free America), and are in excellent shape. If the Triple R weren't so disliked by their fellow humans, they could probably prosper very, very well by trading some of their horses for additional weaponry and equipment.

The Regulators are divided into ten 20-man units, each of which has a unit commander who reports directly to Hamish Starling. The Regulators often spread out over a huge distance when on the move, and keep in constant secure-channel radio contact. They are experts at **strike-and-fade** combat, and are some of the best users of camouflage in Free America. It is said that most of the convoys that disappear in Flatland and Dakota are

probably the victims of a well-laid Triple R ambush, a fact not lost on Hamish Starling. Besides wanting to snake those NORAD Bug Zappers for himself, he figures that once news of the NORAD ambush gets out, people in the neighboring regions will blame his crew for it anyway, so before he embarks on a life of true fugitive status (NORAD has lots of friends all over), he might as well try to upgrade his hardware.



Rizzo Thatcher, Man of Opportunity

Rizzo, a 10th level Freebooter (I.Q. 21, M.E. 15, M.A. 20, P.S. 12, P.P. 14, P.E. 15, P.B. 7, Spd. 20, H.P.:55, S.D.C.: 40, Weapons: 9mm Uzi, .45 Pistol), is perhaps the sneakiest person in Free America. Rizzo spent some time in a Bugtown a few years back, but he got out before the Bugs could implant an Silkworm in him and turn him into a Bug Zombie. Ever since, he has come to rely solely on himself in all things, and has no loyalty to any one or any cause other than his own self-improvement.

Rizzo travels the land in an old 16 foot (4.9 m) truck that he keeps loaded with various trade commodities, weapons and ammo, spare parts and junk. His prize bit of inventory is a beat-en-up Soviet-era 12.7mm heavy machinegun and 1,000 rounds, although the ammo is a bit untrustworthy at this point, and has a 15% chance of jamming or misfiring (50-50 chance if a mishap occurs) whenever firing anything longer than a short burst.

This cagey fellow was on his way to Sulfur Gulch on a trade run when he heard the NORAD convoy's radio broadcast. Rizzo has seen this kind of thing before and he knows the score: NORAD was trying to buy off Sulfur Gulch as an ally and Sulfur Gulch decided they'd simply take what NORAD was giving and give them a few wrecked trucks in return. From a Sulfur Gulch

point of view, that's what they call a "fair trade." Needless to say, Rizzo likes the way Sulfur Gulch does business, but he also knows the same kind of thing can happen to him, so he is always cautious whenever he approaches the town.

The way Rizzo sees it, somebody *must* have heard the NORAD radio transmission, which means that any day now, a bunch of folks are going to come to the Gulch looking to cash in on some *primo* salvage. Rizzo himself wouldn't mind scoring that haul, but he is just one person, and not one who's very fond of combat. He would much rather hook up with another group and provide them with his intimate knowledge of the town and its defenses for a cut of the booty. Rizzo will initially try for a 50% share, but he could probably be talked down to 25% by characters able to withstand his Fast Talking ability. A Freebooter character could try to Fast Talk Rizzo, too. If it works, Rizzo might go as low as 10%, but that's rock bottom. Of course, the danger in low-balling him too badly is that he is a pure mercenary, and he will gladly sell out to anyone offering to pay him more.

Rizzo has two pieces of valuable information to share with whoever hires him. The first is that there is a secret underground passageway leading from the open badlands straight into the heart of Sulfur Gulch! The passage is part of the town's antiquated sewer system. Those willing to take their chances crawling through the pipes (the town periodically flushes them out with a few thousand gallons of water) can sneak right up to the town square. An iron grate covers the opening to the sewer tunnel; how the players cut through this (and quietly enough so they don't draw the entire town on their heads) is up to both the players and the G.M.

The second hot tip Rizzo's got is that he knows of a very large and very powerful Zombie patrol in the area. These alien infiltrators are sweeping the area for signs of settlements that could be taken over and turned into Bugtowns. It could be possible that the Patrol heard the radio broadcast, too, and will come to investigate. Sulfur Gulch would be a great target for the Bugs — it's well defended, has lots of people living in it, and would make for a conveniently located strike point from which to launch attacks on NORAD positions in Four Corners and elsewhere. However the heroes use this information is up to them, but Rizzo suggests they either use it to get the other competing treasure-seekers to somehow cooperate on this venture, or simply to use it as an incentive to get in and out of the Gulch fast enough that the heroes can hightail it out of here before the Zombies show up. Because if there's one thing that everybody in Free America knows for sure, it's that where Zombies tread, Bugs are sure to follow.

Spider Zulu Team Bravo

NORAD is none too pleased with Sulfur Gulch, for obvious reasons. The folks in Colorado Springs made a treaty in good faith with the Gulch in which they would arm the town with a supply of Organitech Bug Zappers in return for the town's support and joint operation in future Bughunting activity. Somewhere along the line, the Gulch decided to double-cross NORAD, figuring that they didn't have the guts to do anything about it. Big, big, big mistake.

NORAD is sending a team of Splicers, genetically augmented Bug-killing commandos, to infiltrate Sulfur Gulch, get the guns back and mess up the town as badly as possible. For this task,

they have selected Spider Zulu Bravo Diego, a newly formed team of 12 2nd and 3rd level NORAD Splicers led by the 6th level Splicer veteran Selene Delacruz (I.Q. 14, M.E. 20, **M.A.** 16, P.S. 19, P.P. 20, P.E. 19, P.B. 4, Spd. 30, H.P.: 56, S.D.C.: 211, A.R.: 15, Powers: Tough Exoskeleton, Healing Factor, Leaping Ability. Weapons: **M-16 w/M-203** Grenade Launcher, 2 LAWs). Commander Delacruz lived in Sulfur Gulch for a while back when it was a beacon of hope and stability in a shattered and crazy world. Once it became no better than a fortress of Warlords, she left and joined NORAD as an Exterminator, and then later underwent the Splicer process, about a year ago.

Delacruz has been authorized to use any means necessary to accomplish her mission objectives, which means that if she encounters the player characters and they endear themselves to her (and more importantly, if they can help her get into Sulfur Gulch), then she will gladly join forces with them. As a reward for any help the heroes offer her team, Delacruz will offer them a cut of the recovered Organitechnology, but only once it has been safely delivered to NORAD hands. That means that anybody helping the Splicers will have to hump all the way back to Colorado Springs to get paid, but considering what's at stake, it's probably worth it for most characters.

Delacruz has no use for the Parliament of Crows nor the Ridley Ridge Regulators, and if the heroes have already dealt with either group, any intelligence she can gather on them would be a nice bonus. She will be able to tolerate **Rizzo** Thatcher's company, but she will never wholly trust him, even if he were to prove his "loyalty" many times over. Delacruz is a hardened survivor, and she has seen Rizzo's type hundreds of times over. He might have valuable information to share, but it will always come at a price not worth paying.

Part Three: Welcome to Sulfur Gulch

Sulfur Gulch is a bunker town based around a **pre-Meltdown** civilian airfield that somehow was not destroyed when the world went nuts right after Y2K. In the years that followed, as the country fell into anarchy and the Bugs took over, a large band of Survivalists, a few Eggheads, some ex-Exterminators, and a handful of others banded together here, and overhauled the facilities, which consisted of a basic airstrip, a few outdoor hangars, and a absolutely huge aircraft graveyard, where the chassis of dozens of defunct aircraft lay abandoned. The settlers established a perimeter about the entire place, including the graveyard, and declared themselves a free and independent bunker town. For about a year, things went great. The Bugs seemed to have no interest in the place, since all hardlines to it had been cut long before (Or had they? Read on, dear **reader**...). And, Zombie patrols (human soldiers whose minds have been taken over by the insidious Bug Brain Grubs) also have overlooked the place more because of sheer luck than anything else. Although the Gulch lies at an old crossroads, it has never advertised itself as a trading outpost, and it has aggressively waved off all uninvited visitors, just like dozens of other tiny settlements sprinkled throughout the regions of Bunkerville, Four Corners, Dakota and **Flatland**.

Things got bad when late in 2007 somebody discovered that Sulfur Gulch harbored a major-league secret! Lying underneath the town was a massive subterranean aircraft hanger, where craft could be lifted to the surface via grand elevators. Most of the craft down there were in serious disrepair, but they provided a

vast quantity of spare parts that could be used to bring the craft in the graveyard back to operational status. There were, however, three operational craft in the secret underground hangar — two fully loaded and armed **A-10** Thunderbolt II tank-killing **warplanes** as well as a single V-22 **Osprey** tilt-rotor aircraft. These new planes, in addition to the few Bell Huey and Cobra helicopter gunships and the mighty **HC-130** Spectre Gunship the locals had refurbished on the surface gave Sulfur Gulch a very impressive air force. So impressive, in fact, that it gained the notice of NORAD, to the south, who began making diplomatic overtures to the bunker town in the hopes of securing it as an ally, both for the use of its planes, and to use their airstrip as a staging and relay point for airborne NORAD missions into Bugged territory.

It was at this time that **Zelda Grotsky**, Sulfur Gulch's Town Marshal (and ex-UPS dispatcher) decided that NORAD could not be trusted, and ordered for the town's air force to launch the deadly sneak attack on the NORAD convoy sent to ply the town with Organitechnology gifts. It was this attack that the players heard on the radio at the start of the adventure. Since then, the town has scored a great deal of booty in terms of spare supplies, parts, weapons, and fuel, but they all know that they are living on borrowed time. Sooner or later, NORAD will come looking for its lost Bug Zappers, and when they do, Sulfur Gulch will be in for the fight of its life. Of course, it might be in for that before NORAD shows up, if local Zombie patrols discover the town and what's inside of it...

A faction exists within the Gulch who does not approve of Zelda's slide into despotism, and awaits some chance to oppose her. The problem is, there are only about 20 people willing to stand up to her (5 **Flyboys**, 12 Survivalists, 2 Eggheads and a Sawbones), and they openly fear Zelda's crew of 10 fanatically loyal bodyguards, who will gladly dice up anybody who threatens their beloved leader. If the heroes could contact these disaffected Gulchers, they could have a valuable resource on the inside. Surely, these rebels without a cause know where the stolen Organitechnology weapons are being stored (in the cinder block bunker, described below), and would be willing to help the heroes obtain it if they help overthrow Zelda in return. Or, maybe these guys would be willing to help the heroes out if only they would guarantee them safe passage out of the city and an escort to friendly territory.

The town itself consists largely of a huge airplane graveyard with a few buildings on the eastern end of it: three airplane hangars, a primitive control tower, four Quonset huts (where the locals live and work), and a cinder block bunker where emergency supplies and weapons are kept, as well as three 500 lb(227 kg) seamless metal crates that have no locks, no hinges, but have emblazoned on the front, "DO NOT OPEN — EXTREMELY DANGEROUS CONTENTS INSIDE! BY ORDER OF THE GIDEON DIRECTIVE." Nobody in Sulfur Gulch knows what these things are or how they got into the bunker, but really, who has the courage to try prying one open?

Sulfur Gulch is home to roughly 75 Survivalists, 20 Flyboys (a new O.C.C. detailed at the end of this adventure) and about 25 other assorted O.C.C.s (largely Grease Monkeys, Sawbones, and Wackos). There are precious few "civilians" here — almost everybody is a hard-bitten survivor who could be playing an important role in the Great American Bug Hunt if they were not too busy double-crossing NORAD and contemplating using their

formidable air power to bully other settlements into becoming Sulfur Gulch's subjects.

The town is cordoned off by a chain link fence topped by baled razor wire. Within the compound city, atop the flight tower, is a guardpost where sentries scan the horizon through their high-power binoculars and telescopic weapon sights. In the darkness, they use nightvision gear to keep a sharp eye for any intruders who might use darkness as their cover. The sentries are armed with a 90mm **recoilless** rifle and each one has an **M-16**.

The road leading into Sulfur Gulch is "mined" with three 500 lb (227 kg) aerial bombs buried under the earth next to the road and rigged with a remote control detonator. These bombs are used to trap incoming ground vehicles, like what happened with the final truck of the NORAD convoy at the beginning of the adventure.

Note: The high-powered aircraft of Sulfur Gulch are very much an anomaly in the world of **Systems Failure™** and not every bunker town will have such an impressive arsenal at its disposal. The reasons for this are varied; most high-

tech aircraft were destroyed during the chaos of The Meltdown. Those that weren't were taken out by the Bugs when they invaded. Those few remaining still generally are in poor shape and unworthy to fly. As such, they often are stripped for parts and ordnance, usually to modify aircraft that are cheaper and easier to maintain, such as autogyros, ultralights, single engine airplanes and light helicopters.

Part Four: Bug Problems

Eventually, the heroes and whatever friends they have made will have a go at raiding Sulfur Gulch and going for the NORAD stash. Depending on the flavor of the campaign and the inclination of the G.M., one could have additional factions of treasure seekers hit the Gulch at one time, turning the place into a hotbed of crossfire and competing salvage crews. Indeed, if Sulfur Gulch were to host an all-out battle between the Ridley Ridge Regulators and the Parliament of Crows, all hell would break loose. Even if the heroes were not directly involved, just sneaking in and out of the town without getting caught up in the ruckus will be nearly impossible.

Something else to consider is that in all the excitement, **Zelda** Grotsky and her cronies are sure to try to open one of the cases of Bug Zappers. Now, Zelda has had her Eggheads working non-stop at cracking the case codes (hooked up to those C4 bombs, **remember?**), but it will be up to the G.M.'s discretion as to whether or not Zelda & Co. blow themselves up trying to trade up their **firepower**.

In addition, the Sulfur Gulch aviators will probably scramble if the town is attacked outright. The Thunderbolts and Osprey have never been used in combat since their advanced avionics make them a prime target for Bug attack. All three craft have been reserved for use only during dire emergencies, but given the circumstances, a full-fledged attack on the town certainly counts. If necessary, the entire Sulfur Gulch air force will lift off, including the Thunderbolts, the Osprey, the Spectre, two armed Cobra helicopters, and three armed Huey helicopters. On the ground,



Sulfur Gulch has only four armed Hummers to defend itself with, as well as three **unarmored SUVs**, two jeeps, and a beaten up Yugo subcompact (it's a miracle the thing still runs) used mostly for scouting.

If and when Sulfur Gulch turns into a war zone, during the chaos, a small Zombie Patrol will approach the facility and attempt to sneak in and get into the underground hanger, which they somehow have learned about. Their mission is to put an old water heater back on line, for little do the Gulchers know that the water heaters of the hangar had dedicated phone lines attached to them, so that whenever the oil tanks got low, they would automatically place a service call to their local service station, which would send out a maintenance man to give the heaters a refill. The **hardlines** have never been cut, largely because nobody ever knew they were there. But, as long as the heaters were non-operational, the hardlines themselves were of no use to the Bugs. Once the Zombies get the heaters up and running, a host of alien Bugs will pour through. At first, a single Swarm will arrive within seconds of the hardline's re-activation. The Swarm will consist of 10 groups of 10 Tier 1 Army Ants, each led by a single Tier 2 Assassin Bug, Bombardier Beetle or Killer Bee. The entire Swarm will be controlled by a single Tier 3 Lightning Bug. As the Swarm moves to the surface to attack, the Zombie Patrol will radio back to its own unit, a force of 144 ground troops, 6 LAV-25s and 3 M1A1 main Battle Tanks to move in and support the Bugs once they have begun assaulting Sulfur Gulch from the inside. After the Swarm initially attacks, another new Swarm will come through the hardline every five minute for half an hour, allowing for a total Bug force of seven Swarms to attack the Gulch. The only way to prevent the full complement of Bugs from arriving here is for some heroes to go down into the Bug-infested hangar and cut the hardline somehow. Taking out the hot water heaters is possible, but they have 100 S.D.C., and most characters will probably not think to consider them first (**Brainstorming** Eggheads will make the connection almost immediately, however).

As the **Bug/Zombie** onslaught gets underway, the humans fighting on the surface have two options. They can either immediately forget their differences and fight united against the alien menace, or they can all choose to cut and run. Whether they make the decision for fight or flight is up to the G.M. If you want to run a mass combat scenario, then go with the fight. There's nothing quite so cool as humans pulling together to stomp the multi-colored guts out of some much-deserving Bugs, now is there? Of course, if you'd rather have the campaign focus on your heroes getting the hell out of Sulfur Gulch in one piece, then perhaps having everyone flee the party-crashing Bug Swarms is the way to go. Or, if you like your adventures on "rock and roll" setting, have it both ways — all the humans unite to blast the bugs to Kingdom Come, as well as their host of Zombie soldier-slaves, but ultimately the Swarm reinforcements will probably force a strategic withdrawal, at which point it's everybody for themselves. Better hope you can hop a ride on one of them airplanes or hijack a ground vehicle, because this ain't no place to be stuck hoofing it.

Part Five: Aftermath

What befalls the heroes after the Battle of Sulfur Gulch can be one of a variety of possible scenarios. If the heroes gutted it out, cut the hardline, and gave the Bugs and Zombies free tickets to the Great American Bullet Festival, then the heroes might very well find themselves inheritors of a smashed-up bunker town. This goes double if **Zelda** Grotzky and her cronies were killed during the action. Although the Gulch would require serious reconstruction, it might be worth it, especially if the heroes wouldn't mind establishing diplomatic connections of their own with **NORAD**. Of course, the players would have to earn the respect of the Gulchers, but if they distinguished themselves in the battle, then respect should not be a problem.

If the characters hightailed it from the Gulch with the three cases of Bug Zappers in tow before the big battle occurs (a distinct possibility, and one for which the players should be rewarded bonus experience points), then they should be rewarded once the guns are returned to **NORAD** — one or two weapons per player should suffice. The cases each held Bug Zappers of a single type. The first case held 24 Z10 "**Eastwood**" Energy Pistols, the second case held 18 Z23 "**Ventura**" Energy Carbine/SMGs, and the third case held 12 Z41 "**Stallone**" Energy Rifles.

Of course, it is also possible that the heroes made off with the guns but did not return them to **NORAD**. If that is the case (and if they were able to get **Elkie** to give them the legitimate codes for the cases, or were able to defuse the cases' self-destruct mechanisms), then they have a massive treasure trove on their hands. The question now is, what do they do with it? Selling or bartering away this kind of special hardware will generate lots of talk, the kind that will reach **NORAD** ears before too long, and prompt a nasty visit from Selene Delacruz and her team of pay-back commandos, at the very least.

New Core Material

Flyboy O.C.C.

With **Splatterpunks** and Zombie patrols controlling the roads and who knows what else controlling the unpaved badlands, the air is the best way to get from Point A to Point B. That is, if Bug-controlled fighters or choppers don't pick you from the sky, or some bunker lord with a SAM decides he doesn't like you taking up his airspace. Therefore to fly the unfriendly skies of Systems Failure™, a new breed of aviators has risen to the challenge — the **Flyboys**.

These aeronautical savants can fly just about anything that is meant to lift off from the ground. They feel at home when at the controls of some kind of aircraft, be it a balloon or a B-52. Some, in fact, claim to get "**landsick**" after staying on the ground for too long. And that's just the mildest of eccentricities these hard-boiled aviators exhibit. Chock full of weird superstitions and personality quirks, Flyboys aren't quite as detached from reality as your average Wacko, but they are getting there.

There are three basic types of Flyboy: **Rotorheads**, **Propellerheads**, and **Wingnuts**. **Rotorheads** are Flyboys who specialize in flying rotorcraft. This means helicopters and gyro-

copters. **Propellerheads** specialize in fixed-wing craft, usually propeller driven craft, since jet airplanes rely on electronics and are all too easily taken out by Bugs. In general, **Flyboys** are very monogamous with the type of craft they fly. Rotorheads swear helicopters are the best and won't fly airplanes, and vice versa for Propellerheads. The only case where the two overlap is with hybrid aircraft, like the unusual V-22 Osprey, a rotating-wing aircraft that takes off and lands like a helicopter but flies like an airplane. **Wingnuts** are a subset of both Rotorheads and Propellerheads; basically they are aviators whose need for speed has driven him a little nutty. The life on the edge, taking unnecessary risks, defying death, and generally baffling all those who know them with their crazy fearlessness.

Whether a Rotorhead, **Propellerhead**, or Wingnut, all Flyboys fall into one of two further categories: they are either **Roamers** or they are **Grounded**. Roaming Flyboys travel from spot to spot looking to make some money either as an airborne mercenary (what bunker town wouldn't pay you a few pounds of gold to drop a bomb on the **Splatterpunks** who have been bothering them?) or running aerial freight services. NORAD has also been known to contract Flyboys out from time to time to conduct aerial recon over Bugtowns and other enemy territory. Roaming Flyboys have the freedom to go wherever they want and follow whatever destiny they choose, but keeping their craft fueled and able to fly is costly and requires specialized resources. Thus, most Roamers don't survive unless they have built up a reputation so wherever they go, people will be just dying to throw them good-paying work.

The best way to get a reputation is to pull a stint as a **Grounded Flyboy**, one who is a flier for a particular employer, be it a bunker town, a mercenary company, a free militia, NORAD, what have you. Grounded Flyboys typically pull down a monthly salary of **\$1D4X100** in precious metals or trade commodities, plus whatever fuel, parts and services their aircraft need. The downside is they have to follow orders, usually to take on incoming bogies.

The real danger to Flyboys is other aircraft. It's well known that what is left of the old U.S. Air Force has been taken over by the Bugs, who use the craft to conduct long-range patrols and reconnaissance. Any Flyboy found in the air by Bugged aircraft had better know how to run, dogfight, or both if he wants to survive. Given how vulnerable modern **avionics** are to Bug control, many Flyboys either fly older craft, like manually controlled bi- and monoplanes, or have retrofitted their high-tech aircraft with as much analog hardware as possible.

The skies of Free America are largely quiet these days, as most Flyboys don't go up without a good reason (fuel is too hard to come by for joy rides), but more and more Flyboys are taking to the air, which could be a most welcome addition to the Great American Bug Hunt.

Also Known As: Top Gun, Yeager Meister, Sky Pirate.

Attribute Requirements: P.P. 10, M.E. 12

O.C.C. Abilities and Bonuses: Nerves of Steel. Flyboys are famous for being cool as a cucumber, even under the worst of conditions. They have to be, or else they would never survive for very long. For most, this is a blend of training, experience, and just a rock-steady disposition to which freaking out is not natural behavior. As a result, Flyboys all receive a +7 bonus to save vs Horror Factor, +4 to initiative (they don't hesitate during danger, they just act), and +1 melee attack per round. One with the Gun. Flyboys also are deadeyes with any heavy or



vehicle-mounted weaponry, gaining a +3 to strike under any conditions. In part, this is what makes them so deadly behind the flying stick. Give a **Flyboy** an open shot, and he'll drop a basketball down a chimney from a thousand feet up.

O.C.C. Skills: Pilot: Flyboy Program (+25%) (SPECIAL), Pilot Related Program (+25%) and one other Skill Program of choice.

Note: The Pilot Flyboy Program contains the following skills: Pilot Airplane, Pilot Helicopter, Pilot Jet aircraft, Pilot Jet Fighter, and Parachuting.

O.C.C. Related Skills:

Communications: Any (+5%)

Domestic: None

Electrical: Basic Electronics only.

Espionage: Wilderness Survival only.

Mechanical: Any except Organitechnology Mechanics.

Medical: First Aid only.

Military: Any (+20%)

Physical: Any except Acrobatics and Gymnastics.

Pilot, Basic: Any (+10%)

Pilot, Advanced: Any (+10%)

Pilot Related: Any (+10)

Rogue: Card Sharp, Concealment, Palming, Pick Locks, Seduction and Streetwise only.

Science: Mathematics: Basic and Mathematics: Advanced only.

Technical: Any

Wilderness: Any

W.P.: Any

Secondary Skills: None initially. Character may select one Secondary Skill at levels 3, 6, 9, 12 and 15.

Standard Equipment: One pistol or **sub-machinegun** as a **sidearm** plus 50 rounds of ammo. A flight suit and flak jacket (A.R. 10, S.D.C. 50), and one aircraft of choice (glider, ultralight, helicopter, single engine airplane, or double engine airplane; no jet aircraft). The character's vehicle starts off as a regular model (no modifications unless there is a Grease Monkey in the party) and only a single heavy machinegun with 200 rounds mounted on it. The Flyboy begins with a single tank of fuel, so he or she had better know where their next fill up is coming from, because there ain't no gas stations out in the Badlands.

Money: \$1D6X100 in precious metal. Roaming **Flyboys** usually don't have the room to haul trade commodities with them, and Grounded Flyboys spend their money like water, so they have virtually nothing saved up.

The Upside: You've got a cool ride, and special skills that everyone else envies. When you're in your element, flying your aircraft, you're hard to beat. Plus, you've got bragging rights nobody else can touch. Sure, Exterminators and Splicers think they're bad, but you just can't make a bigger statement than throwing a dozen rockets on your target, strafing it with cannon fire, or simply dropping a big-ass bomb on it.

The Downside: Maintaining your aircraft can be really tough in a world governed by chronic shortages of fuel and spare parts. And, as you know all too well, most of the pre-Y2K Air Force has been captured and taken over by the Bugs. A run-in with a Bugged Apache or F-16 could ground you permanently.

Note: Naturally, the **Flyboy's** time to shine is while hitting ground targets or better yet, while **dogfighting** enemy aircraft.

Unfortunately space restrictions prevent us from putting in detailed dogfighting rules here, but never fear, there are dogfighting rules to be had in other Palladium books. And, since the systems are all pretty much compatible, you should be able to adopt one of these rule sets to your **Systems Failure™** campaign with minimal difficulty. The best place to go is pages 86-90 of the **Heroes Unlimited™, 2nd Edition rulebook**, which details air-to-air combat nicely. Failing that, the **TMNT Guide to the Universe** also features dogfighting rules. You also might want to check out "The Right Stuff," an excellent article by Edward J. Sauerland appearing in **Rifter #5** that offers notes and optional rules for dogfighting. It also presents the Barnstormer, a Rifts O.C.C. that can be easily imported into **Systems Failure™**, since it is a kindred spirit to the Flyboy.

New Vehicles

AC-130H Spectre

The Spectre gunship is a modified C-130 turboprop cargo plane equipped with a staggering array of side-mounted weaponry designed to pound the daylight out of any ground target the aircraft is circling around. For close to 30 years before The Meltdown, the Spectre was used with great success to provide ground troops with much-needed air support during insertion and extraction. Now, there are few Spectres left, and those that do exist often lie **moldering** in some deserted airfield, deserted by the air crews who no longer had the means to service them, and forgotten by those would have salvaged the craft.

Those who do have working Spectres have a mighty weapon at their disposal. A single Spectre could, if unopposed, batter an entire town into submission, as well as wreak considerable damage to a larger settlement. Spectre gunners have been known to place their weapons fire in precise locations during urban operations without causing any collateral damage, further proving the extreme usefulness of this heavy-duty combat bird.

That said, Spectres are extraordinarily maintenance-heavy in the **Systems Failure™** world. Not only do they need huge amounts of fuel, but simply keeping their ammunition stores filled is no small task.

Length: 97 feet, 9 inches (29.8 m).

Maximum Takeoff Weight: 155,000 lbs (69,750 kg).

Cruising Speed: 300 mph (480 km).

Range: 1,500 miles (2,400 km).

A.R.: 10. Deflects any small arms fire under a medium machinegun.

S.D.C. by Location:

Main Body: 1,000

Wings (2): 200 each

Tail (2): 175 each

Engines (4): 200 each

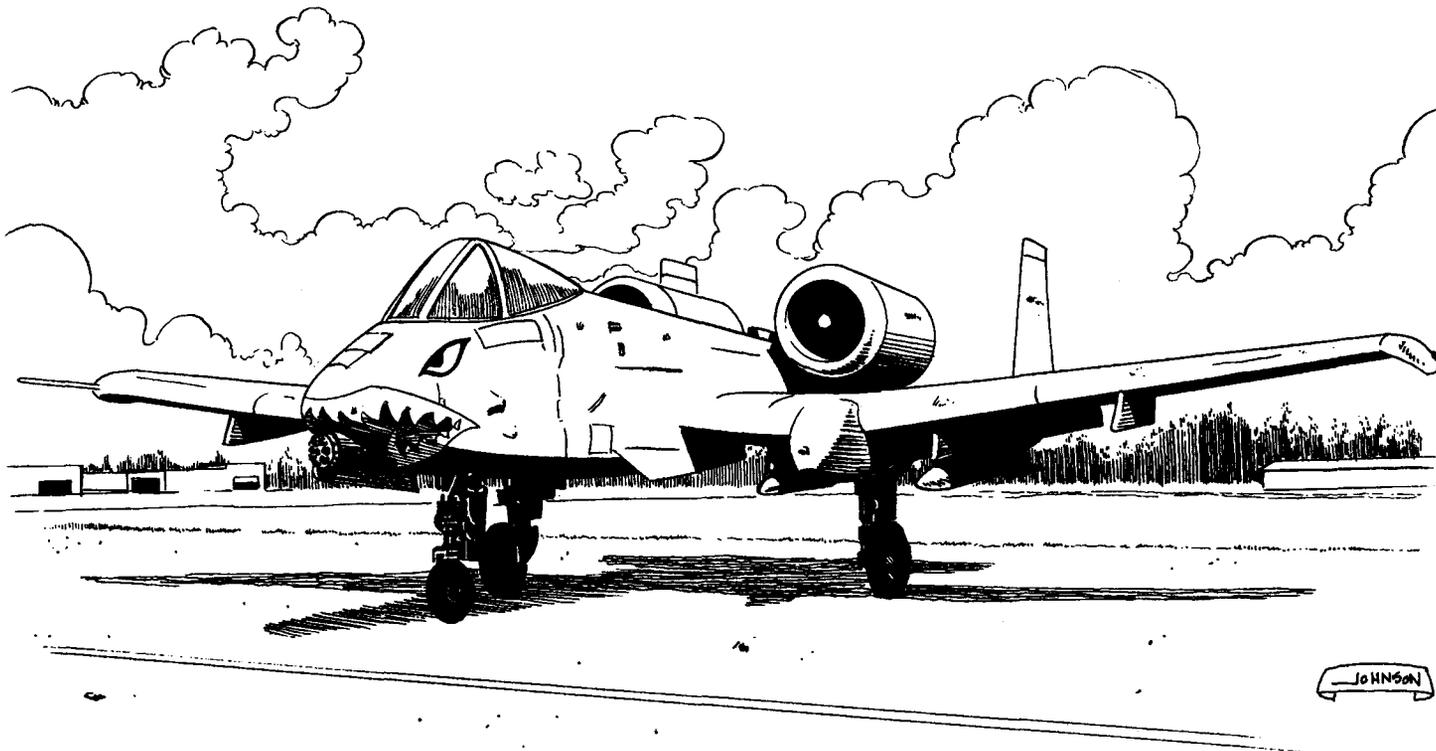
Bonuses: +2 to strike.

Armaments: Two 20mm Vulcan cannons with 3,000 rounds each (similar to a 30mm chain gun, for game purposes); one 40 mm Bofors cannon with 256 rounds (similar to a Mark 19 automatic grenade launcher for game purposes, except it is an automatic cannon, not a grenade launcher), and one 105mm howitzer with 100 rounds (similar to a 90mm recoilless rifle

for game purposes, except one howitzer shell inflicts 2D6X100 damage.

Crew: Fourteen — pilot, co-pilot, navigator, fire control officer, electronic warfare officer (an optional post in retrofitted planes), flight engineer, loadmaster, low-light TV operator, infrared detection set operator, five aerial gunners.

Cost: Fugeddaboudit.



A-10 Thunderbolt II

The Thunderbolt, also known as the “Warthog,” is a no-nonsense jet fighter designed for close air support of ground forces. It excels at shredding anything on the ground, especially tanks, with its fearsome GAU-8 Avenger **Gatling** gun, as well as other armaments. Tough, ugly and mean, the Thunderbolt spells major trouble for anybody on the ground and in its way. The Thunderbolt has been one of the easiest jets to retrofit with manual controls and Bug-proof avionics, largely because the craft already had a number of manual backup systems built in. However, there are precious few of these craft left. The Bugs captured most of the stateside inventory, so those bunker towns or militias that do have a Warthog tend to keep it hidden, to be used only when absolutely necessary.

Length: 53 feet, 4 inches (16.16 m).

Basic Weight: 51,000 lbs (22,950 kg).

Payload: 16,000 lbs/7,200 kg.

Speed: 420 mph (672 km).

Range: 800 miles (1,280 km).

A.R.: 14. Deflects any fire under 23 mm.

S.D.C. by Location:

Main Body: 650

Wings (2): 400 each

Tail (2): 300 each

Engines (2): 350 each

Note: A Thunderbolt can remain aloft with only one engine and while missing large parts of its tail **and/or** a wing. While so severely damaged, all piloting rolls are made at -25%.

Pilot Compartment Armor: A.R.: 16, S.D.C.: 400. Even if a Thunderbolt is shot down, the pilot compartment is likely to remain intact.

Bonuses: +2 to strike.

Armaments: The primary weapon is the GAU-8 Avenger **Gatling** gun, which for game purposes is the same as a 30mm chain gun, only each shot does 4D6X10, not 2D6X10. Thunderbolts also have four wing pylons **total** for accommodating extra weaponry, such as missiles, bombs, or modified weapons, such as rocket pods, additional machineguns, automatic grenade launchers (not recommended, but you've got to make do **with what you've got, right?**), and even Organitech weapons. Rumor has **it the** Air Cavalry, a well known band of airborne freedom fighters, have a few **Thunderbolts** with clusters of Organitech Bug Zappers mounted on the planes' noses and wingtips. When fire-linked, these arrays put out incredible **firepower**.

Crew: One pilot.

Cost: Where exactly where do you expect to buy one of these things, anyway?

V-22 Osprey

The Osprey is a tilt-rotor aircraft, designed much like an airplane, except **its** wings and engines can rotate upwards by 90 degrees. This allows the craft to take off and land like a helicopter, **but** in flight, the wings rotate into horizontal position and **the**

Osprey flies like a plane. The U.S. Marine Corps introduced the Osprey before The Meltdown to replace its aging fleet of Chinook medium lift helicopters. It is used mostly as a medium lift and troop transport vehicle, as well as for close ground support.

Length: 63 feet (19.2 m).

Maximum Takeoff Weight:

Vertical Takeoff and Landing (VTOL): 23.75 tons

Short Takeoff and Landing (STOL): 27.5 tons

Self-Deploy STO: 30.25 tons

Cruising Speed: 275 mph (444 kph).

Range: 230 miles (370 km), fully loaded.

A.R.: 10. Deflects any small arms fire under a medium machine-gun.

S.D.C. by Location:

Main Body: 600

Wings (2): 300 each

Tail (2): 200 each

Engines (2): 300 each

Armaments: One 30mm chain gun on a chin turret. Each wing has a single **hardpoint** that can accommodate a pair of missiles, a bomb, or a rocket pod.

Crew: One pilot, one co-pilot, and up to 24 passengers (this would take up the cargo space entirely).

Cost: Effectively priceless.

Hummer

The High Mobility Multipurpose Wheeled Vehicle (HMMWV), better known as the "hum-vee," or simply the

"hummer," was designed to replace the aging U.S. Army Jeep. Basically this looks like a civilian sports utility vehicle on steroids, a rugged four-wheel drive vehicle capable of handling challenging terrain and taking considerable punishment. It is a versatile and valuable light combat vehicle. Hummers have a single weapons mount which can accommodate anything from a light machinegun to a TOW missile launcher. At least one Parliament Hummer has a flamethrower mounted on top (which is risky, since it's oversized ammo tank would cause a nasty explosion if hit by weapons fire).

A.R.: 7

S.D.C. by Location:

Main Body: 350

Wheels (4): 75 each

Speed: 120 mph (193 kph) on a good road.

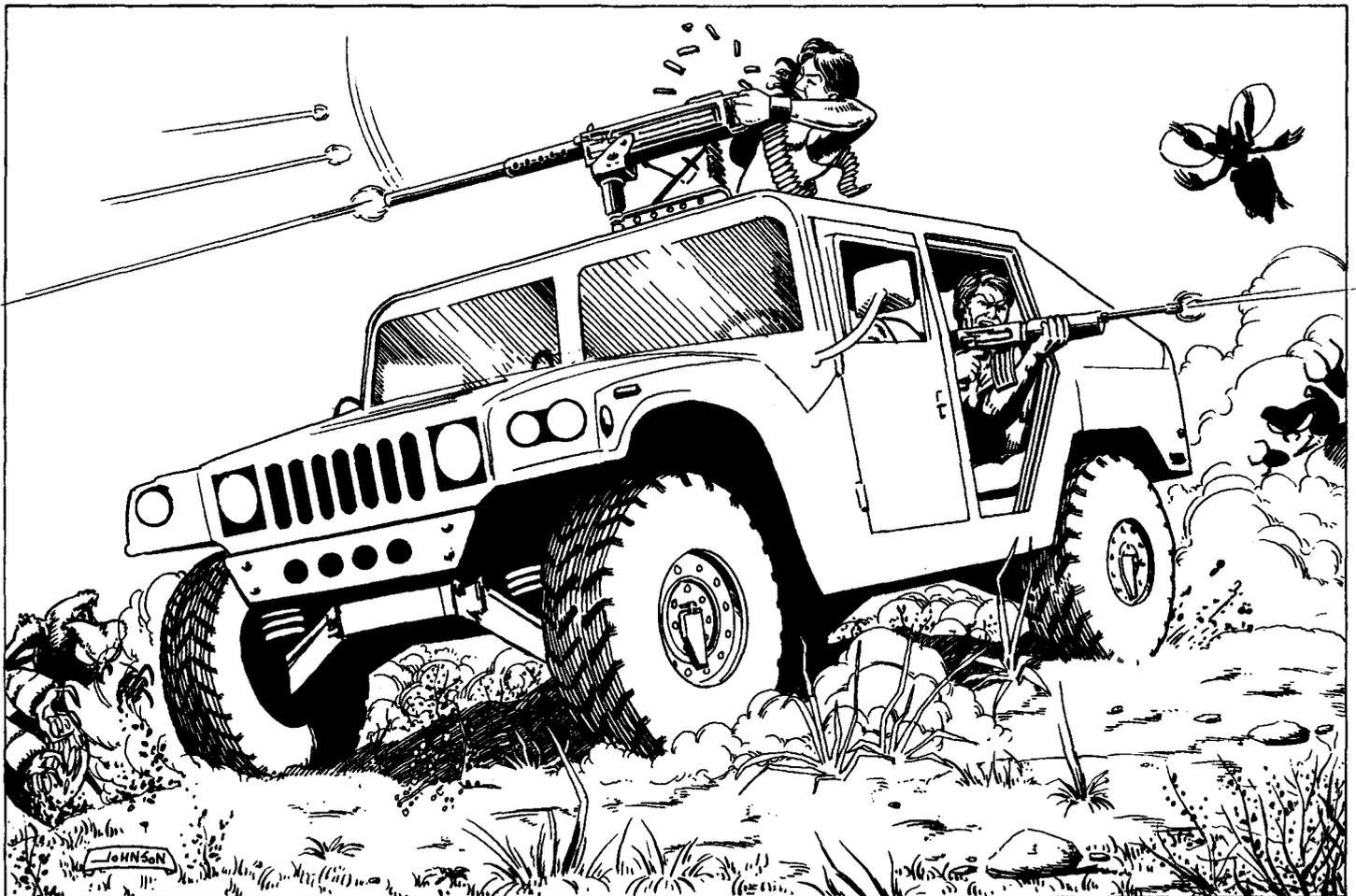
Range: 350 miles (560 km).

Crew: One driver, up to ten passengers, depending on configuration.

Max. Payload: 4,400 lbs. (1,997.6 kg), including crew.

Cost: \$25,000.

Notes: This vehicle made a big splash on the civilian market (especially with Survivalists) as well as enjoying widespread military use, so finding these as well as spare parts should not be overly difficult. Like the Gun buggy, most Hummers had little electrical equipment, or could be retrofitted as such to be Bugproof.



Gun Buggy

The unlikely offspring between a jeep and a motorcycle, Gun Buggies originated as the Fast Attack Vehicle, a **pre-Meltdown** surplus vehicle for the U.S. Army. They are like ultra-light dune buggies consisting only of a covered engine, four seats, and a rollbar frame connecting it all. Hitting the vehicle itself is somewhat difficult, since it is mostly empty space, and bullets pass right through. Hitting the occupants, however, is fairly easy. Gun buggies have a single weapon mount on the top rollbar that can accommodate a light or medium machinegun, or an automatic grenade launcher. Gun buggies are not heavy enough to accommodate any heavier equipment. Due to their open construction, passengers can **fire** in any direction while riding in a Gun Buggy. A.R.: 5 Note: Any incoming fire that hits a Gun Buggy has a 66% chance of simply passing through the vehicle due to its very open construction. In such instances, roll percentile dice again; a roll of **01%-50%** means that one of the occupants has been hit instead. Determine randomly or by G.M. discretion.

S.D.C. by Location:

Engine: 100

Wheels (4): 25 each

Roll Bar Superstructure: 100

Speed: 120 mph (193 kph) on a good road.

Range: 350 miles (560 km).

Crew: One driver. Can accommodate three passengers.

Max. Payload: 2,000 pounds (908 kg), including crew.

Cost: \$10,000.

Notes: These four wheel drive vehicles are becoming very, very popular due to their cheap construction, simple maintenance costs, good gas mileage, and lack of any electrical components which would make them vulnerable to Bug attack. Expect to see many more of them in the coming years as Grease Monkeys and Survivalists begin reverse engineering their own versions. Rumor has it NORAD plans on mass producing these as a cheap form of combat vehicle when and if Operation Landslide gets underway.

Big Bad Mama

This absolutely frightful monster stands **11 feet (3.35 m)** tall, **12 feet (3.66 m)** wide, and **30 feet (9.1 m)** long. Weighing **60 tons**, it rides on eight six-foot (1.8 m) tall tires and commands a 12 cylinder, supercharged diesel engine. The vehicle was originally designed as an industrial materials-mover, but was abandoned during The Meltdown, discovered by Brother **Wingfoot**, and retrofitted for more destructive purposes. The Parliament of Crows, by the way, is not the only crew to have such a vehicle. Numerous **bunkertowns** make use of old industrial trucks for security purposes, and down in the Dixie region, an unnamed free militia is known for using a trio of refitted industrial fire trucks to plow into Bugtowns to liberate its prisoners. Plus, let's face it — you will not find a better-suited vehicle for running over Bugs anywhere.

Big Bad Mama has five weapons mounts; one .50 caliber machinegun on the front of the truck, for the driver to control, a 90mm recoilless rifle on the roof of the cab, and another three .50 cal. mounts along the length of the trailer. Just about any vehicular weapon, short of a heavy cannon, could be mounted on the vehicle. The current weapons **hardpoints** can accommodate anything from a light machinegun to a missile launcher.

A.R.: 13; anything short of a heavy machinegun or grenade launcher will bounce off harmlessly except for called shots to the cockpit, through which a deadeye might be able to pop the driver. Good luck, though — such a shot would entail a -3 to strike, on top of any other called shot modifiers.

S.D.C. by Location:

Main Body: 1,250

Weapon Turrets (3): 100 each

Wheels (8): 150 each

Speed: 60 mph (96 km), although it is unsafe to drive over 30 mph (48 km), due to its extremely poor handling. For every 10 mph (16 km) above 30 mph (48 km), the driver suffers a -10% on any Piloting skill rolls.

Range: 300 miles (480 km), but the gas tank holds 400 gallons of gas, which translates to absolutely terrible mileage.

Crew: One driver and one passenger in the cockpit. Theoretically, up to 40 passengers could ride on top of Big Bad Mama, but they would have to roll a D20 against their P.P. to hang on when the vehicle moves at over 30 mph (48 km), due to the extremely bumpy ride it gives. Anybody falling off the vehicle will take 2D6 falling damage, as well as 2D6X10 damage if they fall under one of the vehicle's massive wheels.

Max. Payload: 25 tons.

Cost: \$150,000, for a comparable vehicle without weapons modifications, assuming one would be for sale at all.

Notes: With so many tanks and other armored vehicles either in Bug or NORAD hands, it is difficult for independent Bughunters and adventurers to find a heavy combat vehicle of their own. That is why heavy construction and other industrial vehicles have become a popular fill-in. Designed for size, strength and durability, these oversized behemoths work nicely as fighting vehicles, especially when pitted against ragtag Splatterpunk crews or lightly armed Zombie patrols. Unfortunately, industrial vehicles like Big Bad Mama are hard to come by, difficult to maintain (where do you find a spare **10 foot/3 m tall tire?**), and guzzle gas like there's no tomorrow. As a result, these are perhaps better suited for defending a bunker town or an outpost than for long-range travel.

New Support and Anti-Tank Weapons

Unfortunately, we couldn't cram into **Systems Failure™** all the weapons info we wanted to, so for your Bug-blasting approval, we present a few additional heavy support and anti-tank weapons. For additional small arms information, check out the **Palladium Compendium of Contemporary Weapons™**, which has hundreds of great small arms and small arm equipment you can incorporate into your **Systems Failure™** campaign. Also keep an eye out for the **Palladium Compendium of Heavy Weapons™**, coming soon from Palladium Books.

30 mm Chain Gun

Weight: 1,500 lbs (681 kg) fully loaded.

Range: 11,000 feet (3,355 m).

Rate of Fire: Fully automatic.

Effective Range: 6,000 feet (1,830 m).
Damage: 2D6x10 per round.
Payload: 400 rounds (enough for 4 full melee bursts).
Cost: \$25,000 and up.

Note: Before **The Meltdown**, this weapon usually was mounted on light ground vehicles and helicopters. Numerous units have since been scavenged and are used as super-light artillery or as stationary guard post weapons.

66mm Light Antitank Weapon (LAW)

Weight: 5.2 lbs (2.3 kg).
Rate of Fire: Single shot and discard.
Effective Range: 1,000 feet (305 m).
Blast Radius: 50 feet (15.2 m).
Damage: 1D6x100.
Cost: \$2,000 and up.

90mm Recoilless Rifle

Weight: 35 lbs (16 kg) unloaded.
Payload: One round.
Rate of Fire: One round per minute (every four melees).
Effective Range: 1,200 feet (366 m).
Blast Radius: 80 feet (24 m).
Damage: 1D10x100.
Cost: \$3,200 for the launcher, \$250 per rocket.

2.75" Rocket Pod

Weight: 100 lbs (45 kg) for the launching unit, 20 lbs (9 kg) per rocket.
Payload: 19 rockets.
Rate of Fire: Single shot or by volley (2, 5, 10 or all 19 rockets).
Effective Range: 11,250 feet (3,431 m).
Blast Radius: 20 feet (6.1 m).
Damage: 1D4x10.
Cost: \$15,000 for the pod, \$100 per rocket.

Note: Often mounted on vehicles, on light wheeled assemblies for use as light artillery, or a stationary guard post mount.

TOW Heavy Anti-Tank Missile

Weight: 205 lbs (93 kg) for the launcher, 50 lbs (22.7 kg) per rocket.
Payload: Single shot.
Rate of Fire: One round per minute (every four melees).
Minimum Range: 213 feet (65 m).
Effective Range: 6,562 feet (2,000 m).
Blast Radius: 50 feet (15 m).
Damage: 2D6x100.
Cost: \$5,000 for the launcher, \$1,000 per rocket.

81mm Mortar

Weight: Barrel: 45.3 lbs (20.6 kg); base plate: 61.6 lbs (28 kg); tripod: 37.8 lbs (17.2 kg).
Payload: Single shot.
Rate of Fire: Once per minute (4 melee rounds).
Minimum Range: 656 feet (200 m).
Effective Range: 6,562 feet (2,000 m).
Blast Radius: 70 feet (21 m).
Damage: 1D6x100.
Cost: \$6,000 for the launcher, \$250 per shell.

40 mm Mark 19 Mod 3 Grenade Launcher

Weight: 137.5 lbs (62.4 kg).
Payload: 100 rounds.
Rate of Fire: Single shot or in bursts/volleys of 2, 4 or 6.
Effective Range: 1 mile (1.6 km).
Damage: 2D6x10.
Blast Radius: 50 feet (15 m).
Cost: \$15,000 and up.

Note: These weapons are devastating against infantry and light vehicles. They can only be fired from a tripod or a vehicular mount.



Knights of the Dinner Table

BY JOLLY R. BLACKBURN
STORY BY STEVE JOHANSSON

0300 HOURS ON THE OUTSKIRTS OF NEW LANSING...

THE **POLICE COM-BOTS** RETURN FIRE. **BOB**, YOU'RE HIT BY TWO **MINI-SABOT** ROUNDS. YOUR **ENERGY SHIELD** FLICKERS UNPER THE **MASSIVE** FORCE OF THE BLOWS.

DAMN! ONE MORE SALVO ANP IM TOAST.

THESE THINGS ARE BRUTAL! THEY BRUSHEP OFF MY CONCUSSION GRENADES LIKE THEY WERE FIRE CRACKERS!

DON'T LET UP NOW! KEEP THE PRESSURE ON, GUYS. I THINK WE ALMOST HAVE 'EM.



ALMOST HAVE 'EM!! ARE YOU FRICKIN' INSANE??!! THESE GOONS ARE RIPPING US TO SHREDS!!

BRIAN, EXPLAIN AGAIN WHY WE FRONTALLY ASSAULTED THE "TIGERTANKS" OF COM-BOTS??

YEA, I PONT THINK WEVE EVEN SCRATCHEP THEM.

I TOLP YA! BECAUSE...



SCREW THE EXPLANATIONS!

BA, IM PREPPING A LIBERATOR MISSILE!! I'VE CENTER GROUND ZERO JUST A FEW METERS BEHIND THE LEAP COM-BOT!

YOU DO REALIZE YOU'RE GROUP IS LIKELY TO CATCH SOME BACKBLAST?

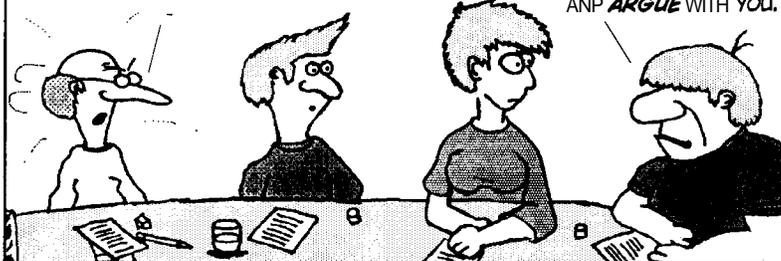
GO AHEAD, BOB! WE'VE GOT TO STOP THEM. IT'S WORTH THE RISK.



WAIT!! STANP DOWN THAT MISSILE, BOBBY-BOY!! HOLD YOUR FIRE!!

WAA...WHAT? ARE YOU NUTS? NO WAY IM STANPING POWN.

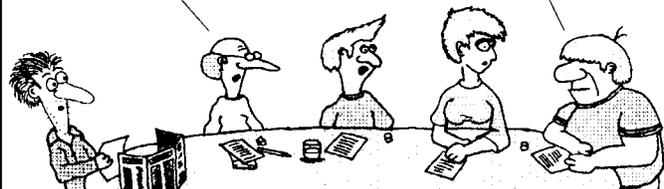
IM AFRAIP I DON'T HAVE TIME TO SIT HERE ANP ARGUE WITH YOU.



BA, SINCE **BOB** HAS TO MOMENTARILY EXPOSE HIMSELF TO ENEMY FIRE TO PREP HIS LAUNCH, I USE MY MODIFIED REMOTE CARALARM PEVICE TO DE-ENERGIZE HIS ARMOR.

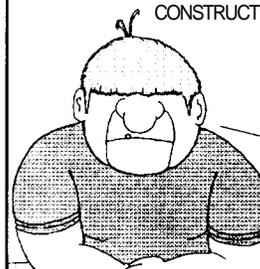
HEY LARDHEAD! YOU'RE SETTING ME UP AS A TARGET DUMMY. WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

AS I WAS ABOUT TO EXPLAIN...



YOU MAY HAVE NOTICED MY PENCHANT FOR CANNIBALIZING THE INNARPS OF ROBOTS. THIS HAS BEEN MORE THAN AN IDLE HOBBY - INTERESTING AS IT MAY BE IN ITS OWN RIGHT.

IT SO HAPPENS THAT I'VE BEEN ASSEMBLING THE KEY COMPONENTS WITH WHICH TO CONSTRUCT OUR VERY OWN MARK IV WAR BOT.



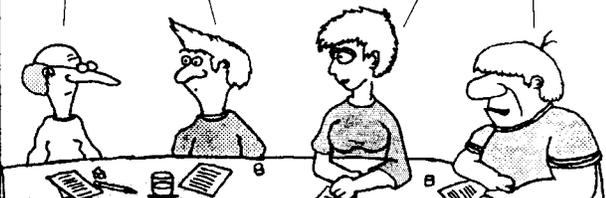
THE WEAPONS PATA IN THE EPROMS OF THESE POLICE UNITS HAPPENS TO BE THE LAST PART OF THE PUZZLE!! ANP I PONT WANT THEM FRIED BY AN ELECTROMAGNETIC PULSE.

WHAT GOOD'S SOME STUPIP ROBOT GONNA PO ME WHEN IM SIX FEET UNPER?

WELL NONE REALLY. BUT YOU ARE SERVING A VALUABLE PURPOSE. THOSE 'BOTS ARE GOING TO BE DISTRACTED BY YOUR, ER, SUDDEN IMMOBILITY.

OOOH...KILLER ROBOT...

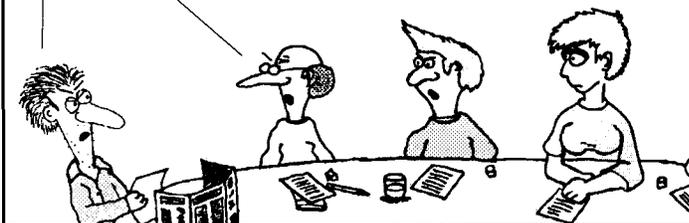
IM AFRAIP MY ANGST WARRIOR WOULD CONCUR.

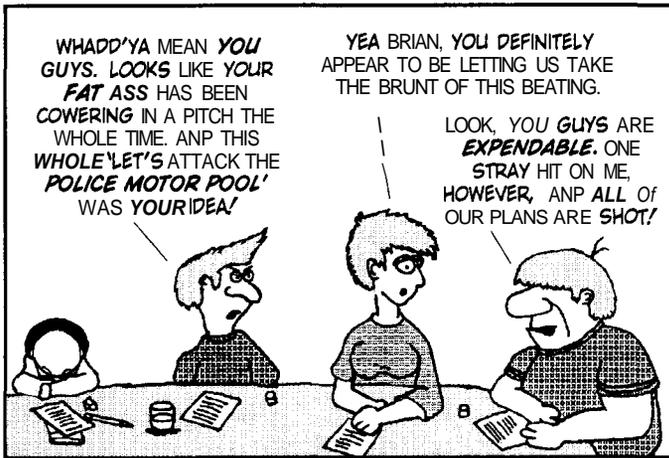


WELL YOU'RE RIGHT ON THAT BRIAN. THE **POLICE COM-BOTS** CAN'T RESIST THE **IMMOBILE** TARGET **BOB** OFFERS ANP LAUNCH THEIR LAST **SABOT ROUNDS** INTO HIM. YOU WITNESS **BOB'S GOOEYINNARDS** BEING EXPELLEP FROM HIS ARMOR AT **HYPERSONIC** VELOCITY.

EXCELLENT. THEIR PERIMETER PEFENSES ARE EXPENPEP. YOU GUYS CAN RUSH 'EM NOW ANP TEAR 'EM UP LIKE SARDINE CANS WITH YOUR **VIBRO-JACKHAMMERS**.

GAAHH!!

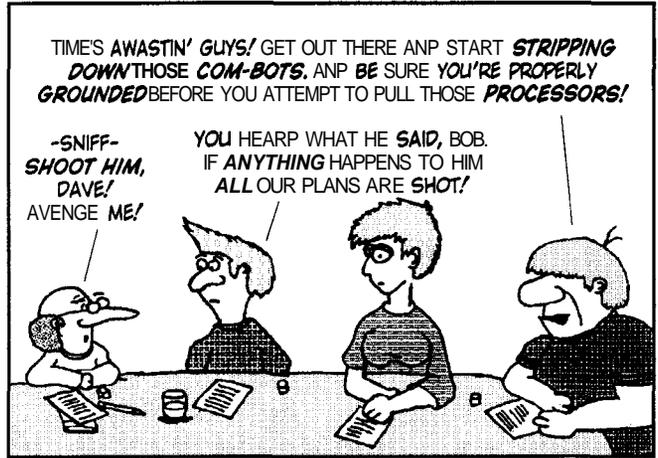




WHADD'YA MEAN YOU GUYS. LOOKS LIKE YOUR FAT ASS HAS BEEN COWERING IN A PITCH THE WHOLE TIME. ANP THIS WHOLE 'LET'S ATTACK THE POLICE MOTOR POOL' WAS YOUR IDEA!

YEA BRIAN, YOU DEFINITELY APPEAR TO BE LETTING US TAKE THE BRUNT OF THIS BEATING.

LOOK, YOU GUYS ARE EXPENDABLE. ONE STRAY HIT ON ME, HOWEVER, ANP ALL OF OUR PLANS ARE SHOT!



TIMES AWASTIN' GUYS! GET OUT THERE ANP START STRIPPING DOWN THOSE COM-BOTS. ANP BE SURE YOU'RE PROPERLY GROUNDED BEFORE YOU ATTEMPT TO PULL THOSE PROCESSORS!

-SNIFF- SHOOT HIM, DAVE! AVENGE ME!

YOU HEAR WHAT HE SAID, BOB. IF ANYTHING HAPPENS TO HIM ALL OUR PLANS ARE SHOT!

LATER AT JOE'S GARAGE & SCREW MACHINE SHOP...

THE PROPRIETOR AGREES TO ALLOW YOU TO USE HIS SHOP OVER THE WEEKEND. IN ADDITION TO THE 20,000 CREDITS, YOU'LL HAVE TO PAY THE TECHS TIME AND A HALF OUT OF YOUR OWN POCKET. ANP DON'T FORGET THE 3,000 CREDIT PENALTY IF YOU FAIL TO PUT ALL THE TOOLS BACK IN THEIR PROPER LOCATION.



CAN I AT LEAST PLAY ONE OF THE NPC TECHS?

GOOD IDEA, BOB! THEN WE WON'T HAVE TO PAY HIM.

YEAH, YEAH, THAT'S ALL FINE ANP DANDY. I ROLL UP MY SLEEVES ANP GET TO WORK.

SURE, DAVE.



OK BA, I PUT MY PLAN INTO ACTION. THE HEAVY MECH LIFTER OUGHT TO BE A SUITABLE CHASSIS. DAVE, CAN YOU SUPERVISE THE INSTALLATION OF THE KEVLAR ARMOR PLATES ANP ANTI-TANK GUNS? SARA, WHY PONT YOU GIVE ME A HAND INSTALLING THE FIRMWARE MODULES. I'LL KEEP YOUR PROGRAMMING SKILLS TO HACK THE DOCLITY OVERRIDE CONTROLS OF THE MAIN UNIT.

BRIAN, ARE YOU SURE ITS A GOOP IDEA TO USE A INDUSTRIAL JANITORIAL-BOT AS THE MASTER KERNEL?

A WEEK LATER OUTSIDE NEW SAGINAW...

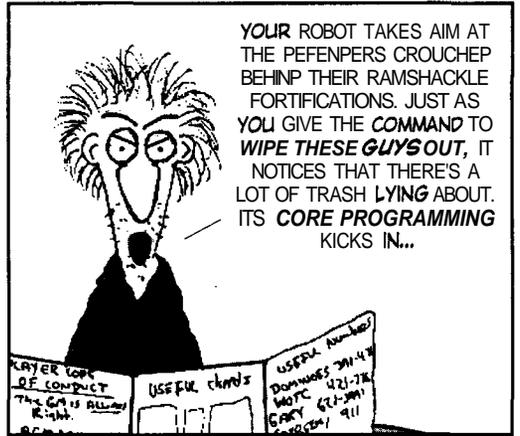
THE MAYOR, ALTHOUGH VISIBLY SHAKEN AT THE SIGHT OF DEUSEX MACHINA, REFUSES TO YIELD TO YOUR TERMS. HE SENPS A VERY BLUNT ANP TO-THE-POINT REPLY TO YOUR PEMANPS - "NUTS!"



OH MAN - HE JUST DOESN'T KNOW.

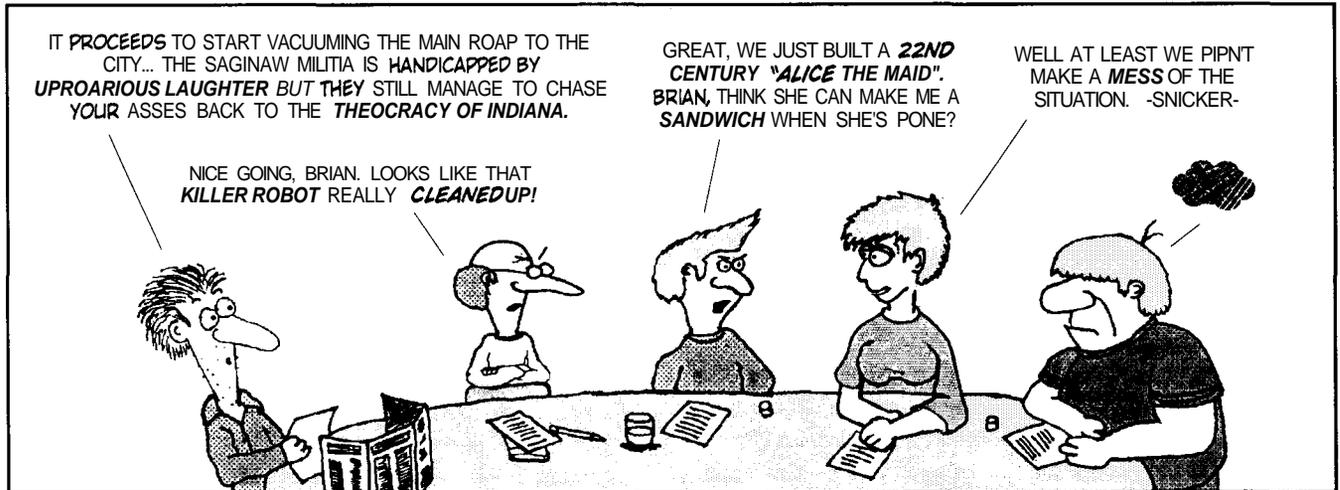
I SURE HOPE THIS WORKS!

THE FOOL! HE SHALL SOON TASTE THE WRATH OF KAHN... ER... BRIAN!



YOUR ROBOT TAKES AIM AT THE PEFPENPERS CROUCHEP BEHIND THEIR RAMSHACKLE FORTIFICATIONS. JUST AS YOU GIVE THE COMMAND TO WIPE THESE GUYS OUT, IT NOTICES THAT THERE'S A LOT OF TRASH LYING ABOUT. ITS CORE PROGRAMMING KICKS IN...

WATER TANK RE-CONDUCT The GUY IS BALLY! R...
 USEFUL CHANDS
 USERID Number: DUMMAGE 791-44
 MATEC 421-7K
 GARY 612-991
 9/11



IT PROCEEDS TO START VACUUMING THE MAIN ROAP TO THE CITY... THE SAGINAW MILITIA IS HANDICAPPED BY UPROARIOUS LAUGHTER BUT THEY STILL MANAGE TO CHASE YOUR ASSES BACK TO THE THEOCRACY OF INDIANA.

GREAT, WE JUST BUILT A 22ND CENTURY "ALICE THE MAID". BRIAN, THINK SHE CAN MAKE ME A SANDWICH WHEN SHE'S PONE?

WELL AT LEAST WE PIPNT MAKE A MESS OF THE SITUATION. -SNICKER-

NICE GOING, BRIAN. LOOKS LIKE THAT KILLER ROBOT REALLY CLEANED UP!

PALLADIUM

ROLE - PLAYING GAME®

The Mysteries of the Deep Forest

Optional New Material for the Palladium Fantasy RPG®

By Randi Cartier

The Palladium World is covered with large stretches of wilderness, much of which is forest. As mankind flourishes, the deepest parts of these forests are being seen for the first time by the "civilized" world. Brave adventurers, armed only with their steel and courage, have now started to penetrate the mysteries of the deep forests. After facing unknown creatures and terrors in these lands, they are emerging with knowledge of the forests previously unavailable. Countries are exploring areas of the forest they plan on colonizing, but only have a small percentage mapped. The Eastern Territories is a good example of this. Tales of creatures and monsters abound in many taverns, but at the same time stories of the beauty and bounty of the forests also emerge. Many people now make their living off the forests, or protect or guide others through them. New herbs, plants and foods have also been found and are now available in civilized lands. And alas, creatures and animals are being discovered in areas where civilization is encroaching on old forests, bringing new dangers to farmers and ranchers. The following is a small sample of the types of animals being discovered, as well as a few useful items, herbs and plants commonly used in these areas.

Denizens of The Deep Forest

Jaquan

At first glance, a Jaquan looks like a grotesque mixture of a spider and a flying beetle. The main body is that of a large spider, covered in iridescent fur, with the normal eight legs, and clawed feet. The head has the normal number of eyes, and a biting set of mandibles. What is different about the creature is that the back is covered in a hard carapace, which protects an enclosed set of

membranous wings. The carapace splits when the creature flies, just as it does for any type of flying beetle. The carapace is also a blue/green iridescent color.

The Jaquan is able to spin webs to catch its food, like a normal spider, expelling its silk from a orifice under the mandibles. It can also "spit" its web at its target, which, combined with its ability to fly, makes the creature a formidable foe.

The creatures behave as a small hive or colony, attacking their prey in tandem. Individually, they pose a small threat, but in a pack, they are deadly. They are arboreal in nature, using the trees to move silently and using the foliage for cover for their attacks. Many a stalwart adventurer has frozen in horror at the sight of a pack of Jaquan attacking, and lost his life to the horrible swarm. The Jaquan are calculating in their tactics, spitting their webbing at the head and legs of a creature, to either blind or immobilize their prey. They also have a paralytic bite to further immobilize it, in preparation to bring their "food" to the nest.

Alignment: Considered an evil predator.

Attributes: Notable statistics are: I.Q.: 1D4 (low animal), P.S.: 2D6+1, P.P.: 3D6+2, P.E.: 2D6+4, P.B.: 1D6, Spd: 2D6 (ground), flying: 3D6+5.

Natural A.R.: 11

Hit Points: 2D6

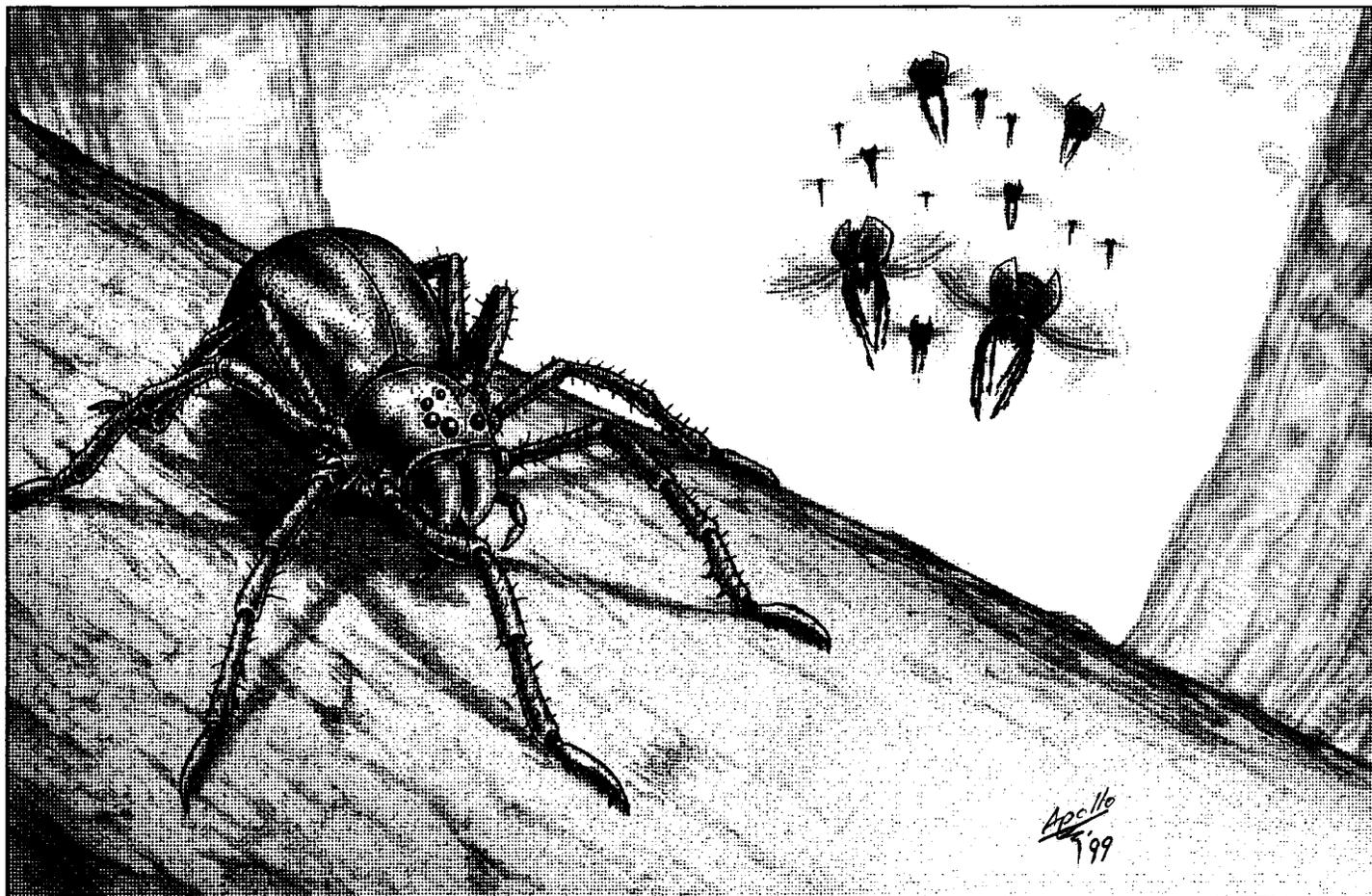
S.D.C.: 3D6

Horror Factor: 10, 13 for a large group.

P.P.E.: 1D6

O.C.C.: None; insect.

Natural Abilities: Climb 90%, Acrobatics 80%, Prowl 80%, Swim 35%, night vision 100 feet (30.5 m). Can jump through tree branches, swing from tree to tree by webbing, jump to the ground from heights of 50 feet (15.2 m) and land safely, and sense vibrations up to 100 feet (30.5 m) away. On the ground they can jump 3 feet (.9 m) high or 10 feet (3 m) across.



Combat: Attacks per Melee: Two

Special Attack: The Jaquan is able to spit its webbing at its victims to immobilize or blind them. The webbing is sticky, but does not cling to itself. It emerges from the webbing orifice as a small ball, but rapidly expands as it moves through the air. It creates a 2x2 foot (0.6x0.6 m) sheet of sticky netting, able to wrap itself around the head or legs of the victim. Instinctively the Jaquan aims for either an immobilizing or blinding shot. Upon a successful hit of the target, there is a 60% chance the sticky net has hit either the head or legs (G.M.'s choice). If the head, the victim is -8 to initiative, strike, parry and dodge. If the webbing hits around the legs there is a 75% chance of falling to the ground, bound. The creatures will keep hitting the head or leg area until their victim is completely blinded or bound and immobile on the ground. If the head or legs are not hit, the target still has penalties of -2 to strike, parry and dodge, and -1 to initiative due to restricted movement caused by the sticky webs. Each webbing can take 3D6 points of damage before breaking.

Damage: Bite: 1D6 or claws: 1D6+2.

Special: Paralytic bite: Upon a successful bite, the Jaquan injects a paralytic venom into its victim. A successful save vs. non-lethal poison is needed to fight off the effects of the venom. If not successful the victim is paralyzed for 1D4 hours. If the save is successful, the venom has no effect.

Bonuses: +3 to initiative, +3 to strike, +4 to dodge (automatic), +3 vs **poisons/toxins**, immune to Paralysis poisons, +4 to save vs Horror Factor.

Magic: None

Psionics: None

Average Life Span: 4 years.

Value: 20 gold for webbing glands (for alchemy purposes), 20 gold for the carapace, for jewelry.

Habitat: Thick, mature forests, mountainous or temperate areas.

Range: Upper Old Kingdom and Old Kingdom Mountains, Eastern Territories, Northern Wilderness, scarce in the Western Empire and Bizantium.

Language: None

Enemies: Anything they consider food (which is just about everything).

Allies: Own hive members.

Size: 12-18 inches (30-46 cm).

Weight: 4-7 lb (1.8-3.2 kg).

Notes: The Jaquan are highly efficient predators, using their webs and their ability to fly to their best advantage. They are very cunning, working in hunting groups consisting of 2D4 members. An established colony can reach a size of 10 to 50 individuals. The females lay 10 to 40 eggs, inside a protective cocoon, (3D6 S.D.C.) concealed high in the trees. The eggs hatch in 5 weeks, emerging ravenous and ready to hunt. They mature in 4 months. They are very territorial and will fiercely protect their nests and territory.

Black Grouse

The Black Grouse, or "Curse Bird" as it is also known, is a subject of legend, a malicious bird spoken of by many traveling Rangers and forest Elves. It is said that to be "eyed" by a Curse Bird is to receive ill luck. Unfortunately, the talk is true. The Black Grouse looks similar to a normal grouse, but is coal black, slightly larger, and has a set of piercing, yellow eyes. The real difference, however, is that it can actually curse a person or ani-

mal. It is said that Loki, the God of Mischief, in one of his feisty moods, gave the birds the ability to curse their hunters. He did this because he felt the birds should have some chance against their hunters, and to make life a little hard for mortals, for his amusement. Loki's change to the bird bred true, and the Black Grouse was born. The curse can range from a simple mishap, to effect identical to the magical Luck Curse, depending on the number of birds that are encountered. The more birds, the worse the curse. The bird is of a high animal intelligence, and seems to have inherited Loki's cunning and spitefulness also. The birds will approach their victim, to have a good line of sight, for the best effect possible. They are not frightened or "flushed" as easily as other grouse or game birds, and will attempt to conceal themselves in the underbrush and grass of trees and roots, if not wanting to attack. They are very territorial and will attack intruders if they feel threatened, are protecting young, or are simply just in a bad mood.



Alignment: Considered Anarchist or evil in nature.
Attributes: Notable statistics are I.Q.: 1D4 (high animal intelligence), P.S.: 1D6+1, P.P.: 2D6, P.E.: 2D6, P.B.: 2D6, Spd: 35 flying, 6 while running.
Hit Points: 2D6
S.D.C.: 1D6
Horror Factor: 10 in a covey (flock), when recognized for what they are.
P.P.E.: 2D6
O.C.C.: None; animal.
Natural Abilities: Fly, Land Navigation 75%, Camouflage 75%, Prowl 75%, night vision 60 feet (18.3 m).
Combat: Attacks per Melee: 2 by bite, plus Special.

Special Attack; Eye Curse: Due to Loki's intervention, the Black Grouse is able to naturally curse a person or animal. The power of the curse depends on the number of birds involved in the encounter. A large covey can inflict upon the unfortunate victim the Luck Curse, which is identical to the Wizard Spell Luck Curse (page 204 of the Palladium RPG, 2nd Edition). A small group of birds (1 to 4) causes the victim to lose or break something in the next 2 hours. 5-10 birds causes a fall or fumble on the next important physical action, within 24 hours. Above 10 birds, they can inflict the Luck Curse, with the same effect as a 4th level Wizard. If the victim saves against the bird's curse there is no effect. If unsuccessful, only a Remove Curse invocation can remove the curse from the afflicted.

Damage: 1D4 by bite.

Bonuses: +1 to Strike, +4 to Dodge, +6 vs Horror Factor, +1 vs magic and psionics, and immune to the spells Luck Curse and Minor Curse.

Magic: None

Psionics: None

Average Life Span: 2 to 4 years.

Value: The eyes of the bird are worth 10 gold per pair, for alchemy purposes, and the meat is worth 6 gold.

Habitat: Large, mature forests, at bases of tree roots, underbrush and grasses of the forest floor.

Range: Though they are rare, their range is much larger than the normal grouse. Land of the Damned, Northern Wilderness, Eastern Territories, northern edge of the Western Empire, and the Upper Old Kingdom. It is rumored they have also been spotted in the Ophid's Grasslands. Some say Loki transplanted the bird to other areas for his further amusement.

Language: Chirps and cries.

Enemies: Just about everybody.

Allies: None, only their own.

Size: 16-20 inches (41-51 cm).

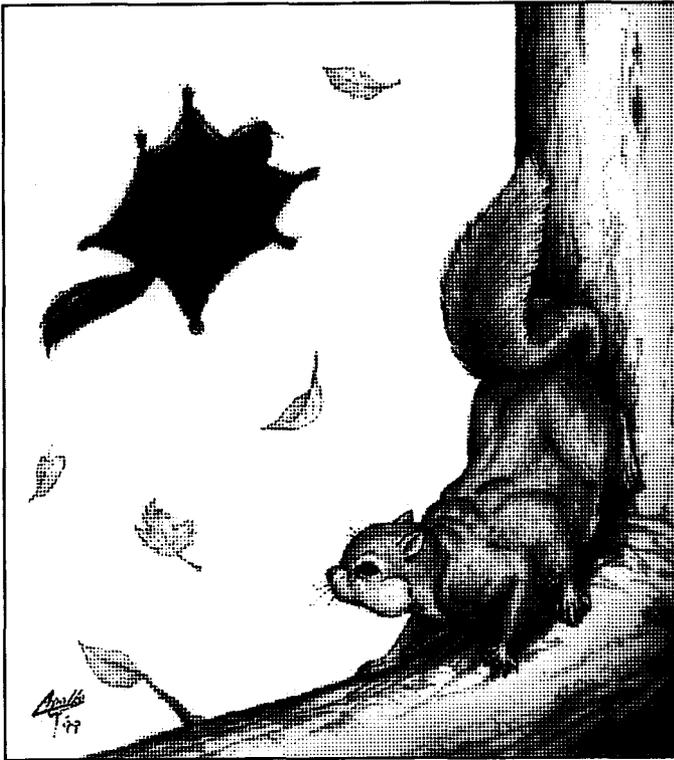
Weight: 2 to 3 lb (0.9-1.4 kg).

Notes: Black Grouse are mean and vindictive. To walk into their area or nesting places is to invite immediate attacks and curse gazes. The gaze of the bird is very intense to their victims, who seem to feel the piercing yellow eyes glaring directly into their souls. It can be very unnerving. 5 to 6 eggs are laid in nests of grasses and twigs concealed at bases of trees and bushes. Nestings are twice a year, spring and fall. Hunters and Rangers try to destroy the eggs if found. Black Grouse cannot be domesticated due to their malicious nature. The young mature in 4 months.

The eyes are often used by Alchemists to create bad or ill luck charms.

Night Gliders

The Night Glider is a silent, nocturnal predator and scavenger. This creature closely resembles a flying squirrel, only larger, and with an additional middle pair of **leg/wing** appendages. This gives the Glider a larger wing span, enabling it to glide and hover like a hawk, riding **thermals** and air currents. They can do this for many hours, hovering in the night skies. It is a beautiful animal, with silky silver-gray abdominal fur, and longer, dark brown fur on its back, head and tail. The membranes of the **wing/limb** appendages are dark brown. Its coloration makes the Glider hard



to spot flying in the night skies. Unfortunately, its beauty belies the vicious temper of the beast. It will attack viciously if provoked, especially in family groups. Its feeding habits and bite resemble those of a vampire bat, causing many to surmise the Glider is a distant cousin to the bat. Night Gliders are nocturnal, sleeping during the day, in colonies or hunting packs, lying high up in the trees in the branches and foliage. At night they take to the air, gliding among the trees, looking for sleeping animals or humanoids to prey upon. Upon spotting sleeping prey, the Glider will silently descend to earth, then stalk quietly up to its prey. The animal has a numbing saliva which it drops upon an exposed area of the victim. It then bites the victim until he bleeds in the area, allowing the Glider to lap up the welling blood. The Glider has an anticoagulant in its saliva, much like the vampire bat, which keeps the wound open and flowing, allowing the animal to gorge on blood. Often, the Night Glider will only feed slightly, then leave to draw others of its kind to feed upon the victim. Possessing the ability to track a blood scent, they have been known to track a victim if he has awakened and attack him when found, or simply follow until the person or animal passes out from loss of blood.

Alignment: Considered Anarchist.

Attributes: Notable statistics are IQ: 1D4 (animal intelligence), P.S.: 1D6, P.P.: 3D6, P.E.: 2D6, P.B.: 4D6, Spd: 1D6+2 on ground, gliding/diving: 3D6+4.

Hit Points: 1D6+6

S.D.C.: 1D6

Horror Factor: None normally; seeing one feed has a Horror Factor of 8, group feeding, 12.

P.P.E.: 2D4

O.C.C.: None, animal.

Natural Abilities: **Glide/hover,** night vision 120 feet (36.6 m), Climb 80%, Swim 35%, Prowl 80%, Camouflage 80%.

Track Blood Scent: A Night Glider can follow a victim's blood scent up to 300 feet (91.5 m) away, with a skill of 75%.

Combat: Attacks per Melee: 2 by bite.

Special Attack: Anesthetic Bite and Blood Drinking: This animal has a set of glands that release both an anticoagulant and a topical anesthetic into its saliva. The Glider will quietly crawl upon a victim and drop saliva onto an exposed area, causing it to become numb. It will then bite deeply, causing blood to flow. The anticoagulant will not allow the wound to clot, allowing the Glider to gorge itself upon the victim's blood. The initial bite does 1D6 points of damage, but the feeding of the animal causes a blood loss to the victim of 1D6+2 Hit Points per minute. Alas, unless something awakens the victim when the feeding starts, he may not wake in the morning. Multiple attacks by the creature are common, and unfortunately many times the victim does not awaken before he falls into a deeper, fatal sleep from loss of blood.

Damage: 1D6 by bite, plus blood loss.

Bonuses: +3 to Initiative, +3 to Strike, and +5 to Dodge (automatic), while in the air. It only has a +1 to Dodge on the ground. Immune to numbing poisons, +3 vs paralytic poisons.

Magic: None

Psionics: None

Average Life Span: 4-6 years.

Value: Fur: 5-10 gold, saliva glands: 10 gold for poisons/Alchemy purposes.

Habitat: Thick, mature temperate forests, especially in mountainous regions; uncommon in sparser woods.

Range: Common in the Eastern Territories, Old Kingdom Mountains and Northern Wilderness. Uncommon in Bizantium, Upper Old Kingdom and Land of the Damned.

Language: Chirps, barks, whistles.

Enemies: Predatory birds, larger cats, and other small predatory animals.

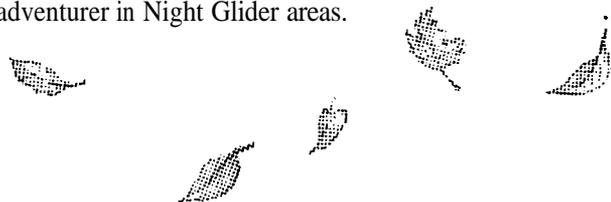
Allies: None, other than their own kind.

Size: 5-8 inches (13-20 cm) plus a 5 to 7 inch (13-18 cm) bushy tail.

Weight: Up to 1 lb (0.45 kg).

Notes: Night Gliders make their nests up high in the trees from leaves and twigs, to avoid ground based predators. They give birth to 2-6 young, after 30 days of gestation. Females bear young 3 times a year. A family group usually has 2-8 adults and young, and a colony consists of about 10-30. They have a vicious temper and will fiercely defend their young, colony or food. They will track a blood scent to its source, either killing it or scavenging for blood or fresh, bloody flesh. They are known to take small kills, such as mice, rabbits and birds, back to the nest for the young, or feed on the blood and return to the nest and young, regurgitating the blood for the young to feed upon. Their fur resembles chinchilla fur in texture and length. They are highly prized for their fur, not only for coloring, but for the faint markings on the pelt, resembling vague outlines of leaves. This mottling helps to conceal them during their daytime sleep.

Settlements near heavy, mature forests have been prone to attacks by feeding Night Gliders. Farmers often venture out in the morning to find dead or unconscious livestock in the pastures or pens. It is very dangerous to be a lone traveler **and/or** injured adventurer in Night Glider areas.





Bank Eel

The Bank Eel's appearance is reminiscent of any normal eel. It has a long, finely scaled body, black, green and brown in color. It has four elongated, heavy boned dorsal fins, set lower on the body, enabling the creature to drag itself along on land surfaces. It is adept in water, but clumsy on land, relying on camouflage and the ambush to acquire its prey. The belly fins allow the eel to "walk" upon the **shore/bank** to a suitable ambush **point**, and the eel is also equipped with a pair of primitive lungs to help it to survive out of water for up to 2 hours. They hunt in pairs or more, concealing themselves along game trails or watering holes along banks of rivers, ponds and small lakes. They ambush unwary travelers or animals that come close to the water or waiting area. They attack in tandem, leaping up and biting their prey. Their fangs are equipped with a fast acting sleep poison to knock out their prey, so they can drag them to the water and drown them. The eels act together, to drag a heavy victim to the water, submerging them then drowning them. Their method of hunting allows a small number (3-6) of eels to bring down much larger prey. It is easy for them to bring down a full sized humanoid or deer. The food is brought to the underwater colony for consumption.

Alignment: Considered an evil predator.

Attributes: Notable statistics are I.Q.: 1D4 (high animal intelligence), P.S.: 2D6+2, P.P.: 2D6+2, P.E.: 3D6, P.B.: 1D6, Spd: 3D6+4 in water, 1D6 on land.

Hit Points: 4D6

S.D.C.: 3D6

Horror Factor: 11 for one individual, 13 for a hunting group (5-8), 15 for colony size (12 and up).

P.P.E.: 1D6

O.C.C.: None; animal.

Natural Abilities: Climb 40%, Acrobatics 40%, Prowl 75%, Swim 90%, breathe air with primitive lungs for 2 hours,

breathe underwater, night vision 100 feet (30.5 m), water vision 160 feet (48.8 m).

Combat: Attacks per Melee: 2 by bite.

Special Attack: Sleep Poison: The Bank Eel is equipped with a small gland at the back of the throat, supplying the fangs with a short duration, but powerful sleep poison. Upon biting the prey, it injects the poison into the victim, causing him to save vs non-lethal poison at -4 or fall comatose on the ground. The victim is comatose for 2D6 +2 minutes. Each bite requires a saving throw, and is accumulative in effect. If the victim begins to recover before being submerged in the water, or while under the water, the eels will strike again, trying to render their prey unconscious again. Even if the victim saves against the poison, he is at -2 to initiative, and -2 to Strike, Parry and Dodge due to the powerful effects of the toxin. This lasts for 1D4 melees, and duration is accumulative if bitten more than once.

Damage: 1D6

Bonuses: +1 to initiative, +2 to Strike and +1 to Dodge, while on land. In the water: +3 to initiative, +3 to Strike, +4 to Dodge. +3 to save vs poisons & toxins, immune to sleep poisons.

Magic: None

Psionics: Bank Eels are able to use a primitive form of telepathy to communicate amongst themselves. The range of communication is 400 feet (122 m). This allows the Eels to work in coordinated attacks, to respond rapidly to threats to others of their kind or the colony, and to relay information to others rapidly and with detail.

Average Life Span: 6 years.

Value: Meat, for those who like eel, is worth 5-10 gold. The venom sacs, for alchemy/poison purposes, will get 10 gold. The hide, used for belts, trim and gloves, is worth 5-20 gold.

Habitat: Streams, ponds, lake banks and the occasional swamp, in mature, heavy forests.

Range: Common in the Eastern Territories, Northern Wilderness, and the Land of the Damned. Rare in the Old Kingdom, Bizantium and the Western Empire.

Language: None, rudimentary telepathy.

Enemies: Birds of prey, other underwater predators, humanoids and larger land predators.

Allies: None, only colony members.

Size: 3 to 5 feet (0.9-1.5 m) in length.

Weight: 12 to 16 lb (5.4-7.2 kg).

Notes: The Bank Eels are superb predators. Once the prey has been drowned, the meat is taken to the underwater colony, where it is jammed under rocks and debris to keep it from floating to the surface. Here it is ripped apart at their leisure, to be fed to the young and nesting females first, then to the rest of the colony. Nests consist of long tubes or burrows in the sides of the underwater bank, lined with small rocks. Females will guard the nests and hatched young fiercely, hardly leaving the area while incubating or tending young offspring. Females lay 10-15 eggs, hatching after 2 months, in the spring. They reach maturity in 1 year.

Bank Eels have been known to attack small rafts, barges or boats, if their territory is breached or they feel threatened by the craft approaching. They have been witnessed leaping out of the water to attack victims in their boats. They then drag them into the water, or try to capsize the small craft to be able to harvest their meal.



Corzin Tree Runners

The Corzin Tree Runner resembles a large city rat in size and coloration, but with an additional, middle set of legs, and a long, prehensile tail. The back legs are larger for leaping and running. They are arboreal by nature, and are superb climbers and leapers in the trees with their long, clawed feet. The middle set of limbs are not used while jumping or running, and are held up close to their mid-section. Instead, they are used to enhance their climbing ability, using the extra set of claws for moving both quickly and securely up and down trees and bushes. They also will use the extra limbs for a raking attack upon their prey, if given the opportunity. They are a pack-oriented creature, with a vicious temperament. They will attack anything intruding in their territory, threatening their young, or interrupting their hunt. The Runners live high in the mature trees, using the limbs of the trees themselves as "tree roads" much like a game trail on the ground. Experienced Rangers, Elves, foresters or anyone acquainted with fauna lore, may be able to spot the barren branches or worn bark on the main tree itself, used as the roads. The Runners use the roads to track prey, or just to travel between tree tops, moving silently and swiftly among the leaves.

They are vicious carnivores by nature, and will also scavenge for food from abandoned corpses or drive off or kill other animals with food. They are known to be unerring in their attacks, striking areas of the body that will bleed profusely, to bring down prey. They are also able to track a blood scent for miles, and go into a blood frenzy if aroused by large quantities of blood. They will also sometimes go into a frenzy if a large, powerful enemy attacks the communal nests, not giving up until dead. Even a party of many well equipped, experienced adventurers is better off quietly slipping away when seeing a pack of Tree Runners in blood frenzy or realizing they are in the territory or homes of the Runners.

Alignment: Considered an evil animal predator.

Attributes: Notable statistics are I.Q.: 1D4+1 (high animal intelligence), P.S.: 1D6+3, P.P.: 3D6+2, P.E.: 2D6, P.B.: 1D6, Spd: 3D6 on ground, 4D6 in trees.

Hit Points: 2D6+4

S.D.C.: 2D6

Horror Factor: 10 for a lone Tree runner, 13 for a pack, +1 when in a frenzy.

P.P.E.: 2D4

O.C.C.: None; animal.

Natural Abilities: Climb 95%, Acrobatics 90%, Swim 50%, Prowl 80%, night vision 120 feet (36.6 m), camouflage 80%, **jump/leap** up to 6 feet (1.8 m) high and 10 feet (3 m) across, can jump from trees upon prey from 25 feet (7.6 m) up with no harm to themselves. Also see Special Attack.

Track Blood Scent: A Tree Runner can follow the scent of blood up to 200 feet (61 m) away. They have a tracking skill of 75%.

Combat: Attacks per Melee: 2 by bite or claw.

Special Attack: The Runner has a special thermal vision that measures the heat from a humanoid or animal. They attack the areas that are warmest, which are usually sources of blood near the surface of the body. Equipped with long, chisel like teeth, they are guided by this sense and bite deeply at this point to slash open the vein or artery. To make a called shot on the vital area, the Corzin needs a natural strike roll of 17-20. If missed, the animal still bites, but does normal damage. The bite itself is small, but deep, causing the victim to bleed profusely. The victim, upon a successful hit to the area, will begin to lose 1D6+2 Hit Points per minute from the wound. Any exertion or violent movement with double the rate of blood loss. Each successful bite will bleed as profusely, until the victim bleeds out. When the victim's Hit Points reach a loss of 75%, a save vs **coma/death** is needed to avoid falling unconscious due to loss of blood. Even if successful, the victim is -4 to initiative, and -4 to strike, parry and dodge. Speed and Attacks are cut in half, and skills are performed at -50% due to **disorientation**. Areas to be hit are the Brachial and Ulnar arteries in the shoulder and forearm, the Carotid artery and Jugular vein in the neck, the Radial artery in the wrist, the Femoral artery and vein in the thigh, and the Saphenous vein and artery in the knee and calf.

Blood Frenzy: Tree Runners can fall into a Blood Frenzy for 2D6 minutes, if exposed to a large quantity of blood spilt by a large humanoid or animal, or if the colony or pack is fiercely threatened. Whenever any of these conditions are met, there is a 1-60% chance of a frenzy. When affected by a frenzy, a Tree Runner gains +1 attack, +2 to damage, +2 to initiative and +2 to strike. In this frenzy, the Runners cannot dodge, only attack. All bonuses are in addition to natural bonuses.

Rake Attack: Much like a cat may do a raking attack with its hind legs, the Runner is able to attack with both sets of middle and hind legs. The rake attack does 2D6+2 points of damage, but counts as two attacks.

Damage: Bite: 1D4 plus possible blood loss damage, claw attack: 1D6+2, rake attack: 2D6+2.

Bonuses: +3 to Initiative, +3 to Strike, +3 to Dodge on the ground, +5 to Dodge in the trees. +2 to save vs Horror Factor.

Magic: None

Psionics: None

Average Life Span: 5 years.

Value: None

Habitat: Large, heavy forests, some less dense forests (rare), and dense undergrowth. They have occasionally been spotted in tall, old ruins in deep forests, with rumors of being spotted in villages or towns near the edge of forests.

Range: Common to the Northern Wilderness, Eastern Territories and the northern edge of the Western Empire. Rare in the Old Kingdom, Land of the Damned and Bizantium.

Language: Grunts, barks and growls.

Enemies: Aerial predators, larger, climbing predators and humanoids.

Allies: None, just themselves.

Size: 12-14 inches(30-36 cm) and a 10-12 inch (25-30 cm) prehensile tail.

Weight: Up to 4 lb (1.8 kg).

Notes: The Corzin are pack oriented animals and will attack in tandem. They will automatically go for the vulnerable areas of the prey, and are able to recognize when one vital area is hit, and shift to another attack location. They are vicious in temperament, and in a blood frenzy are quite formidable. Their mottled colorings of brown and black allow them to blend into dense foliage. They have communal homes and nests, all of the colony caring for the young. Females nest in hollow balls of woven leaves, grasses and twigs, giving birth to 9 to 12 babies, twice a year, in the spring and fall. Gestation is 21 days and the young reach maturity in 6 months.

Magic Items for the Forest

The deep forests of the Palladium World are both beautiful and dangerous. Over the years, Alchemists have responded to the needs of the beings who travel, protect and make their living in these areas. The following are a few of the items available to the needful.

Forest Cloak

This item is useful to individuals who need to be concealed in the forest to achieve their deeds. No matter what they are. Usually worn by woodsmen, Rangers, forest Elves and soldiers, this cloak protects the wearer from observation while in the forest. It allows the wearer to be concealed from view much like a Chameleon spell, but with subtle differences.

The appearance of the cloak is completely natural in color and material. It is made of a thick sheet of moss-like material, with green and black markings. Closer observation reveals faint outlines of various leaves and shrubs on the surface. The cloak is held by an intricate wooden clasp made of rarer woods of the forests, such as cherry wood, **ironwood**, birch and hickory. The clasp design and material vary from cloak to cloak.

To use the **item**, the cloak is worn then the wearer picks a place for his **observation/concealment**. He may sit or stand, depending upon the height of the vegetation around him. He then utters the command word. Immediately, the wearer seems to turn into the main type of tree or bush in his immediate area. To another observer, there is only trees. In all respects, the wearer is the

tree. Smell, touch and sight are fooled into believing he is a tree. Even upon examination by a Mind Mage or Wizard, with See Aura, Presence Sense or any other sensory tools, the wearer is usually not discovered. The cloak's **illusionary** magic is so powerful that some people believe the cloaks have a small amount of the Earth Elemental essence incorporated in their manufacturing, and the wearer actually does become a plant.

The wearer cannot move, speak or cast spells during the use of the cloak, or the illusion will fall away, much like a Chameleon spell. Psionics can still be used. The wearer does not see himself as a plant, but as his normal self.

Observers of the cloak bearer must make a saving throw vs illusion at -4 to see through the cloak's protection. If the cloak is used in sparser forest conditions, the save is easier at only -1 against the illusion. Those who use magic or psionics to detect the wearer must make another save, and if it fails, they will not sense the user of the cloak.

Duration: 60 minutes per use; 3 uses per 24 hours.

A.R. 10 and S.D.C.: 40: This S.D.C. and A.R. does not afford the wearer any protection, because it is not armor; the wearer takes full damage. The S.D.C. applies mainly when an enemy is deliberately trying to destroy it.

Cost: 20,000+ gold; a rare item.

Backpack of Freshness

This article can be a backpack, handbag, saddlebag or large belt pouch, depending on size and usage. The article seems normal, with various **sealable** pouches on both the inside and outside of the bag. It has been enchanted with the ability to preserve and keep fresh any type of plant matter, including fruit, enchanted and normal herbs, and fungi. Plants, cuttings, seeds, berries and leaves all are kept fresh. Once placed inside a pocket, the enchantment will keep the material fresh for up to 30 days. At that point, or when removed from the pack, the material begins to decay naturally. If put back into the pack, it will preserve the material in its current state.

A pouch has 5 pockets, small **backpack/handbag** 10 pockets, large backpack 20 pockets, extra large pack or saddlebags 30 pockets. Price is according to size.

Cost: Small **pouch/purse** (5 lb/2.3 kg) costs 2200 gold. Medium size **backpack/purse** (15 lb/6.8 kg) costs 6000 gold. Large **backpack/saddlebags** (30 lb/13.5 kg) costs 11,000 gold. Extra large **backpack/saddlebag** (45 lb/20.3 kg) costs 16,000 gold.

Ring of the Green

This rare ring is only manufactured by experienced Alchemists with a flair for nature in their work. Often consulting with Druids, Elves, Rangers and Earth Warlocks for advice and additional enchantments, these rings often come with a variety of powers, depending on who needs them and what region they work in. The rings are usually made for Forest Elves, Rangers, scouts, woodsmen and **Beastmasters**. Occasionally Druids or Earth Warlocks may request them. Although these rings can be bought at larger, well versed Alchemy shops, they are usually given as gifts to people of good alignment and intentions for the forest. The ring is usually made of a rarer wood, such as hickory, ironwood or birch. The ring is enchanted to adjust its size to the wearer, and is usually enchanted with the following powers, although a Game Master may want to adjust the ring for **his/her**

own campaign: The ring's functions are at 6th level of ability.

Pass Trail: This power allows the wearer to pass through heavy brush, undergrowth and trees, leaving no tracks, or signs of passage, such as broken branches or vegetation. The wearer still makes noise and is visible while moving through the area. Only the wearer himself is enchanted, and it works both on foot and when flying. The enchantment lasts for 10 minutes per level, usable 3 times a day.

Commune with Animals: This ability of the ring functions exactly as the psionic ability of the same name on page 169 of the **Palladium Fantasy RPG® 2nd Edition**. The only alteration is that it seems to be magical in nature. It is usable 3 times per day.

Disguise Scent: The ring is able to change the scent of the wearer to throw off anyone tracking them by scent, whether with dogs, or other creatures or races that track naturally by scent. The wearer must be familiar with an animal he wishes to match his scent to, and concentrate for one melee action. The scent of the wearer then changes to match the desired **animal/creature**. Note: If the wearer picks an **animal/creature** rare or unknown to the area, this may alert the tracker to an anomaly and arouse suspicion regarding the scent he is tracking. The ability is usable 2 times per day. Cost: 45,000 gold when available.

Corbett's Deer Cap

This cap was first created by the Alchemist **Galin Corbett** as a means of testing apprentices. The creation of such a cap is a good test of a new Alchemist's abilities, and it is a useful item for travelers in the forest. The creation process for a Deer Cap is not overly complicated (for an Alchemist), but is very exacting. Deer Caps are very common in wooded regions, but flawed caps often make their way into circulation, and there are many stories about them that circulate. There is a 15% chance upon purchase that the cap is magically flawed. If flawed, the following occurs: Since the cap captures the essence of a deer, the wearer acquires the fear/flight response of the deer. The owner, after wearing the cap for 6 hours, acquires the nervousness of the animal. If danger is sensed, the wearer must save vs Horror Factor with a penalty of -2 or flee the area of danger. If the wearer saves against the effect, he is still nervous and irritable, as long as the cap is worn. The wearer must save against each fear encounter, until the cap is removed. If removed and not worn for 24 hours, the wearer may don the cap again safely for 6 hours before the flaw reinstates itself.

If it is a authentic cap, the article is made with the following: The cap is made of applewood, cut from a tree in the fall after the last apple has dropped. The antlers adorning the cap are taken from a 2 year old buck, slain by one arrow. The deer skin lining is taken from a 2 year old doe, also slain by one arrow. The cap is assembled with only natural glues and bindings. If any of these ingredients are not the stated items, or the cap is assembled with metal bindings, the cap is a fake. Remember, even if the Deer Cap is of the proper materials, it may be magically flawed.

The Deer Cap (even a flawed one) bestows upon the wearer the following benefits: The wearer gains 90 foot (27.4 m) night vision, excellent day vision, and the Danger Sense of a deer. This ability works exactly as the psionic ability Sixth Sense on page 171 of the **Palladium R.P.G. 2nd Ed.**, with one exception. The Sixth Sense only works for the wearer, no others, even if surrounded by friends or family. The cap does not need **I.S.P.** to function, and it may be worn continuously with no harmful effects, unless flawed. Cost: 25,000 gold.

New Earth Warlock Spell



The Green Door

Level 8

Range: 2 miles (3.2 km) per level of the Warlock.

Size: 10 foot (3 m) high by 6 foot (1.8 m) wide opening.

Duration: 5 melee rounds per level of the Warlock.

Saving Throw: None

P.P.E.: 45

This spell has been found to work best in the large, mature forests of the Palladium World. It is speculated that the elemental essence of the earth is so strong and concentrated in these areas, that it is what actually makes this spell possible. If the spell is cast in other areas, such as younger, sparser forests, partially cleared areas, or small wood lots, the spell is only at half range, size and duration, and the casting cost is increased to 60 P.P.E.

The Door must be cast upon the forest floor, and the Warlock must be the one to open the door. Upon activating the spell, the Warlock must be familiar with the destination of the door, and visualize it in his mind while casting it. If the caster is familiar with the area, there is no flaw in the destination. If not completely familiar with the destination, then the spell is subject to the same restrictions as a **Teleport**: Superior spell, and may suffer the same effects (except the caster can see through the portal without stepping through it, so in case of failure he can try casting the spell again).

As with the Mystic Portal, the door may be opened and the destination viewed. Anyone passing through the door is visible on the other side. People on the opposite side cannot view their starting point. The door is only one-way. If return passage is desired, another spell must be cast. Anything may pass through the door if it will fit.

The door takes on the appearance of the available vegetation. Trees and vines have been known to provide the archway and support of the door, especially willows, or long, supple young species of trees. Grasses, bushes and vines often weave together to form the door itself. Mosses and ground cover plants also sometimes form the door. A wooden doorhandle is always present in the door. The vegetation returns to normal, with no harm, once the spell is canceled or has elapsed.

Herbs and Plants of the Forest

The following are some useful plants and healing herbs found in the temperate, mature forests of the Palladium World. These include the Eastern Territories, Old Kingdom, northern Western Empire, Great Northern Wilderness, and to some extent the Land of the Damned and the Timiro Kingdom. These herbs and plants will not survive in any other region, due to heat or either lack or overabundance of rain.

Ivona

This is an annual bush resembling purple basil, only darker purple in color. The leaves are picked after the first flowering and dried. Brewed in a tea, the process will yield healing chemicals that upon ingestion will heal 2-8 Hit Points or 2d4+2 S.D.C. The tea is somewhat bitter. Cost: Uncommon; 250 gold for one packet, which will make two doses.

Jezel Leaves

This is a large, flowering bush with thick, dark green oily leaves. Picked after the first flowering, the leaves must be preserved in a good quality oil, to prevent drying out. This rare magical herb will heal either a simple break or a compound fracture which has been medically repaired. The leaves are removed from the jar and bruised to release the healing oils. They are then layered on the site of the injury and tied on. The oils are absorbed into the body, and after 1D4 hours the break is cured. The leaves are dried and brittle at the end of the healing. Cost: Rare; 650 gold per dose/jar.

Erlon

Erlon is a green and white, grass-like ground cover plant. Long, slender leaves are picked in late fall. The leaves are dried and then crushed. The powder is then incorporated into oil to form a paste which is then sold in jars. Applying Erlon to an infected wound as a poultice will cure the area of infection in 1 to 3 hours. Cost: Uncommon; 500 gold for a jar with four doses.

Yorzak Root

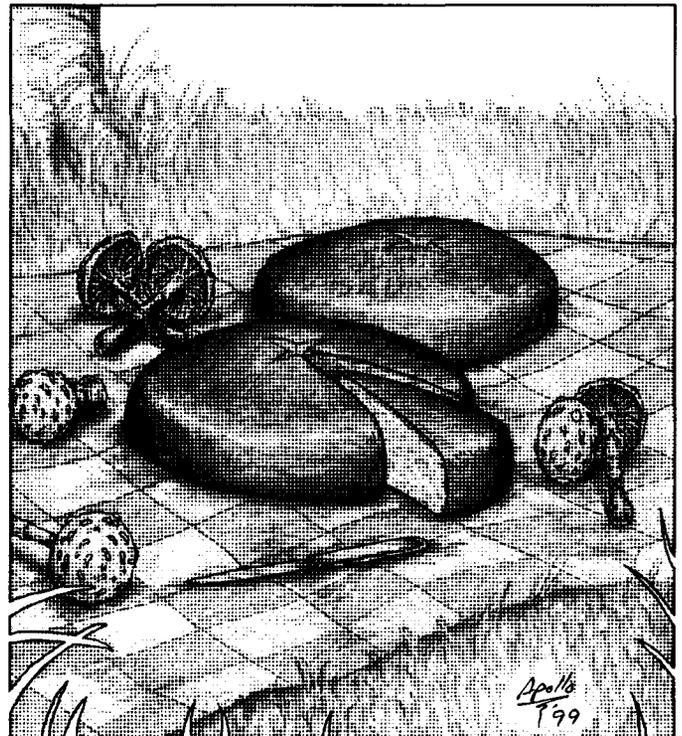
This is a large, purple root, from a large, leafy bush. The plant is found only in shaded areas. It is picked, mashed then dried into a coarse powder. The powder is reconstituted in water, then drunk. The drink serves as a powerful herbal healing potion, curing 4D6 S.D.C. or 3D6 Hit Points instantly. The drink is very vile tasting. Cost: Rare; 1000 gold per packet/dose.

Jekii

The Jekii plant is a large-leafed, parasitic vine found only on mature trees. The vine blossoms with large, 6 petaled yellow flowers in early summer. The blossoms are picked in full bloom, crushed and dried. This aromatic powder, when mixed in pure water, will remove the effects of any hallucinogenic drug or plant. It will also remove any side effects. It will not relieve any addiction symptoms, however. Cost: Rare; 1000 gold per dose.

Varst

When prepared properly, this mushroom will cure any poison or venom in the bloodstream. Varst resembles the **Portobelo** mushroom, and is very large. It is found growing in deep mulch or pine needle beds of mature forests, in shady areas. The mushrooms are picked with full caps, discarding the stems. They are then dried, and crushed into a coarse, black powder, which is ingested or sprinkled onto a poisoned wound. The wound must be opened up to expose the poisoned area if the Varst cannot be ingested. If ingested, the poison is eliminated immediately. If on the wound, it will take 1D4 melees to take effect. Unfortunately, the victim will receive normal damage from the bite or poison until the Varst takes effect. Cost: Uncommon; 300 gold per dose.



Ahan Mushrooms and Bread

This mushroom is found in shallow caves or in mulch beds. First used by forest Elves, they have developed a journey bread yielding high nutritional value made from the Ahan mushroom. Picked, dried and ground into a coarse flour, it is incorporated into a rich, nutty tasting bread. One slice provides enough nourishment for normal travel for one day. In some areas, a fresh stew of these mushrooms is a delicacy. Cost: One pound of mushrooms is worth 50 gold. Slice: 3 gold. Loaf (10 Slices): 25 gold. Stew: 5 gold.

Ironwood Tree

This large, broad leafed tree is often sought for making shields, shafts for weapons, and other items of protection. The wood is very hard, with a natural A.R. of 12. The wood requires tools using diamond cutting edges, or tools of **Dwarven, Elven** or magical quality to work the wood. To damage a shield, staff, arrow, spear, etc., made of this wood, a strike roll over the A.R. must be made. Doors, chests, safes and other items made from Ironwood also require the same strike roll to damage them. Items made of Ironwood also have one third more S.D.C. than the normal wood equivalents. Cost: Rare; 30 gold per board foot (0.3 m).

Urod Tree

This is a tall, slender tree with large, 3 pointed green and white leaves, and covered in a rough bark. The white wood yields a fragrance resembling vanilla, and is used in furniture making and carpentry projects. The tree itself is also tapped like the sugar maple, yielding a thick, white colored sap. This is a rich tasting and smelling substance, that with a slight boiling, yields a sweet, stronger tasting vanilla essence. Cost: 3 gold per pint of syrup, about 3 gold per board foot (0.3 m) for the wood.



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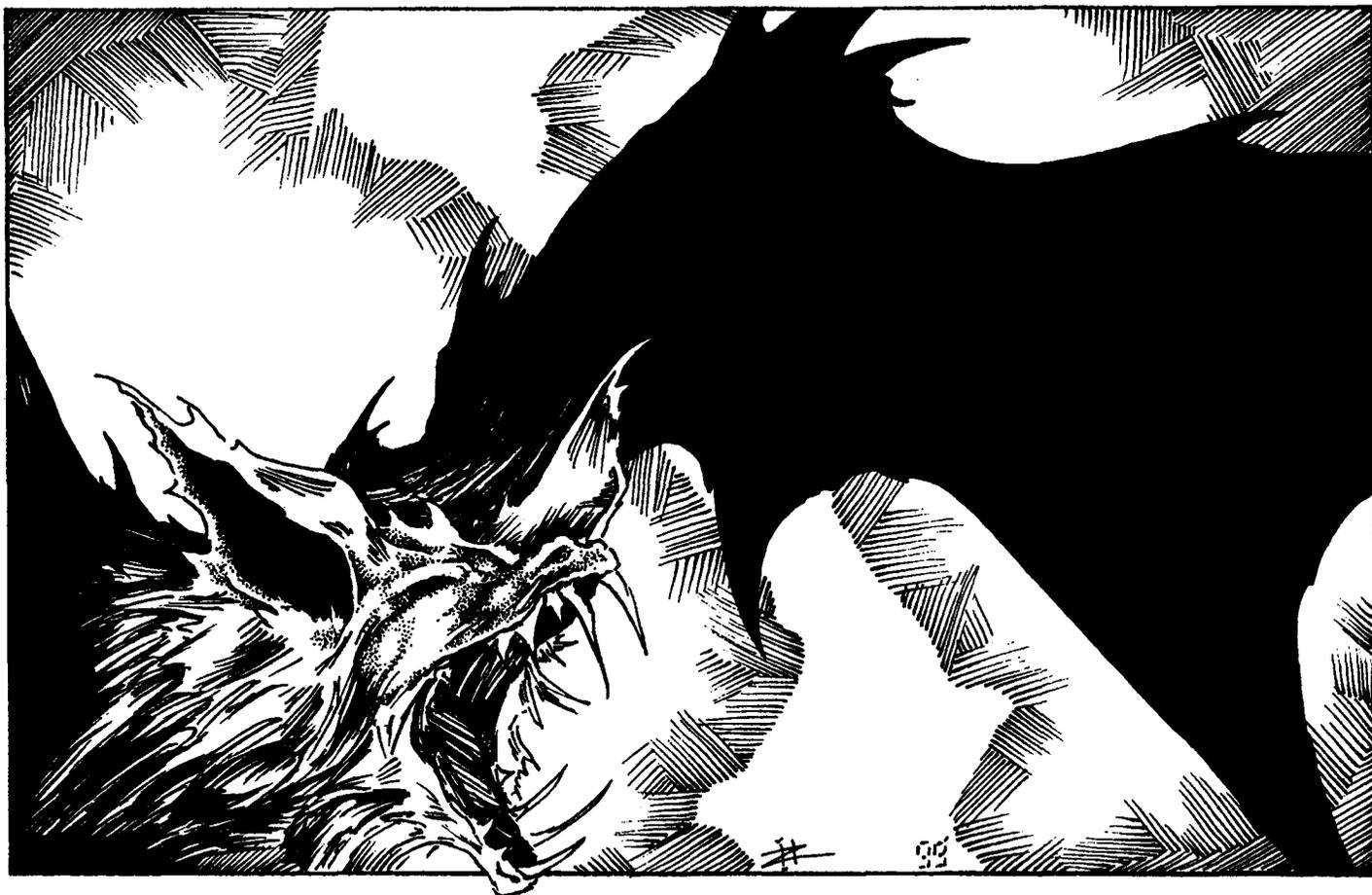
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Nightbane®



The Charonis

Optional Material for **Nightbane®**
& **Beyond the Supernatural™**

By **James M. G. Cannon**

*"The animals that constitute the Order Chiroptera have long been maligned in western society. The little, weird looking nocturnal mammals have been **demonized** for ages, identified with the Devil and Vampires during more superstitious times, and even now, in the so-called Age of Reason, they are believed to be tainted with rabies, despite the extreme rarity of the disease within any population of the creatures. You will more easily find a rabid skunk than a rabid bat. Indeed, bats are anything but harm-*

*ful; most of them are insectivores, and they dine for hours every night on the biting insects that annoy humans during the day. **Tiny**, with poor eyesight, the bat is anything but the servant of the Devil.*

*"But I have seen the creatures that have rightfully given rise to every horrifying myth and cautionary tale concerning bat-kind. I have met the Charonis, and only I have survived to tell the **tale**."*

— **Brian Donahue, parapsychologist**

Lycanthropes are not a populous species. The various strains of their genera are scattered throughout the globe, and only four varieties exist with any substantial numbers. These are the famous werewolves, and the slightly less well known **werebears**,

weretigers, and **werejaguars**. Other varieties of **Lycanthropes** are claimed to exist, including **weresharks**, **werecrocodiles**, and **weresnakes**, but such creatures are so rarely encountered that their existence is doubted by even the most learned **arcanists**.

But there is one strain of the **Lycanthrope** family, long whispered of but never seen, that has recently come to light, thanks to the dogged determination of the Boston-based **parapsychologist** Brian **Donahue** and his team of investigators. **Donahue** labored for decades in an attempt to track down the elusive figures, ignoring the jibes of his colleagues who considered his task a futile one. Despite their own encounters with vampires, werewolves, and demons from beyond the pale, they scoffed at **Donahue's** attempts to locate the fabled wererat.

But **Donahue** persevered, and nine months ago, he and his team penetrated the jungles of South East Asia in an attempt to locate the elusive creature. After two decades of research, and chasing down false leads, **Donahue** finally came face to face with his quarry. The wererats, however, did not wish to be found, and they nearly destroyed **Donahue's** expedition. Only the appearance of a more bizarre race of creatures, humanoid insects known as **Kumongas**, saved **Donahue** and his crew. The wererats transferred their rage at **Donahue** to the **Kumongas**, and **Donahue** and his companions aided the wererats against the insects. So impressed were the wererats by the valor of the humans that they spared their lives, though most tragically died battling the **Kumongas**. Only **Donahue** and his wife survived the attack, and his wife perished days later as the terrible wounds took their toll.

For a short while, **Donahue** lived among the **wererats**, and they gradually came to trust him. They willingly shared some of their secrets with him, and he in turn offered information that they might **find** useful in their bloody war against the **Kumongas**. What follows is a condensed version of **Donahue's** report, touching upon what we feel are the most important discoveries **Donahue** made.

It should be noted that this is one of the most complete documents we have concerning any of the Lycanthropic species, and that alone is a stunning achievement. The added fact that this information concerns a race of Lycanthropes long assumed to be fictional even by our august body makes this information doubly important.

The Charonis

The wererats are a secretive folk, never fond of humans, Faerie, or even other Lycanthropes. They prefer the wild places, where they can live apart from those who would persecute or enslave them. As well, in the wilderness they can avoid the taint of technology and civilization with which humans have ruined the Earth, and can locate and live near the nexuses of ley lines.

The Charonis are all hunters and predators, subsisting largely on hunted game, though they will occasionally supplement their diet with vegetable matter. Charonis prefer animals for subsistence, but they are not averse, in lean times, to hunting humans and eating them.

Charonis gather together in family groups, typically numbering from ten to fifteen. Semi-nomadic, they usually travel in a seasonal round which brings them to the same **location(s)** each season. They will usually have a summer roost and a winter roost, and will relocate during other seasons only rarely. Though they prefer to travel great distances in Swarm or Beast form, they will

occasionally travel incognito, disguised as humans (this practice is usually done following a breeding season). Wererats traveling as humans will disguise themselves appropriately, often taking on the garb and habits of Roma, Bedouin, biker clubs, or other modern nomads.

Charonis are insular and fiercely loyal to their own kind. Powerful supernatural predators, they will not hesitate to kill in order to protect themselves. Indeed, their instincts often compel them to attack or kill even when that isn't the wisest or safest course to take. It was this reaction to the invading **Kumongas** that led to the extinction of two groups of wererats.

The Charonis separate themselves into **five** different families, which they refer to as "Nations." Not long ago, there existed seven Nations, but the coming of the **Kumongas** altered the fabric of Charonis society, and two of the Nations are extinct.

What follows is a brief description of each of the five Nations, including location, philosophy, and other identifying characteristics. The dead Nations are also mentioned here, though no living wererat ever speaks of the dead.

Cilistris

The wererats that make their homes in Canada and the United States are known as the Cilistris (**sill-iss-trees**). They are perhaps the most violent and deadly of the Charonis, and over the centuries they have earned the sobriquet, "the Poisoners." And justifiably so, as in Beast and Swarm form the saliva of the Cilistris functions as a virulent poison that can kill an adult male moose in minutes.

Like all Charonis, however, the Cilistris prefer to live alone, apart from humans and other Lycanthropes; apart, even, from bats. They travel north to south on their seasonal round, and can occasionally be encountered disguised as bikers.

The Cilistris are rowdy, obnoxious, and sensual. They even like drinking in bars, dancing in nightclubs, and experimenting with various illegal substances which have negligible effects on their supernatural metabolism. Cilistris partake in such activities only rarely, however, as they prefer the rapidly shrinking wide open spaces and wastes of North America to the cramped and dirty cities and towns.

The Cilistris do not concern themselves with weighty matters. The most they worry about is where their next meal is coming from, or where they are going to score some drugs. They live for the moment, never planning ahead, preferring to stumble through life one step at a time. This can get them into trouble, and often leads to conflict with humans or other sentients who, more often than not, find themselves at the mercy of the wererats.

Variation: Cilistris wererats produce a virulent poison in place of their saliva. Slightly acidic, the solution does no harm to the bearer, but can function as ordinary saliva in addition to the damage it causes to anything the Cilistris clamps its teeth on while hunting or brawling. Simply applying the poisonous saliva to flesh causes **1D4** points of damage and burns severely. If a Cilistris is able to get its teeth on an exposed patch of flesh, creating a wound, the poison will enter the victim's bloodstream. The victim must then make a saving throw versus lethal poison (14) at -2; if the save is made, he or she suffers **4D6** points of damage. If the save is failed, that **4D6** points is taken *directly from Hit Points*.



Kunocomb

The **werebats** of Africa are an odd lot. Less savage than their cousins in the **Americas** or Asia, and with much more room to move around, the Kunocomb (**kyoon-oh-comb**) **Charonis** have been able to hide more effectively from the rest of the world and have dedicated themselves to pursuits more esoteric than simple survival. Less obsessed with the physical, the Kunocomb are masters of the mental and mystic arts.

These pursuits have led the Kunocomb to a more philosophical regard for their environment, and the creatures with which they share the land. It is not uncommon, for example, to see a Kunocomb living in harmony with human beings, or allying itself with a **werepanther**. By exploring within themselves, Kunocomb lose their prejudices for the world outside, and, indeed, they are the werebats most interested in the Charonis as a whole, rather than simply concerning themselves with the affairs of their own Nation. To that end, they are quite concerned about their new enemies the Kumongas, and are attempting to unify the five remaining Nations to defeat the aliens.

This state of affairs has many monster hunters and **parapsychologists** worried.

The Kunocomb are the werebats most frequently encountered on the Astral Plane, and they excel at Astral Magic. Those who are psionically gifted are typically attuned to the Astral as well, though a number evidence proficiency with the **Dreamstream**. The Kunocomb use these otherworldly realms to traverse the vast distances that separate their race from one another, so that they can easily communicate and unify.

Variation: All werebats of the Kunocomb nation are gifted with magical or psionic abilities. About 60% of them are equal to a Mystic in knowledge, with 30% showing aptitude as Astral Mages. Of the remaining 10% of the Kunocomb population, 1% will be psionically attuned to the Dreamstream, while the rest will be Astral psionists.

Magyars

Magyars represent the average Charonis, and are perhaps the "primary" nation from which all the others branched off thousands of years ago.

Wherever the Magyars themselves arose, they eventually settled down in the mountains and valleys of Eastern Europe and the western steppes of Russia. There they have lived for several thousand years, hiding in the shadows of their more famous cousins, the werewolves. Never populous, the Magyars maintained their culture and identity tenuously, and often at great cost. The werewolves of the region considered themselves the lords of the area, and considered the Magyars invaders. The werewolves tolerated their presence usually, demanding tribute on occasion, or else culling the numbers of the Magyars in brutal orgies of violence.

Still, the Magyars persevered, and **they** survived well into the twentieth century, into a time when even the mighty werewolves were forced to acknowledge the power of humanity, and suffered for their pride in previous centuries. The werebats hid as humans eliminated werewolves in great purges during the 50s and 60s.

But now, the Kumongas have arrived, and the werebats are once more an oppressed people, under siege and suffering the attacks of a far more superior force. Desperate, the Magyars are looking for allies just about **anywhere** they can get them, and are even looking to their former taskmasters the werewolves for help.

A number of Magyars have even entered into the servitude of a few vampire nobles in search of protection, though the relationship is a far cry from that the **Zotzola** share with vampires.

Variation: None as such; Magyars are entirely average as werebats go.

Tenguso

The bats found in the jungles of India and South East Asia are among the largest bats on Earth, and the Charonis who dwell in these areas are similarly endowed with great size, as well as strength and other physical attributes that are much greater than those of other werebats.

The Tenguso (ten-goo-sew) are dedicated to the physical world, and they are a sensual people who enjoy all manner of earthly delights. They work hard at keeping their bodies trim and fit, exercising long hours and practicing and learning varieties of unarmed combat, preferring those martial arts with earthly philosophies over those with more ascetic outlooks.

Indeed, the Tenguso are far from ascetic. Bombastic, loud voiced, enthusiastic, and given to much hugging, touching and partying, the Tenguso are a very physical people. They live for the moment, always attempting to squeeze as much excitement as possible into that moment. They particularly consider the hunt a time of great excitement. They hunt humans primarily, though they occasionally dare each other to challenge other, more dangerous game like weretigers, vampires, dybbuks, demons, spirits, or wizards. Challenges of this or any other sort are not offered or accepted lightly, as an individual werebat's rank within Tenguso society depends a great deal on one's physical accomplishments. Bands are most often led by those who exhibit great skill in martial or amorous arts, by those who are gourmands or sports enthusiasts.

The Tenguso tend to ignore the Kunocomb, disliking them as "mystic moralists," and likewise dismiss most sorcerers, **arcanists**, and scientists as worthless. Anyone with great physical or martial prowess, however, the Tenguso offer respect to, though they might also consider that being a worthy opponent to test their own skills upon.

Variation: Tenguso are more physically powerful than other Charonis, adding an extra 1D6 to their rolls for P.S., P.P., P.E., and Spd. In addition, the Tenguso are all versed in martial arts; each Tenguso possesses the equivalent of the Hand to Hand: Martial Arts skill. If **Ninjas & Superspies** is available, the G.M. might consider giving the Tenguso access to the martial arts in that volume. They will gravitate toward the physical forms of unarmed combat, ignoring most with Chi or **Atemi** abilities in favor of sheer power.

Zotzola

The werebats of Mexico and Central America are known as the **Zotzola** (**zhatz-oh-la**), and many consider them to be **the** most fearsome of all the nations of the werebats. The **Zotzola** are not really much more savage than other Charonis, but most consider them as such for one simple reason: the **Zotzola** are vampires.

They are not related to the Vampire Intelligences or the undead that they breed, but the **Zotzola** transform into vampire bats, and subsist by ingesting the blood of animals (and, occasionally, humans). The **Zotzola** primarily subsist on livestock such as cattle and goats, and their nocturnal hunting activities have given rise to legends of a mysterious creature known as *la chupacabra*,

the "goatsucker." When pressed, **Zotzola** will dine on the blood of humans, but they prefer animals.

In the past century, the bands of **Zotzola** in Mexico have made an alliance with a Vampire Intelligence known as **Kreed**. The **Zotzola** serve as shock troops and daytime protectors for the growing undead legions of **Kreed**, and in return, the vampires are helping the **Zotzola** resist the advances of the **Kumongas**. There exists a great deal of mistrust on both sides, but in a short amount of time they have achieved a frightening amount of their goals together; the **Kumongas** are virtually unknown within Mexico and Central America, while the vampires are expanding at an almost geometric rate. And though the werebats and the vampires get their nutrients the same way, they feed on different populations; the vampires hunt humans, while the werebats stick to livestock.

It's a match made in Hell, and only innocents will suffer.

Variation: **Zotzola** need blood to survive; like the vampire, the **Zotzola** digestive system is designed to process the blood of living creatures exclusively. **Zotzola** do not need and do not like solid food or drink, preferring to drink the blood of animals, or, in desperate times, the blood of humans. As living creatures themselves, however, **Zotzola** need to drink more blood than a vampire does; the average **Zotzola** needs about 10 pints of blood per night, which usually means they have to feed off a few goats or cows each evening. If they do not get the food they need, they will suffer from the same hunger pangs vampires do (see **Rifts® World Book One: Vampire Kingdoms™**, or the **Nightbane® Main Book**), and may go into a frenzy if denied for too long.

Most **Zotzola** also have a **vampiric** ally or patron, and more than a few dabble in **Necromancy**, **Fleshsculpting**, and other dark arts.

Monamma

The **Monamma** used to inhabit South America, but the **Kumongas** have all but eradicated them. A few pockets of **Monamma** werebats may yet exist, but most **Charonis** consider them lost to the ages. In truth, where the **Monamma** are concerned, few of the **Charonis** have bothered to shed any tears. The **Monamma** have an old reputation as cruel and monstrous creatures with a taste for torture; they hunted humans almost exclusively. Large, powerfully built, and **unredeemably** evil, the **Monamma**, it was whispered, had made a pact with some kind of Alien Intelligence, perhaps one of the great Old Ones themselves, in return for unfathomable power. However, that power had perverted the **Monamma**, twisting them into mockeries of **Lycanthropes**.

Luckily, as many **Charonis** see it, the **Kumongas** arrived and saved them the trouble of having to eradicate the **Monamma** themselves. Instead, the **Kumongas** have hunted them down and destroyed every last one of the **Monamma**.

Or so it is believed.

The dark patron of the **Monamma**, whatever it may be, intervened in the last moment, and saved about 300 of them. But the price it exacted was severe: the remaining **Monamma** have become the agents of that dark patron, body and soul. They have become undead.

Variation: The 300 **Monamma** still extant on Earth are some of the strangest creatures ever to call the globe home. They are no longer alive, transformed by eldritch energies into undead **Lycanthropic** mockeries of living creatures.

The **Monamma** no longer fear silver, and are immune to its power. However, fire has now become anathema to them, and their bodies actually burn like wood, catching afire and burning until the fire is put out or the fuel (in this case, the **Monamma's** flesh) is exhausted. In game terms, flames do double damage, and any damage inflicted by flame cannot be bio-regenerated. However, the **Monamma's** natural bio-regenerative abilities have become more powerful, and they can heal wounds inflicted by magic or other supernatural creatures (their only other vulnerabilities) at the rate of 2D6 Hit Points per melee round.

Most **frighteningly**, the **Monamma** are able to expand their ranks in the manner of the **Lycanthropes** of legend. Any human who dies at the hands of a **Monamma**, or loses more than 75% of his S.D.C. and Hit Points in battle against a **Monamma**, will be transformed into one of the horrid beasts himself, thereafter becoming an **NPC** controlled by the G.M. Memories of the new **Monamma's** past life tend to be fuzzy, but they usually remember their friends and loved ones, and decide to share their condition with them as soon as possible.

Todasa

The **Todasa** (**toe-dah-sah**) of Australia and Oceania are no more, eradicated entirely by the **Kumongas**. **Unfortunately**, no eleventh hour savior appeared to rescue them from destruction, and they have truly passed into the realm of legend **forevermore**.

Perhaps it is a fitting end, for the **Todasa** themselves were the bards and poets of the **Charonis**, the keepers of legend and lore for centuries untold. With their passing, the combined knowledge and wisdom of several thousand years has been lost.

The Wererat

A supernatural predator, not recommended as a player character.

Alignment: Any, tend towards evil or Anarchist.

Attributes: I.Q.: 3D6, M.E.: 3D6, M.A.: 3D6, P.S.: 3D6, P.P.: 3D6, P.E.: 3D6, P.B.: 3D6, Spd.: 3D6; In Beast form, add 2D6 to each of the physical attributes and 1D6 to M.E., and the Beast can fly with a Spd. of 1D4x10+10.

Horror Factor: 14 in Beast form, 12 as a Swarm.

Hit Points: 4D6+P.E., +2D6 per level.

Natural Armor Rating: Like the vampire, the wererat is invulnerable to virtually all weapons, including energy weapons, explosives, bullets, fire, wood, and **poison/drugs**. However, also like vampires, wererats are vulnerable to ordinary silver. Weapons that have at least a 50% silver content inflict double damage. Thus a silver plated dagger, which normally inflicts 1D6 S.D.C. damage, inflicts 2D6 directly to the wererat's Hit Points. Although wererats possess bio-regenerative powers, they are nothing like the vampire's so being bludgeoned or stabbed by silver can kill the creature. Also, the wererat is vulnerable to magic and psionics as well as the natural attack forms of other supernatural creatures.

P.P.E.: 1D6x10+10

I.S.P.: 5d6

Natural Abilities: Speak while in animal shape, prowl 90%, swim 50%, track by smell 70%, nightvision 100 feet (30.5 m), and bio-regeneration: restores Hit Points at a rate of 2D6 H.P. each minute (every four rounds), navigation (+15%), track animals (+20%).

Shape Changing Power: Werebats are able to transform into three distinct forms. The first is that of an ordinary human; the second is a monstrous humanoid bat; the third is a swarm of bats. Each **transformation** takes about 15 seconds (one melee round) to complete. However, the Werebat must shift to the intermediary Beast form if he or she is changing from Swarm to human or vice versa. There is no limit to the number of times the Werebat can shift form.

In Beast or Swarm form, the werebat can utilize Sonar to observe its environment, making up for the creature's poor eyesight. The Werebat emits an ultrasonic cry, which has a range of 500 feet (152 m) + 100 feet (30.5 m) per level, and enables the werebat to:

Interpret Shapes: 65% + 5% per level

Estimate Distance: 75% +4% per level

Estimate Direction: 75% +4% per level

Estimate Speed: 55% 44% per level

Estimate Exact **Location**: 60% + 5% per level

The werebat also enjoys the following bonuses: 44 to initiative, 42 to parry/dodge, 42 to strike, gains one additional attack per melee, cannot be blinded, and suffers no penalties in darkness.

Bonuses and percentages are cut in half in foul weather such as rain or snow storms, and the Sonar is all but useless in snow or dust storms.

Magic: None unless a practicing mage.

Psionics: Standard.

Combat: 2 additional attacks when in Beast form.

Bonuses: 41 on initiative, 42 to strike and parry, 43 to dodge, 41 to pull punch, 42 to roll with impact, 46 to save vs Horror Factor, 42 to save vs psionics, 42 to save vs magic.

Damage:

Claw (Beast) 2D6

Restrained Claw (Beast) 1D6

Power Claw (Beast) 4D6 (counts as 2 attacks)

Kick/Foot Swipe (Beast) 4D6

Bite (Beast) 3D6

Bite (Swarm) 1D4

Wing-Swipe (Beast) 4D6

Note: All claw and bite attacks inflict full damage to the H.P. of vampires and other Werebeasts.

Average Life Span: 75 years.

Enemies: Humans, Kumongas, and other Lycanthropes.

Allies: The occasional vampire or Vampire Intelligence.

Size: 6 feet (1.8 m) tall on average as a human; in Beast form, they swell to well over eight feet (2.4 m) tall, with a twenty foot (6.1 m) wingspan. In Swarm form, they are the average length of a normal bat.

Weight: Average human when in that form. The Werebat doubles his or her weight in Beast form, while the combined weight of the Swarm is equal to the weight of the human form (and since the average bat weighs in at less than an ounce, the Swarm form can be quite impressive).

Appearance: As humans, they look normal, though they are often nearsighted and need to wear corrective lenses; they also favor sunglasses if active during the day. In Beast form, hair explodes across the body, the face twists into a bat-like visage with huge ears, small eyes, and a large jaw brimming with teeth; the last three fingers of each hand elongate and skin stretches between them as the arms become massive wings;

the legs and feet grow as well, and each foot extends into a vicious claw; the entire body becomes massively muscled. In Swarm form, the Werebat appears as dozens of ordinary bats screeching and flying.

Habitat: Excellent survivors, the Werebats could at one time be found on every continent except Antarctica. They prefer the wild places wherever they live, however.

The Kumongas

The deadly new enemy of the **Charonis**, and of humanity, known as the Kumongas, are a virtually unknown equation. Very little information regarding the Kumongas is available, and what little is known is woefully incomplete.

The Kumongas are an insectoid race, apparently related to the praying mantis, with tall, chitin covered bodies, bulging insect eyes, antennae, a segmented body including a head, thorax, and abdomen, four arms with one pair ending in three-fingered hands and another pair ending in cruel pincers, and a large beak projecting from their faces, from which they generate ululating cries.

The Kumongas have apparently reached Earth from the Astral Plane, fueling rumors that they are natives of that dimension. However, it seems more likely that the Kumongas are not natives of the Astral, but simply using it as a means to connect their home world and Earth. Many ask why they have come to Earth at all, and no answers are as yet forthcoming. However, **Donahue** conjectures that the Kumongas may be fleeing some sort of instability or enemy common on their homeworld, and are settling Earth because their own world has become uninhabitable.

And what, many wonder, happens if the force the Kumongas are fleeing follows them to Earth?

No one knows much about **Kumonga** social organization or culture, though it seems likely that, as insects and apparently social creatures, they come from some sort of hive, which would suggest the existence of a queen or queens. This is pure conjecture, however.

Brian Donahue, who has so recently unearthed a wealth of information regarding the Charonis, has decreed the Kumongas as his next "conquest." We hope he survives his search for enlightenment.

The Kumongas

A supernatural monster, not recommended as a player character.

Alignment: Any evil.

Attributes: I.Q.: 2D6, M.E.: 4D6, M.A.: 3D6, P.S.: 4D6, P.P.: 3D6, P.E.: 5D6, P.B.: 1D6, Spd.: 4D6.

Horror Factor: 16

Hit Points: P.E. 4 1D6 per level.

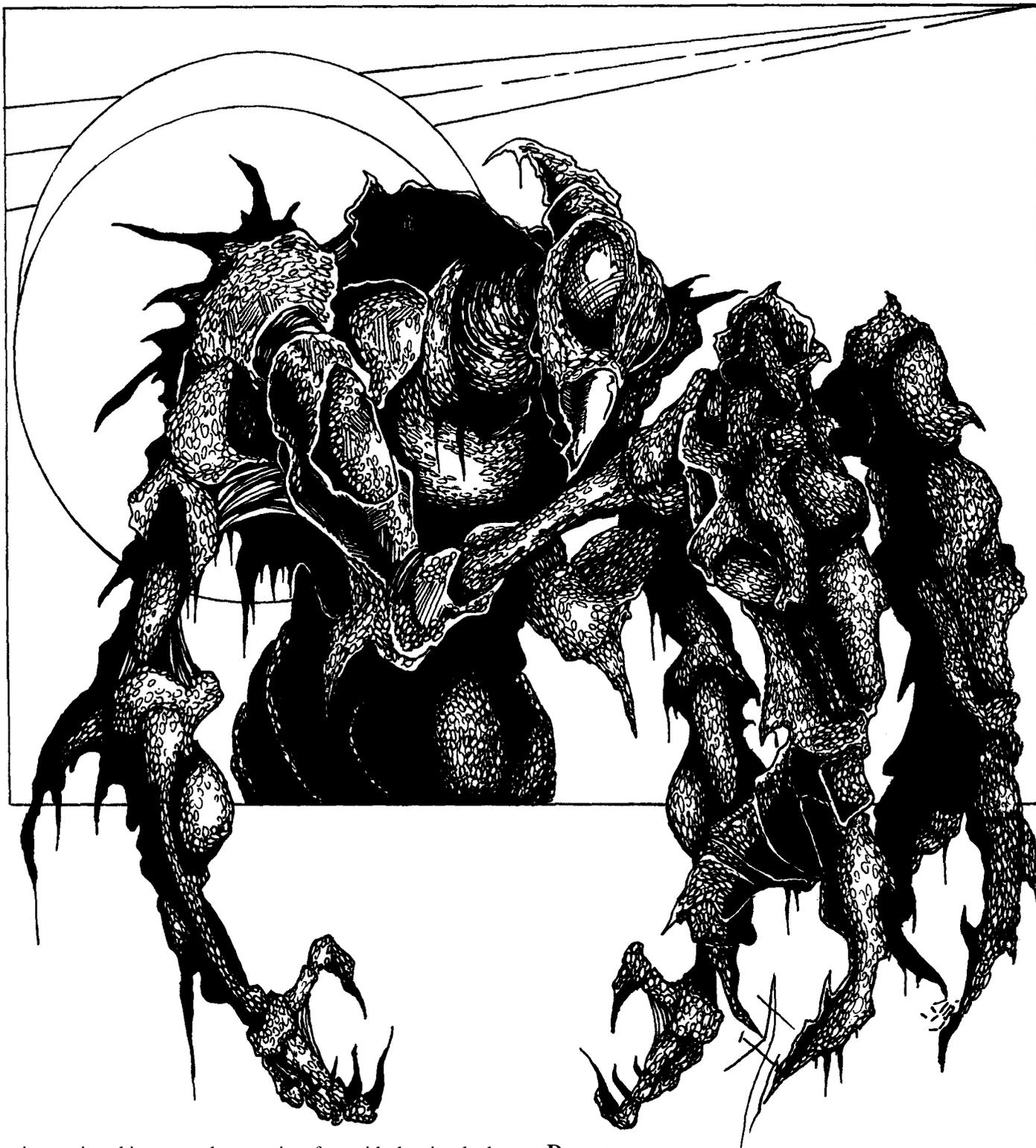
S.D.C.: 2D4x10410

Natural Armor Rating: 14; the chitinous skin of the Kumongas can deflect most small arms, and is particularly resistant to explosives; they suffer half-damage from all explosives even if they penetrate the A.R.

P.P.E.: 1D4x10

I.S.P.: 1D6x10

Natural Abilities: Supernatural strength and endurance, night vision 500 feet (152 m), leap 30 feet (9.1 m) in one bound, and the ability to communicate **ultrasonically** with their antennae;



in practice, this means they can interfere with the signals the **Charonis** pick up with their Sonar, making that ability all but useless. There are rumors that the Kumongas possess other powers associated with their antennae, but more research in this area is needed.

Magic: None to start, though many Kumongas pick up Astral or **Biomantic** abilities, and any sorcerous Kumongas will be Astral Mages or **Biomancers**.

Psionics: Standard.

Combat: 2 attacks per melee in addition to any gained from skills.

Bonuses: +4 save vs poison or mind control, +1 to initiative, +2 to strike and parry, +1 to dodge, +2 vs Horror Factor.

Damage:

Claw 1D4

Pincer 3D6

Restrained Pincer 2D6

Power Pincer Strike 1D4x10 (counts as 2 attacks)

Body Block 2D4

Bite 2D4

Kick 2D6

Note: All claw and pincer attacks inflict full damage to the H.P. of vampires, **Werebeasts**, and other supernatural creatures.

Average Life Span: Unknown.

Enemies: Werabats, vampires, humans, and other **Lycanthropes**.

Allies: None.

Size: Slightly larger than a human on average, a bit more than six feet (1.8 m), though never taller than seven feet (2.1 m).

Weight: 200 to 300 lbs (90-135 kg).

Appearance: A hulking humanoid insect with segmented eyes, antennae, and four gruesome arms, one pair ending in wickedly curved pincers that resemble those of a praying mantis. Their legs bend forwards at the **knee**, giving them the appearance of hunching over even when standing at attention.

Habitat: Appear to prefer tropical to sub-tropical climates, but are apparently comfortable in all kinds of weather.

The Laughing Man R.C.C.

By James Calder

An optional R.C.C. for use with **Beyond the Supernatural™** or **Nightbane®**.

I knew my brother was evil. He was very evil, but he was my brother and he needed help. I ran down to the village in hopes of finding Charles the healer. "Charles!" I yelled upon reaching his door, "Charles! Please hurry, my brother is ill!" Charles Chaumontaine was one of the founding fathers of our village, Chaumont, in northeast France. Charles had been, it was said, gifted with a healing touch and could cure most maladies with a slight touch and some minor concentration.

The light in the top floor of the house came on and almost simultaneously Charles' son, Jean, opened the door. "What is it, Madeleine?"

"Oh, Jean. It is Claude. He is very ill and is unable to speak. Please ask your father to come to our cottage."

"I will not. Your brother has done so much with his magic that I swear —" Just then, Charles came to the door and interrupted his son, "Where is your brother, Madeleine?"

The three of us ran to our cottage in the country just outside Chaumont. My brother had a rather evil reputation in Chaumont and in France in general. Since the Revolution, my brother had dabbled in some of the more evil of the arcane arts, after finding our father's ancient tome of Necromantic sorceries. I thought it mostly academic, but then, well, it is hard to explain.

When we arrived at the cottage, my brother was screaming curses and profanities at the top of his lungs. I waited outside with Jean, who watched with great disdain.

"It would do our village a great service if your brother were to die. My father should not help him."

I looked at the ground because I could not dispute the atrocities of nature my brother had committed. He wove magic spells that would sometimes stricken children with diseases and ruin the crops. The villagers were mostly scared of him but I knew Charles would help; he always helped whomever was hurting. No sooner had I finished that thought than the screaming ceased, only to be followed by a deep, bellowing laugh. Jean looked first at the door to our cottage, then to me.

We rushed through the door and into the back bedroom where my brother lay, still. Blood stained his chest in slashes. "Oh my ..." I shuddered. Jean looked at the body and then at the now opened window. Jean stared at the face of his father, contorted

into an evil grin that sent shivers down his son's spine. Charles just started laughing and then ran off, never to be seen again.

The Laughing Man is a psychic aberration. Once a psychic healer, the Laughing Man is a psychotic killer out to cleanse the world of evil. The once benign nature of the human is overshadowed by the fact that he or she is now a despicable supernatural predator.

Parapsychologists and other psychic investigators theorize that a Laughing Man originates as a psychic healer who attempts to heal a thoroughly evil, usually **supernaturally** evil, individual. While probing for the affliction or disease, the healer is made to witness the swirling chaos and evil that resides in that victim. Some say, the healer is literally driven mad and becomes this vile creature. Other say that the healer, once a champion for light and healing, becomes (in their own insane vision) a cleanser of this evil that they perceive is in everybody.

In any event, this creature targets individuals (any individual, good or evil) for cleansing. The attack begins by first observing the "poor deluded soul" and devising the proper method of cleansing. The usual choice is to first cause the victim to begin laughing (see the ability description below). This is the Laughing Man's way of helping since laughter, he believes, can cure all perceived maladies, including evil. Then, a more mundane method for killing the victim will be performed, such as using a knife or sword (never a firearm), to strip the victim clean of evil. The victim will be laughing the entire time the cleansing is being performed.

These creatures are intelligent, but not reasonable. They can not be persuaded out of the deed they are "destined" to perform. Once a victim is selected, the Laughing Man will kill them. There are reports, however, of a Laughing Man actually healing people who had not been designated as victims, and then going on to kill their target. There are also horrifying tales of Laughing Men healing their intended victims only to slash them and bring them close to death several times before killing them outright.

G.M.'s option: When a psychic healer character attempts to heal a creature of intense or supernatural evil (a vampire, a werewolf, a Necromancer, etc.), there is a 5% chance that the character in question will become an unthinking Laughing Man.

Abilities of the Laughing Man:

1. Induce Laughter (NEW Psychic Healing Ability)

Range: Touch or within 10 feet (3 m).

Duration: 4D4 minutes.

I.S.P.: 8

Saving Throw: Standard.

The psychic is able to inflict one of the worst physical traumas upon a victim: uncontrollable laughter. The character will not be able to carry on any tasks while in this fit of laughter. The laughter begins (not in the duration) as a short giggle and then mounts to huge belly laughs. Victims will be unable to figure out why they are laughing, but will know that they cannot stop. The victim automatically loses initiative and cannot participate in combat. Skills are performed at -50% during the duration of the attack. Note: The G.M. may make this ability available to any psychic character.

2. Invading Terror Laugh: The Laughing Man (because this creature was a healer) is able to probe deep within the core and psyche of others. As a result, the Laughing Man can begin laughing and this laughter will send chills down the spines of those who listen. The Laughing Man will have an effective Horror Factor of 9 while laughing. Often, the Laughing Man will induce laughter into intended victims and then begin laughing himself. This can bring about the effect of the victim being both stuck in a fit of hysterical laughter at the same time as being terrified to death (almost literally).

3. Heal Self: Unlike normal psychic healers, the Laughing Man can use his psychic healing abilities on himself. In addition, the Laughing Man is not affected by Horror Factor (never scared) and is +8 to save vs. possession, +4 to save vs. mind altering drugs, +4 to save vs. **poison/toxins**, +1 to save vs. magic, +15% to save vs. **coma/death**, and is considered a master psionic, needing a 10 or higher to save vs. psychic attacks. These bonuses are in addition to attribute bonuses.

The Laughing Man R.C.C.

Alignments: Diabolic only. These characters, though once possibly good, are far too evil and insane to be anything but Diabolic.

Not recommended as a player character (non-player character villain). If the G.M. does allow the creation of the Laughing Man as a player character, create a normal psychic healer and add the abilities listed above.

The Eight Attributes: As per normal human (3D6 per attribute).
S.D.C.: 4D6

Hit Points: P.E. + 1D6 per level of experience.

Horror Factor: None; 9 while laughing.

P.P.E.: 1D6

Natural Abilities: The Laughing Man has the above abilities plus the psionics listed below, but no other natural abilities.

Combat: Two hand to hand attacks plus those possessed prior to the tainting transformation.

Damage: Same as humans.

Bonuses: See above bonuses.

Insanity: The Laughing Man is a sociopath, obsessed with the destruction of evil, which he views as the ultimate disease, but sees in nearly everyone.

Magic Powers: None.

Psionic Powers: In addition to those listed above, the Laughing Man has the following psionic abilities: *Deaden Pain*, *Healing Touch*, *Increased Healing*, *Induce Pain*, *Induce Sleep*, *Psychic Diagnosis*, and *Psychic Surgery*. Remember, the Laughing man is a psychic healer and as such may still heal others, if only to carve out the evil it seems to see.

I.S.P.: M.E. + 6D6.

Average Life Span: Same as human.

Experience Level: The Laughing Man remains forever frozen at the level he or she was when the transformation into a psychotic killer takes place. No further progression will be made. Average level of an NPC Laughing Man will be 2D4.

Vulnerabilities/Penalties: None, but often the sounds of distress or pain will distract the Laughing Man.

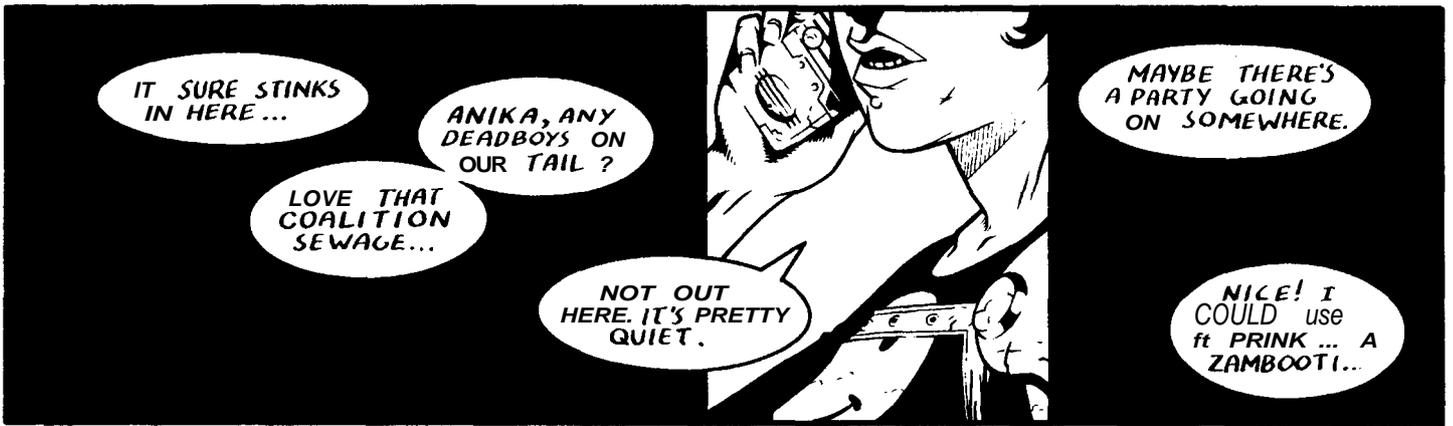
R.C.C. Skills: The Laughing Man will rarely use any skills. He will know how to speak his native language at 98% as well as basic skills like piloting an automobile, cooking, and so on. Frequently, the Laughing Man will have W.P. Knife, finding more use for a scalpel than in his previous incarnation.

Alliances and Allies: None. These once human creatures have no friends, seeing evil in all.

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IT SURE STINKS IN HERE ...

ANIKA, ANY DEADBOYS ON OUR TAIL ?

LOVE THAT COALITION SEWAGE...

NOT OUT HERE. IT'S PRETTY QUIET.

MAYBE THERE'S A PARTY GOING ON SOMEWHERE.

NICE! I COULD use ft PRINK ... A ZAMBOOTI...

chapter three  BY RAMÓN PÉREZ AND COLEEN LAXALT



IS BOWIE KEEPING AN EYE ON THE PERIMETER ?

YEAH.

SAY, DID I THANK YOU GUYS?

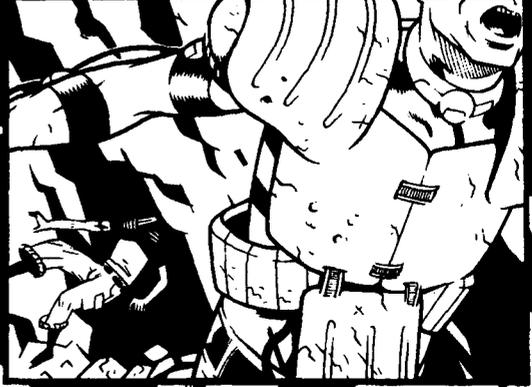
THANK US FOR WHAT?

LEAVING ME OUT HERE TO BABYSIT THE FREAK. THANKS A LOT.



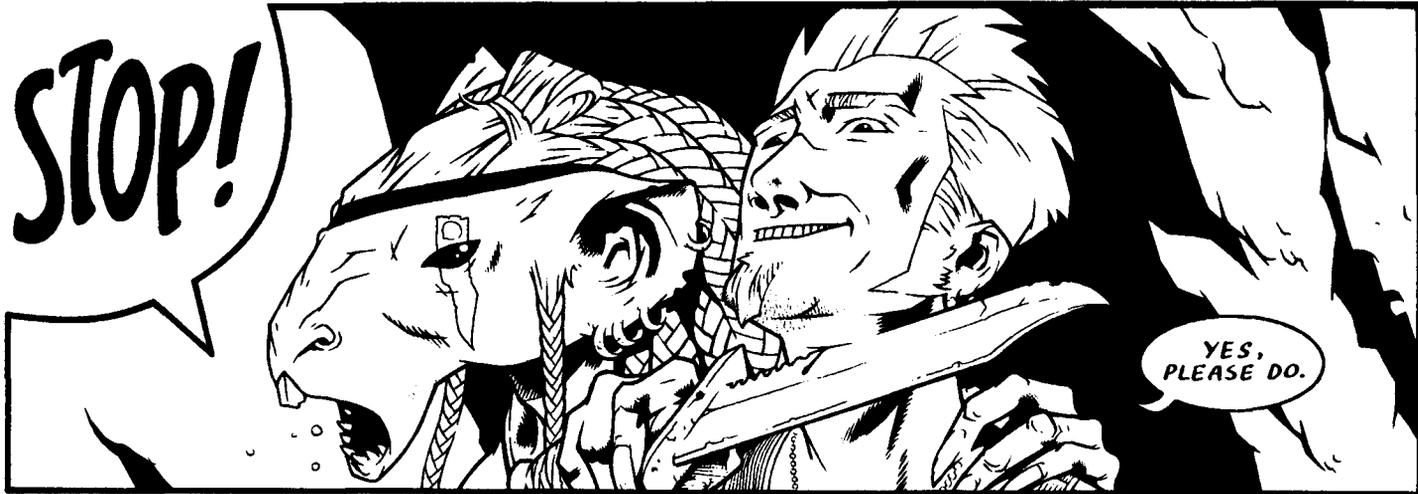
MOSES, SOME LIGHT PLEASE.





GUYS!

HEY, GUYS !!





WHAT DO YOU WANT HERE?

OKAY, I'M TIRED OF THIS. SO BYE-BYE. NICE MEETING YOU. LET ME GO.

JOHNNY...

WHAT?! JUST KILL THEM!



WE NEED TO GAIN ACCESS TO THE UPPER LEVELS.

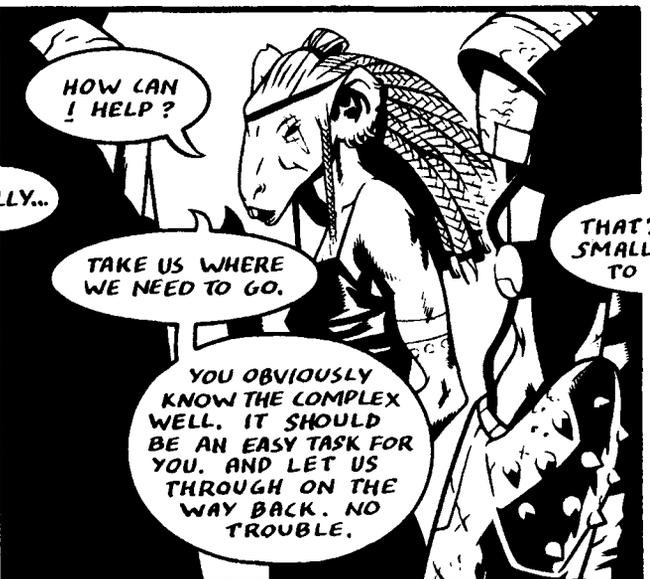
WHAT DO YOU WANT WITH THE UPPER LEVELS?

WE HAVE SOMETHING CONCERNING DOCTOR DESMOND BRADFORD.

AND WE HOPE IT IS A MEANS TO DESTROY HIM.



REALLY...



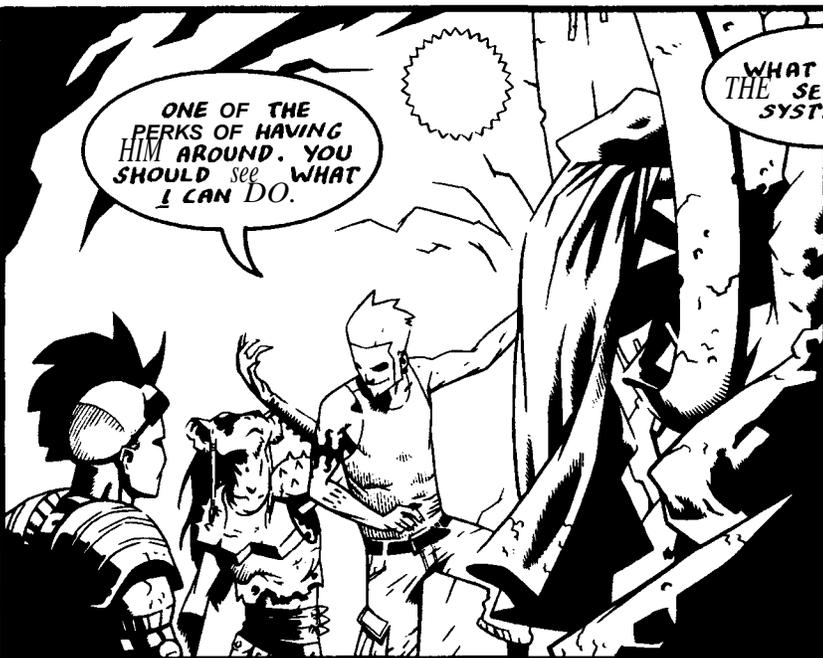
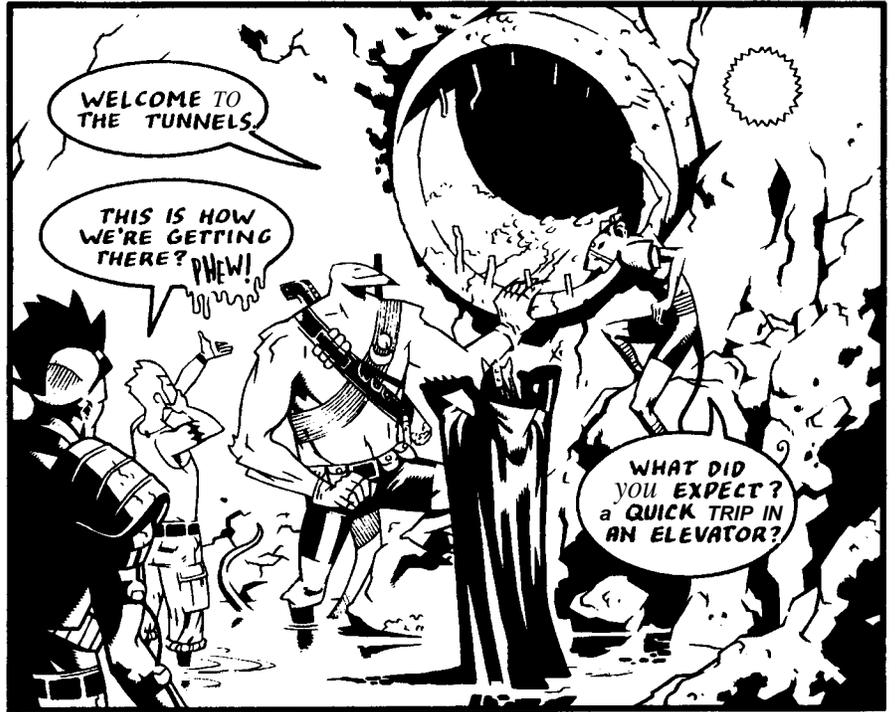
HOW CAN I HELP?

TAKE US WHERE WE NEED TO GO.

YOU OBVIOUSLY KNOW THE COMPLEX WELL. IT SHOULD BE AN EASY TASK FOR YOU. AND LET US THROUGH ON THE WAY BACK. NO TROUBLE.



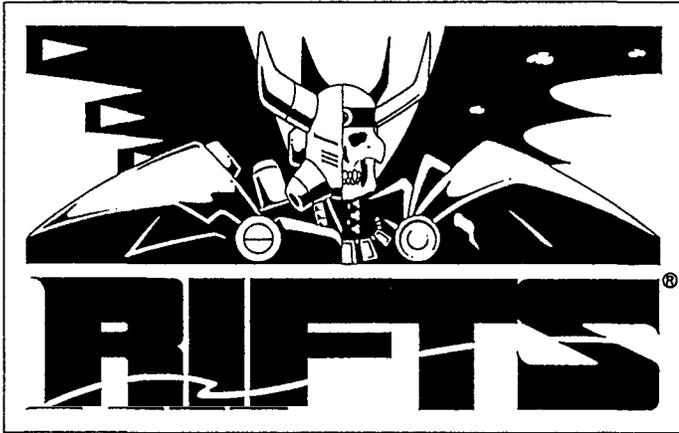
THAT'S ALL? SMALL PRICE TO PAY.







Demonwrath



An Adventure for Rifts®

By Matthew Burns

This adventure is designed for low level and beginning characters, with Monks and Demon Quellers especially in mind. It presents an excellent means to introduce Chinese, Japanese, or Russian characters. It is suggested that the players all be either members of the monastery or outsiders. A mixed group is definitely playable, but the adventure tends to get a little rough around the edges.

The Setting

On the **Russian/Chinese** border, a small, secluded mountain squats in the crisp, winter air. On the snowy peak, a red-stoned monastery sits in silence as if awaiting enlightenment. Few outsiders have ever set eyes upon the enormous monastery, and only a handful of them have entered its walls. The ground is covered in a fine frost, crunching under foot. A light snow sprinkles the roof of the monastery. Its walls are intricately carved in reverence to past heroes. A biting wind whips the fur jackets of the two Monks standing guard before the massive pair of wooden gates. Within the walls, the air is warm and dry. Sweat glistens on the skin of bare-chested Monks in loose pants tied at the waist and ankles with thin cord, training in unarmed and armed combat. Each student has a mentor, training and drilling him or her based on his or her individual strengths and weaknesses. In the next room, the training continues as Demon Quellers are taught the arts of fighting and magic. In another room, there is only darkness.

Plot

If one (or more) of the players is a Monk or Demon Queller, then that particular **character(s)** is **nearing** the end of his training. His final test shall be given to him by Master Shin himself. Master Shin, an ancient but wiry human, has mastered several types of martial arts and possesses the knowledge of magic. Thirteen years ago, Master Shin founded the monastery and began training Demon Quellers and Monks to combat the super-

natural forces pervading both Russia and China. He runs the monastery, having full say in its day to day functions, the training students receive, all rules and guidelines set down, and any relations to outsiders. Master Shin also has trained a handful of students to be his personal assistants and special agents. These few are either with Master Shin or out on assignments and do not generally associate with the general populace of the monastery.

If the player characters are all students of the monastery, then Master Shin gives the group a series of missions to complete as proof that they have reached the appropriate level of training to become full-fledged members of the monastery. The first task appointed to them is to eliminate a **Mindolar** (see **Rifts® Conversion Book**) who has amassed a network of spies and assassins on the border of Russia and China. The Mindolar, **Flill**, is hiding out in a small D-Bee village four miles (6.4 km) south of the mountain range. He has taken control of the leader of the village, a Dwarf named **Krendo**, as well as about half of the village itself. A second level human Shifter, Vir Commanc, foolishly summoned the Mindolar two weeks ago and fell under its influence mere seconds after the spell was complete. Flill is using his mind-controlled "subjects" as expendable spies and assassins. He hopes to build up a small reputation for himself and then seize control of a warlord or two.

If the players are partially or all outsiders, then the adventure begins somewhat differently. The player characters, while traveling through the area (for whatever reason, I leave it up to the G.M.) stumbles across a lone human under attack from three Oni (see **Rifts® Japan**) and in obvious need of help. After killing or chasing away the Oni, the group learns that the Chinese man is Yen Quan, a student of a monastery at the top of a mountain, which lies about a mile (1.6 km) away. Yen, quite talkative and friendly, explains that he is in training to become a full-fledged member of the monastery (Consider Yen a level 1 Demon Queller). He was running letters back and forth between the monastery and a band of Gypsies. Since the Gypsies travel so extensively, they had important information that Master Shin could use. Past that, Yen doesn't know what the notes say (they're in sealed envelopes) or what the information is, nor does he want to know bad enough to break the seal. To do so would get him kicked out of the monastery, as it would be a breach of trust.

Grateful to the extreme, the fledgling Demon Queller invites the group back to the monastery for warm food, drink, and hospitality. He is quite insistent that the group "allow me to repay my debt of gratitude." He also mentions that he believes a snowstorm is coming. On the way, Yen talks of his past and how the monastery found him, abandoned, and raised him to become a slayer of demons. He talks of his training, life in the monastery, his dedication to eliminating the evil that surrounds the monastery, and his admiration for Master Shin (If some of the members of the group are outsiders and some are students at the monastery, just substitute a player **character(s)** for Yen).

Once at the monastery gates, the players are submitted to mystical examination to ensure that they are not disguised demons.

The guards, after examining the newcomers and hearing Yen's story, allow the group inside. The player characters immediately enter a large, warm room. The floor is padded and there are weapons hanging on the walls, some wooden practice sets and some real. There doesn't appear to be any high tech weaponry in the room. It is lit by large, metal bowls filled with some sort of material similar to coal that gives off far less smoke. In the center of the room stands a glass case. On a red velvet pillow, a black sword, richly ornamented in runes, sits gloriously, as if awaiting use. Any magic users will notice the numerous spells, wards, and circles of protection surrounding the glass case. If any comment on the sword is made, Yen explains that the sword is called *Demonwrath*, that it is highly protected by magic, that they should not touch the case, and that it is lent out to only the most trusted and experienced of Master Shin's students on important missions. *Demonwrath* can only be wielded by men of good hearts and pure souls. The room is otherwise filled with students, training hard under a mentor's watchful eye. The impression one gets from the students is one of near **flawlessness**. Yen leads the group past the trainees and to a door at the back of the room. The small door opens into a hallway, leading left and right. Yen tells the group that the door at the far left end of the corridor leads to Master Shin's private rooms. To the right are the training areas for Demon Quellers. A door directly before him leads to the area where students relax, eat, and enjoy each other's company. Past that room are the living quarters, kitchens, storage rooms, and armory.

Entering the recreation area, Yen encounters his mentor, Quai Tain, who asks for his report. After a brief discussion, the stern instructor thanks the group for "assisting my inexperienced, and somewhat foolish pupil." Quai Tain takes the letter from Yen and leaves to talk with Master Shin. Yen gives the group food while they wait. The food is a mixture of rice, meat, and vegetables (some of which the group has not seen before). Quai Tain returns, informing the group that they have Master Shin's thanks for assisting Yen and asks them, in return, to enjoy the hospitality of the monastery and stay for the night. Yen provides bedrolls for any who don't have sleeping bags.

In the morning, the storm has ended and the group is summoned in the first training room to see Master Shin. Once there, Master Shin gives the group his thanks in person. He is very ceremonious and rigid, giving each member of the group a small, jeweled dagger as a present. He then turns to Yen and tells him it is time to complete his training. As the first of three tests, he must go and defeat Hill (all the aforementioned information on **Flill** is given to Yen in front of the group). Yen is warned of the creature's bite and other powers. If he chooses to back down from the mission, he may leave the monastery with his training unfinished, an exile. Master Shin explains, "No one from the *monastery* may help you," looking pointedly at the outsiders, "but if outsiders get involved, there is nothing I could, or **would**, do to prevent it. Indeed, relating to the outside world is also part of your training. Attaining outsiders' help is allowable as part of that training." If the group does not volunteer, Yen will immediately turn to them and ask their help (Note: the other two tests will not be revealed until the first is completed).

The **Mindolar** (7th level) has taken control of the small village, which only consists of about thirty D-Bees and humans. The controlled people will do their best to defend Flill, but their weapons are only S.D.C. axes, clubs, and hoes. One or two will



have a low-powered M.D.C. weapon, such as a laser pistol. All of Flill's "elite assassins" are out on missions. Yen will stress that the group cannot harm the innocent people and must eliminate the Mindolar. The horrible creature resides in **Krendo's** hut. With him are **Krendo** and **Vic Commanc**. The Mindolar will fight to the death, as he has no fast means of escape. Upon Flill's death, the villagers return to normal. The Mindolar's control, and their actions while under it, are half-forgotten memories.

When the group returns, Master Shin congratulates them on their success and rewards them with a good night's sleep before assigning the second test. This more dangerous test is to intercede between a demon army and a nearby warlord, Kostov **Ventrovich**. Kostov, knowing he couldn't compete with the more powerful and far better equipped warlords elsewhere in Russia, came to the **Russian/Chinese** border to try establishing a foothold. The warlord has agreed to leave the monastery alone, since it does not aspire to any political power. In fact, for this service, he has agreed to protect the monastery against outside assault. The demon army outnumbers the warlord's army by **thirty-to-one** and is preparing to crush the smaller force in ten days. Master Shin has learned that the leader of the demon army is a Koshei, a Deathless One (see **Rifts® Mystic Russia™**). One of his "special agents" acquired some useful information from a spiteful Wind Demon the Koshei had tortured years earlier. According to myth, the life essences of the Deathless Ones are kept in eggs. If the egg is not destroyed, the Koshei will rise again and again from destruction to plague the countryside. The wretched Wind Demon was only too happy to give the location of the Koshei's precious egg. If the Koshei's egg is destroyed, then he dies forever. Once the Koshei is gone, the demon army will disband and go back to its petty squabbling.

The Koshei's egg is twenty miles (32 km) west of the mountains. The group has ten days to find and destroy the egg. A map has been provided for them (What the group meets on the way is up to the G.M.). Guarding the egg are several powerful foes: (For all these, see **Rifts® Mystic Russia™**) A Demon Claw, two **Kladovik**, a Serpent Hound, and an Unclean (Note: the Wind Demon will, in no way, help the group. They should not run into **him**.) The egg is hidden in a hollow log among the snow-covered trees. The guardians will fight to the death to protect the egg.

If the group should fail to defeat the guards and destroy the egg, Kostov's army will be crushed and the monastery will have to fight the demon army (though it will be reduced in size by 80 percent, making it a one on one fight, if the students are still alive to aid in the monastery's defense).

If successful, the group will be rewarded with another night's rest before the third task is set before them. The final trial is to find and defeat a Demon Lord. He was spotted spying on the monastery and it has since been determined that he seeks to destroy it. His name is Xolotl (See **Rifts®: Pantheons of the Megaverse™**). He is a powerful creature with the body of a man and the head of a dog.

Dark Secrets

Master Shin is not human, though Shin is his true name. He is, in fact, a Raksasha (see **Rifts® Conversion Book**). He is a humanoid creature with clawed hands and the head of a tiger. Thirty years ago, he kidnaped an old man who knew the secrets of training Monks and Demon Quellers. Using his psionic and magic abilities, the Raksasha forced and tricked the old man into teaching him those secrets. Shin then formed a monastery as a base of operations by gathering together lost children, young men and women willing to fight evil, and a few older, superstitious humans to use as servants. The children and young men and women were trained to become Monks, Demon Quellers, spies, and assassins. The spies and assassins, under the guise of "special agents" or "personal assistants," have been his bread and butter, being hired out to warlords, villagers, governments, and even other Demon Lords. His network of spies and assassins ranges throughout most of Russia and the Western half of China. The Monks and Demon Quellers were kept ignorant of his atrocious acts by necessity. He uses them as a front to the outside world. It also helps him to have a band of almost fanatically loyal fighters to protect him. The fact that they do so to "defend the good" is an irony he laughs at every day (Shin has been using Alter Aura spells and psionics to hide his true nature).

Shin's loyal followers serve yet another means, to eliminate any competition. He uses his network of spies and assassins to locate a target's weak spot. He then either has the assassins or Monks and Demon Quellers remove his rival (Such was the case with **Fllil**, the **Mindolar**). Only a handful of beings in existence know of his setup. One or two Demon Lords, who he habitually hires out to, have the distinct pleasure of sharing his laughter over roast human on a stick. Any members of the monastery who discover his secret are either quietly dealt with or are branded as having "lost their souls to the darkness." In the latter case, the poor wretches are exiled from the monastery, never allowed to return. Any members found talking to them will be punished with exile as well (Only five members of the monastery have ever discovered Shin's true identity in thirteen years. All but one are **dead**). The exiled person is usually attacked and killed after they have traveled a few miles from the monastery. Often, it is Shin, himself, who chases down and slays his former pupil. He finds killing the people that he trained to fight beings such as himself another of life's great ironies. Only one woman, an eighth level Monk named Xiao Yin Mao, managed to escape Shin after learning of his identity, by leaping through a Rift. Unfortunately, she was stranded in South Africa and captured by locals. They had her bound and gagged, ready to be sacrificed to Xipe Totec, the

God of Flaying, when Xolotl, a good deity and not a Demon Lord at all, found and rescued her (see **Rifts® Pantheons of the Megaverse™**). She has since become his lover.

Shin has discovered that Xolotl and Xiao Yin Mao have been spying on him, planning some way to expose him to the monastery as a monster. He has decided to send naive students (the player characters) to destroy the "Demon Lord." If they are killed in the attempt, it is no great loss. The rest of the monastery can then be stirred to action upon the deaths of their fellow students. If Xolotl and Xiao Yin Mao manage to convince the students of the truth, Shin will simply accuse them of having "lost their souls" to the "demons" and raise the monastery against them.

Solutions

When the player group finds Xolotl, he is alone on a mountaintop. He will try to reason with the group before taking any offensive action. He will try to explain the treachery of Shin. If the group persists in attacking, he will use his magic to restrain them. At that time, Xiao Yin Mao will come out of hiding. She will tell her tale to the group. Xolotl will then release the group, under the promise that they will not attempt to harm Xiao Yin Mao. He will conspicuously leave himself out of the promise as an act of faith in the group. Should they continue to attack him only, he will **teleport** himself and Xiao Yin Mao to safety, intending to confront Shin later (which he will do, as soon as the group arrives back at the monastery). If the group attacks both Xolotl and Xiao Yin Mao, Xolotl will do his best to defend her and destroy the group.

However, if the group should, at any point, listen to Xolotl's words and believe them, he will offer his help in exposing Shin to the monastery and purging the evil from its walls. He will transport the group to the monastery's doors. Immediately, the group will be beset by questions from the two guards. If they are not convincing enough in their answers, the guards will attack, suspecting the group has been possessed or are demons themselves.

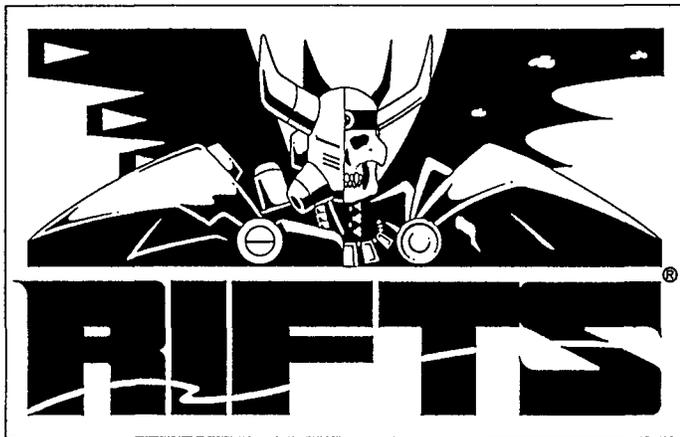
Once inside the monastery, how does the group proceed? Do they have Xolotl try to remove Shin's disguise? If successful, this will cause a split in the monastery, with one third of the members believing the transformation to be real and the other two thirds believing it to be a demon's trick. Naturally, all of Shin's spies and assassins will side with him, and a type of civil war will ensue. Shin's greater forces will push the smaller force out of the monastery, forcing them to flee or be destroyed (this larger group has access to the armory, which contains more powerful weapons, including modern energy pistols and rifles). Xolotl can produce an escape route via a Rift. The members of the monastery who denounced Shin will attempt to form their own monastery, dedicated to stopping all of Shin's plans and enlightening the members whom he managed to fool. Shin's monastery, however, will look upon them as "lost souls" and continually try to wipe them out (and this can lead to numerous adventures).

Another option open to the group is to suggest a contest between Shin and Xolotl. Shin knows that Xolotl would ultimately defeat him, so he will refuse. If the group pushes for the contest, Shin will claim they are trying to assassinate him and declare them "lost souls." He will order the Monks and Demon Quellers to attack. The group can either try to fight it out at this point, or they can flee and come up with another plan.

On the other hand, if the group tries to use the rune sword, Demonwrath, as a test of guilt and innocence, Shin will refuse to let them touch it. He will claim they are trying to steal the sword and hide it from the "forces of good" (Note: the spirit trapped inside of Demonwrath has no knowledge of Shin's true identity or his plans.). If the group then tells Shin to pick up the sword, he will try to refuse. Xolotl will press the issue at this point if the group does not. Xiao Yin Mao will also lend her voice. Again, Shin will refuse, but this time the Monks and Demon Quellers will begin to ask him why. As he stumbles for an answer, the entire monastery will demand the test. Under the pressure, Shin will begin to lose his cool, becoming belligerent and slipping out of his "good guy" routine. In a fury, Shin will grab Demonwrath, burning his hands, and change into his true shape. He will teleport away with the sword, planning to start over somewhere else. The members of the monastery will apologize to the group,

Xolotl, and most of all to Xiao Yin Mao. They will ban all members of Shin's "personal assistants" who had full knowledge of his actions (That is to say, those who knew they weren't helping the side of light. Most of his assistants are **banned.**). The monastery will ask Xolotl for leadership and guidance. He offers a compromise. He will leave Xiao Yin Mao in charge and visit the monastery often to see her and check up on matters. At this point, Xolotl will ask the group if they would care to help him in another matter. He will explain that he is gathering allies to help his brother Quetzalcoatl (see **Rifts® Pantheons of the Megaverse™**) defeat the evil Aztec gods. Whether the group accepts or not, there are plenty of ways to have endless adventures. The group can join Xolotl, stay with the monastery, or strike off on their own. Any which way they go, there will come a day of reckoning with Shin.

The New Kingdom



Optional Material for Rifts®

By Jason Richards and Nathan Taylor

The large mass of eyes and tentacles felt another sting, as more of its dark children fell to the blades and stakes of the armored soldiers encroaching on its land. One by one the demons fell, each time taking a little bit of the master intelligence with them. The ancient monster sensed that morning was approaching and knew that most of its human protectors had been slain or lured away by the attacking army. Normally confident, the intelligence shifted nervously as it surveyed its options. The Master Vampire was among the first to be slain, murdered by a treacherous human slave, and now its familiar was dying, bombarded by wooden spears, its body laced with wounds from silver blades. At that moment the intelligence screamed an unearthly bellow as its demonic familiar perished, surging pain and agony through its creator, and weakening its hold to Earth.

Shortly after, the doors to the temple were hurled open and soldiers flooded the grounds, destroying dark minions in their militant wake, progressing rank by rank toward the lower caverns where the intelligence laid in wait, now very weak and even

more afraid. As the last of its guards were destroyed, the intelligence made preparations for dire action. Minutes later, the human butchers entered the intelligence's chamber, only briefly stunned by its monstrous appearance before charging in with spears and losing flights of wood and silver arrows, then charging forth with waterskins full of holy water. As the second wave began its attack the humans saw the creature vanish in a great blue flash and hot wind that swept the cave, knocking the soldiers to the ground and blinding their eyes.

What vampires remained alive either burned up into ashes or fell unconscious where they stood, lost in a deep trance. After the preliminary moments of screams and fire, all was silent. Cheers erupted from the men as they held high their lances and shouted out cries of victory. They had saved their land from this demonic threat, never to have him return...

The demonic mass, now safe in another dimension, could only think of his demonic hordes, now all but destroyed, and how they had disappointed him. "There must be another way," thought the monster. Then his thoughts turned to the invaders and how they had conquered his hordes. He had watched through the eyes of his familiar as the human army came at it in waves, constantly attacking and never ceasing. They laid traps, used tactics, and demonstrated superior skill in their conquests of the intelligence's stupid and unorganized minions. All through time the story had been the same. Earth was an unconquered realm, despite hundreds of attempts by himself and other vampire intelligences.

At this point the displaced intelligence told himself that he would never again be so out thought or disorganized. It was time for a new strategy, and he began to formulate his plan for when he would return...



The Vampire Kingdom of Xavier Stuart

Population:

Total Kingdom Population: 1500 vampires of varying types and 18,000 other humanoid residents.

Fort Tombstone: 1 Master Vampire, 750 Secondary Vampires, and 150 Wild Vampires inhabit the town and the silver mine beneath it. Most Wild Vampires are sent out to wreak havoc in the wild. The vampires also employ 500 human slaves who live in the town, and 400 feeding stock. The humans used as feeding stock are either in the blood pools deep within the bowels of the mine or allowed to practice some trade that's useful to the vampires (armorer, blacksmith, miner) while breeding, creating more human slaves.

Surrounding 50 mile (80 km) radius: 11 humanoid villages and towns are under the control of Xavier Stuart, each having 6 to 10 Secondary Vampires overseeing whatever task the town is designated to do. There are roughly 9500 humanoids within these villages and towns.

Other vampire-controlled areas: Vampires have seized control of several other towns to the north in Arizona and New Mexico. Currently there are five such towns, each run by one of Stuart's

most trusted Secondary Vampire officers and assisted by 10 to 40 vampire and mind slave soldiers (75% of these vampires will be Secondary). Human population of these towns averages 1000 each.

Fort Tombstone

Heart of the Vampire Endeavor

Near the bones of the legendary pre-Rifts city of **Tombstone** has emerged the base of operations for the Master Vampire, Xavier Stuart. Settled safely in the southeast corner of Arizona, the small town is built around an ancient silver mine which Stuart has converted into his lair. Mostly humanoids, both loyal human and D-Bee protectors, and those enslaved by the demons of the night, inhabit the town on the surface. During the night hours, as many as twenty vampires patrol the streets, keeping watch over their town. The vampires control every aspect of the town, from farming to law enforcement, and do so without the knowledge of the few outsiders who stumble across it.

Deep within the mine, the Master Vampire and roughly 900 other vampires sleep the daylight away in hidden chambers among the complex network of stone tunnels full of twists, turns, dead ends and countless dangers. Among the perils are dens of

monsters, deep chasms, and even an underground river with raging rapids.

One of the true terrors of the stronghold is the blood pool. Just in the underground compound alone there are always between 50 and 100 human captives being **used** as feeding stock, attached to intravenous needles which drain the victims of their blood just to the very brink of death. This blood is collected and bagged, then issued as rations. The humans are rarely conscious, and die within a few months of this treatment.

Stuart's throne room is the gem of the fortress. All along the walls are piled booty of every kind, from precious metals and gems to modern armor and weaponry. A large, stone formation has been carved into a throne in the highest part of the large cavern. It sits on a plateau that overlooks the huge chamber where his men gather before their nightly routines. It is from here that he speaks to and encourages his men, or distributes punishment to those who fail him. This punishment ranges from staking for a period of time, demotion in rank, or in the worst cases, the starving and then exile of a vampire. Stuart never kills his own minions, an act he views as barbarism.

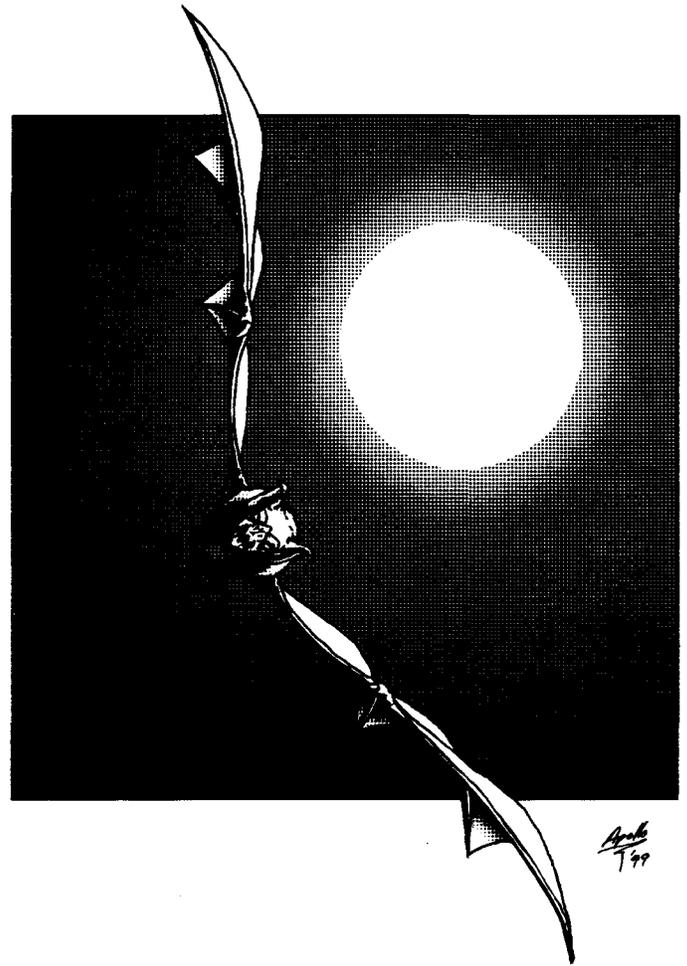
Stuart's coffin is located in a room a good distance away from his throne room, in a secluded spot which is guarded by vampires at night (Xavier often studies or plans in his room at night) and human mind slaves during the day. The vampires (2 to 4) are Secondary Vampires with the Warrior M.O.S. and the human mind slaves (4 to 6) are **3rd** to **6th** level CS soldiers, usually Military Specialists, Special Forces, or well-trained grunts. All are suicide soldiers who use a great deal of explosives, including a large fusion block built into their armor that they activate when they are incapacitated or near death. Xavier is quite safe in his coffin, which is actually a large compartment inside the walls of his room, accessible only through his bat or mist form; any other form is too large. Provided the entrance is found, it would take 50 M.D. to break down the reinforced stone wall.

The underground network of ancient caves is so twisted and turns over so many times that without a map, proper lighting, or some point of orientation one can become almost hopelessly lost within. Just being in the caves without intimate knowledge of them makes a character **-10%** on his Land Navigation skill, even with a map and in favorable conditions. Without a map adds another **-10%**, darkness another **-15%**, and after each failed Land Navigation roll the character becomes more and more lost, a **-5%** for each failed roll. Maximum penalty is **-50%**. The tunnels are so vast that there are some portions still unexplored by the vampires, who tend to stick to the beaten path.

The Vampire Army

The small group of vampire hunters pushed on, beating back the hapless band of Wild Vampires with their silver bullets and homemade water balloons. As the beasts scurried this way and that, more and more fell screaming as the speeding silver projectiles shot through their bodies and a few good shots pierced the hearts of the devils. A single body watched through his binoculars from a hilltop several miles away as the vampires were pushed over the crest of a large hill, ran halfway down its slope, and then turned to rush their pursuers. The overly confident men rushed to meet them point blank and finish them off.

The observer on the hill lowered his binoculars, stared straight into the night sky and motioned to the man in the officer's



car several yards behind him. "Yes, Sir," echoed through the radio headset. "Fire in the hole." The man flipped a switch on the box at his side and then pulled up his own binoculars to watch.

The vampires stood, holding their ground in close combat with the hunters. The fighting was fierce and intense on both sides until the whole group was suddenly engulfed in flame and debris. The explosives buried under the ground on which they all tread started to go off in successive rows. The humans all buckled as debris entered their bodies and explosions crippled their legs. The vampires, impervious to the crippling explosions, were merely stunned, and quickly regained their footing to tackle those who tried to escape. Those few who limped away from the minefield were met by demonic reinforcements who had been magically concealed on the flanks.

*In a minute's time all was still on the battlefield save the vampires feeding on their kills and gathering their weapons, equipment, and armor. The Secondary Vampire on the hill hung the binoculars around his neck and walked back to his car. As he and his driver sped off toward the lair a smile came over each **undead** soldier's face. They looked at each other knowing that they would be well received by their mutual master.*

There is no way to describe the methods of the legions of the **Kintaranta** intelligence other than to say that it is a bold experiment that seems to be working. A new strategy by an old intelligence led it to find a military leader that knew his enemy, and make him willing to fight for the cause of evil. The answer was Xavier Stuart.

With the vampire general leading the way, this new vampire kingdom is becoming more and more a threat. Xavier's ambitions know no bounds. He is on a time line which is well thought out and derived from intimate knowledge of the region and his enemies. He has laid out a simple plan for the rise of his kingdom.

Ambitions for the Kingdom

The kingdom has three steps to achieving one goal: the domination of North America.

A. The first step was originally unaccounted for: Destroy the **Arzno** Mercenary Corps and their leader, Onra. This vampire hunting group, who Xavier first viewed as an annoyance, is becoming a real problem for the Master Vampire and his intelligence.

B. The second step is to conquer the CS state of Lone Star. As ridiculous as it may sound, it's not as impossible as one might first think. With heavy troop commitment in the North against Quebec, Tolkeen, the Magic Zone, and then the Xiticix, the South is relatively unprotected and without a doubt under-protected. Another advantage held by Xavier is that the CS doesn't wish to acknowledge the possibility of the Vampire Kingdoms and has no means to fight them. The bandits in the Pecos Empire would not enter into a war of survival, but would simply move further north, throwing out more problems for a CS military stretched thin northward. If Xavier can establish himself quickly, there may be nothing the Coalition can do about it, at least not in Lone Star.

C. Lastly, the rest of the Vampire Kingdoms must be brought under the leadership of Xavier and his intelligence. With a little luck, this won't require a massive military effort, only propaganda and reputation. This would solidify the vampire presence in Lone Star, making the demons much harder to exterminate. Preparations are underway for Xavier to absorb the **Bisbee** tribe very soon, adding many to Xavier's numbers. If Xavier can get control of Lone Star, other vampires and their kingdoms will flock to his banner and leadership.

With these things completed, North America is there for the taking. The scariest thing is that it has the possibility of working. The best chance there is for this to stop is for someone to step in early. Once the army gets rolling it will become increasingly difficult to smother the flames of all-out war. That's why Onra and his troops worry Xavier so. In a perfect world, the CS would realize the danger, learn from the Arzno Military Corps on how to kill the demons and then use a combined effort to stop them before they start and then perhaps push southward in the extermination effort. Unfortunately, judging by the CS mentality and history this is unlikely.

How?

With the new military style and strategy, a new kind of attack was necessary. Xavier's arrival came at an opportune time, due to the fact that the CS suddenly had some spare equipment "laying around."

Shortly after Xavier's arrival in Arizona the Campaign of Unity was put into full operation. With it came the removal of the vast majority of the old-style weapons and armor from the CS military. Most of that hardware was intended for the **ISS** or other uses by the military and civilian sectors within the states. However, not all of it made it there, and some fell prey to crooked soldiers or smugglers looking to make a few credits. The armor and weapons became the staple of local law enforcement and

mercenaries throughout the southwest. Small towns counted on the troops' monthly AWOL trips to sell them the latest merchandise and upgrades. Unfortunately for the towns, the vampires count on those shipments, too.

The vampire strategy is to enslave a town along these routes and leech whatever military supplies they can from the community, while buying from the convoys. When the supply starts to decrease or prices start to rise the vampires ambush the convoy, take the equipment, and turn all of the soldiers or smugglers into demons like themselves. This very efficient method adds to supply and personnel of the vampire military. The missing CS soldiers (not that great a number) are being listed as **MIA** or AWOL, but investigations are underway.

Once these supplies are taken, they are issued to vampire soldiers, though many of them have no experience at all with modern weapons and don't even care to use them, preferring their own teeth and claws. Nevertheless, such soldiers are useful to the army. The greatest strength of the vampire is still toughness and superior numbers. There is something to be said for the combat effectiveness of an enraged vampire tearing an enemy limb from limb.

The current vampire kingdom population is roughly 1500 and growing steadily. This doesn't count the slaves and other humans used only as feeding stock. The vampire population has been intentionally stifled until recently since Xavier was trying not to be noticed. Now, about 50 to 70 vampires are being created each month, which is just slightly more than the Arzno Mercenary Corps can destroy. Xavier could make his numbers skyrocket if he turned his minions loose on the human civilizations in Arizona and New Mexico, but he still feels that it's best to lay low. For the time **being**, Xavier is content to stay just slightly ahead of the curve.

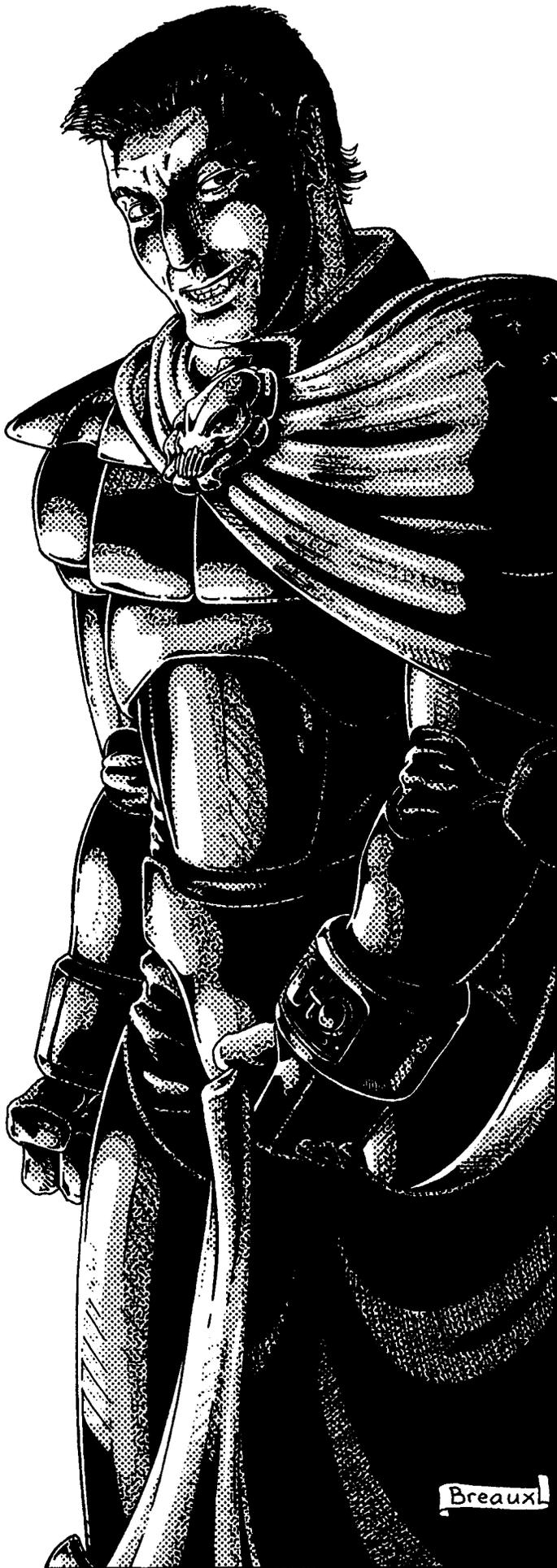
Three small towns in Arizona and two in New Mexico have been taken over by the militant vampires and are used as trading posts and strategic locations for the rest of the army. Typically each town has roughly 40 to 60 vampires with 1 leader and 3 to 5 warriors. These are all vampires loyal to Xavier and a part of his plan, but not a part of the general army.

Characters of Note

Xavier Stuart — The Vampire General

Xavier lived a rather tragic childhood in the Burbs of the CS state of Chi-Town. He never even knew his parents and was raised by his father's brother in a kind and caring home, but he was never truly accepted into this new household. As he grew up, he briefly turned to the streets, seeking refuge with the other rejects that he found there in the gangs and street scum skulking furtively around the less civilized areas of the Burbs. After a brief run-in with CS authorities, Xavier decided that if he was to ever become an officer in the military like he was told his father was, he would have to leave his D-Bee and reject friends and clean up his act. The following year he turned old enough to enlist. This he did, and he loved the military life more than anything. He was a whole-hearted soldier, eager to pursue his father's footsteps.

Xavier was the fastest learner in his classes, a real grade A student. He applied for officer school, confident his abilities and



reputation gave him the best resume around. When his CO called him into his office the following week, Xavier whistled the whole way there, knowing that his destiny for leadership would be fulfilled. A very stern Colonel awaited him with good and bad news.

"Son," he said, "the good news is that you seem to be fully qualified and ready for your officer training. Congratulations. I cut my teeth under the command of your father and I'm proud to be the one who gives you this shot." His face grew serious once again. "The bad news is that you seem to have some security problems. You have a record of fraternizing with D-Bees. That is unacceptable."

Xavier stood at attention and spoke clearly. "Sir, I was just a kid back then, Sir. I know the truth about them now. I'll do anything to prove I am not a risk, Colonel."

The Colonel smiled. "Good, because that's just what I had in mind. Let's take a walk." The two walked through the compound to the prison section. There the Colonel stopped, **un-holstered his sidearm** and handed it to Xavier. "In cell 3 is a D-Bee prisoner I want you to execute. Do it, then pack your bags for school."

Xavier took the large revolver in his hand and walked to cell 3. The guard let him pass with no question and closed the door behind him. Xavier looked up into the eyes of a Quick-Flex alien. Only this wasn't just another D-Bee, it was **Minhos**, one of the guys Xavier had run with in his gang days. Minhos smiled, got up from his cot and walked toward his old friend. Xavier just stared back, lifted the weapon and pulled the trigger. He left, packed his bags, and came back 18 months later as a Military Specialist.

Though Xavier excelled in all of his classes and was one of the most brilliant tacticians anyone had seen in many years, it seemed that his sacrifice of his friend was enough to get him a commission, but that was about it. It took him 20 years to make Captain and that was the end of the line. He spent 5 years as a Captain before anything significant happened at all.

It happened in September of 105 P.A. Word began to leak through the ranks about the Campaign of Unity. Officers from every walk of the military were being transferred into more combat-oriented positions in the last-minute efforts to prepare for war. Excited that he may at least have a chance to train those who would actually engage in the combat, he asked his superiors for a transfer into infantry training. He was transferred, but not into training. He spent the last year of his career in an acquisitions office in Lone Star. Because of his security restrictions, he was rarely allowed anywhere but his office and barracks for fear that his contact with the Dog Boys would cause security problems. This, in the mind of Xavier, was yet another cruel joke.

Xavier now views his transfer in a positive light. He retired at the age of 45 and stayed in Lone Star trying to make a living by hiring himself out as a security guard. He was at the brink of starvation and all but homeless when his second chance arrived. A dream told him to travel south so that he could see what he was capable of. After arriving at a spot that seemed proper, he met three strange men walking down the road, miles from anywhere. The three said they were sent by another and had a secret to tell him. It was only then that they bared their fangs and revealed their strange nature — as vampires.

After learning all about his choice, he agreed to help the **Kintaranta** intelligence by becoming a Master Vampire and leading the eventual assault on humanity. Now, not only is he an officer, he is a general of the most ruthless army in the world.

Real Name: Xavier Stuart

Alignment: Diabolic

Hit Points: 170

S.D.C.: N/A

P.P.E.: 60

I.S.P.: 160

Attributes: I.Q. 24, M.E. 24, M.A. 28, PS. 34, P.P. 24, PE. 22, PB. 25, Spd. 30

Experience: 5th level Master Vampire; was an 8th level CS Military Specialist.

Weight: 180 lbs (81 kg)

Height: 6 feet (1.8 m)

Sex: Male

Age: 46

Disposition: A keen strategist and cool character with what appears to be a surprising amount of honor. For example, he frequently meets with his enemies before he strikes, to discuss initial terms of their surrender to avoid "unnecessary violence." In truth, this is not a sense of honor, but audacity. However, while he is extremely confident, he does not have a "god complex" and is smart enough to accurately size up his opponents.

Natural Abilities: Has all the abilities of a Master Vampire.

Magic: See Natural Abilities.

Psionics: Death Trance, Alter Aura, Empathy, Mind Block, Hypnotic Suggestion, Presence Sense, Sense Evil, Deadened Pain, Induce Sleep, Super Hypnotic Suggestion. Considered a master psionic and only requires a ten or higher to save vs psionics.

Bionics/Cybernetics: None

Combat: Hand to Hand: Assassin: 6 attacks per melee. +3 to initiative, +10 to parry and dodge, +7 to strike, +23 to damage on a pulled punch and +10 to pull/roll with punch, fall or impact.

Bonuses: +5 vs psionics, +4 vs magic, +10 vs Horror Factor, impervious to psionic mind control or mind control drugs, as well as magic or chemical sedation. Impervious to poisons and toxins.

Vulnerabilities/Penalties: Vulnerable to wood, silver, water, sunlight, etc. the same as all vampires.

Skills of Note: Language: American and Spanish 98%, Literacy: American 90%, Intelligence 84%, Pilot: Hovercraft 98%, Detect Ambush 90%, Detect Concealment 85%, Interrogation Techniques 90%, Camouflage 95%, Military Etiquette 98%, Fortification 95%, Trap Construction 77%, Trap and Mine Detection 85%, W.P. Energy Pistol, W.P. Energy Rifle, W.P. Heavy Energy, W.P. Heavy, Hand to Hand: Assassin, and Boxing.

Allies of Note: Vampires, especially his **minions**, and his Grey Seer, Cana the Blind.

Enemies: The Coalition States and all vampire hunters, especially the **Arzno Mercenary Corps** and their leader, Onra.

Weapons & Equipment of Note: Owns and wears a suit of light "Dead Boy" armor. All of his vampire officers also wear "Dead Boy" armor. Has a trove of armor and weapons.

Money: Roughly 3 million in credits, gems, and valuables. Another 20 to 25 million in armor and weapons, mostly stolen CS supplies. His treasure trove is deep within his sanctum and quite safe.

Minions of Xavier Stuart

Xavier's army is still largely untrained and only roughly organized, but is growing rapidly and getting stronger, largely due to the fact that he has surrounded himself with men of superior skill and magnificent abilities. Xavier has taken on the services of several unique characters through a variety of means.

One such example is Cana the Blind, a disturbed Grey Seer and advisor to Xavier. Cana's clairvoyance and general insight allow Xavier to know the possible futures of his actions. The Grey Seer's attitude of self-defeat allows him to be kept a prisoner without direct mind control.

Cana the Blind

Grey Seer advisor to the Master Vampire, Xavier Stuart

"What did you gather from him?"

"I read our deaths in his eyes."

*"I didn't even need your eyes to see that, **Slave.**"*

—**Xavier Stuart and Cana the Blind**, discussing the Mage, Onra

Even as a youth, this mage knew he had a gift. He often had feelings that he knew the outcome of some event long before it would occur. He always had a way with people and could help them solve their problems, but he quickly found that it was almost a curse. He didn't like seeing the dark possibilities that lay in store for himself or people he knew. This led to the promising Mystic's downtrodden attitude and cynical personality.

Cana enrolled in a small monastery in Colorado to allow himself to more fully develop his talents, though he wasn't enthusiastic about it. He merely saw it as the only real choice he had. It was at this place of peace and learning that his fellow monks named him Cana "the Blind" due to his constantly dark outlook on life and the future. He stayed at the monastery for seven years until he was asked to leave (another unavoidable unpleasantness in the eyes of the Seer). Still, his powers potent, he packed up his few small belongings and headed south into the wilderness. It was here that he learned of the new vampire threat. Naturally (in his opinion), Cana found out in an unpleasant manner.

Cana had found lodging in a small farmhouse near the Rio Grande in what was once New Mexico. He was offering aid to the farmers there by predicting the best places to plant crops for the season and other information that he really didn't know, but could pass off as a genuine "prophecy" with the help of a little showmanship. One night the town was raided by Stuart's vampire horde and the citizens were taken as livestock. Cana didn't resist and simply submitted himself to his new masters. When Xavier (still new to the vampire experience) found out that a human had not resisted and seemingly had no fear, he insisted that a meeting take place.

Xavier learned of Cana's skills and put them to the test. When the Grey Seer was able to discern a great deal about Xavier and even his past life simply by looking at him, Xavier told his new "slave" that he was to stay by his side and prophesy for him. Ever the pacifist, Cana agreed and chalked it up as yet another misfortune associated with his "gifts" as others called them.

Real Name: Only known as Cana.

Aliases: Cana the Blind, Seer, and by Xavier: Slave.

Alignment: Miscreant



Hit Points: 43

S.D.C.: 39

P.P.E.: 98

I.S.P.: 71

Attributes: I.Q. 24, M.E. 17, M.A. 10, P.S. 8, P.P. 9, P.E. 10, P.B. 8, Spd. 12

Experience: 9th level Grey Seer.

Weight: 140 lbs (63 kg).

Height: 5 feet 8 inches (1.7 m).

Sex: Male

Age: 39

Disposition: Cana is a pessimist and pacifist, constantly accepting every terrible event in his life as him fulfilling his unshakable destiny. He's incredibly intelligent and this, combined with his paranormal powers, makes his predictions absolutely uncanny. He is a large part of Xavier's strategy building, though he does it from the sidelines with no credit given or asked for. He doesn't like Xavier, in fact he hates him. Even so, his nature will not allow him to confront his master openly. He is frail beyond his years and aging very rapidly. These are the results of a lifetime of complacency.

Natural Abilities: Naturally psionic and magically inclined. In addition to psionics and spell magic, the Grey Seer has the following abilities: Sense Supernatural Evil (390 feet/118.9 m), Open to the Supernatural (same as Mystic), Sense Death and Life (20 feet/6.1 m, line of sight, or 275 feet/83.8 m to sense creatures of extreme good or associated with death), and See Future Possibilities.

Magic: Oracle, Sustain, Life Source, Magic Shield, Armor of Ithnan, Tongues, Globe of Daylight, Manipulate Objects, Aura of Death, Death Curse (reserved especially for Xavier if he should ever try and kill him), Instill Knowledge, Mend the Broken, Mental Blast, Horror, House of Glass, Deflect, Weight of Duty, Wave of Frost, Light Healing, Cloak of Darkness, Mental Shock, Realm of Chaos, Reflection, and Light Target. Spell Strength is 14.

Psionics: Sixth Sense, Mind Block, Clairvoyance, and Empathy. Considered a major psionic and requires a 12 to save.

Bionics/Cybernetics: None. Will not get them except for medical reasons and then will try to get bio-systems.

Combat: 2 attacks per melee, +3 to initiative, +2 to parry, +3 to dodge, +4 to disarm, +2 to entangle, +1 to roll with punch, fall, or impact, +3 to pull punch. Automatic dodge (use all dodge bonuses).

Bonuses: +3 vs psionics, +4 vs Horror Factor, +2 vs possession, +3 vs magic, +10% I.Q. bonus (already added).

Vulnerabilities/Penalties: None, other than a defeatist attitude and a feeling of supremacy in his abilities.

Insanity: **Overconfidence** in his own abilities. Cana will never doubt that the conclusions he draws will come true. This is not without reason, as it has been some time since he was wrong.

Skills of Note: Speaks Spanish, Dragonese, and American all at 98%. Literate in American at 98%. Math skills at 98%. Lore: Demon and Monsters and Magic, both at 90%. Normally only uses his magical abilities and lets Xavier do the rest.

Allies of Note: None. Cana basically hates everybody. He associates with Xavier and his minions, but by no stretch of the definition is he an "ally."

Enemies: Most notably **Arzno** and all of its citizens, especially Onra, who he believes is destined to kill him.

Weapons & Equipment of Note: None.

Money: None. He is property of Xavier and therefore has no possessions.

Other key minions are mainly the twenty or so officers in Xavier's army, all Secondary Vampires trained by a new method of leadership instituted by Xavier. All of them former CS troops, most officers, they have been taught to "remember" the skills that their transformations took partially from them. Most notable among them is **Nathaniel Dengrada**, who is head of these Secondary Leaders and was a retired CS Colonel before he was turned. It was he who gave Xavier his shot at officer school (Diabolic alignment; I.Q. 14, M.A. 19, P.S. 25, P.P. 21). Dengrada is the most experienced of Xavier's M.O.S. experiments (7th level vampire, Leader caste) and is his chief military advisor. He is viewed as the Master's right hand and anything he says goes without question. He is unshakably loyal to Xavier and would kill anyone who would interfere with his plans and dreams of domination.

Many of the officers in Xavier's army are former associates or just those known to Xavier by reputation. Most were either on early retirement or obscure duty when they were turned, and extreme measures were taken to ensure that nobody would come looking for them, including written letters of resignation and forged death certificates from phony hospitals.

Xavier is training Secondary Vampires in several fields, teaching them skills to help them be more useful in one specific position, even if less flexible in many. Leader and Warrior classes are

used in advancing the combat level of the army, Posers and Thieves help network the Master through society, and Hunters carry out any number of specific tasks, from assassination to information gathering.

Vampire M.O.S. System

Secondary Vampires have one thing that really sets them apart from their less civilized brethren: Intelligence. With the emergence of Xavier Stuart's new vampire kingdom, the Master Vampire has developed a plan to harness this previously unused talent of his underlings. Through training, the Secondaries can be taught new skills or "re-learn" skills from their past lives. Not just any vampire (or any Secondary) can learn an M.O.S., but those that have so far have proven very useful to Xavier.

When humans become Secondary Vampires, they lose all but ten of their skills from their former life. At level three a Secondary Vampire can opt to learn an M.O.S. in place of the additional skills that he could learn at that time. If an M.O.S. is chosen the vampire gains the skills listed below. If one of the M.O.S. skills is the same as a skill the vampire already knows (one of the selected ten) then the skill becomes "unfrozen" and will continue to advance starting at the vampire's next level of experience (4th). Note that the original O.C.C. bonus, if any, is not regained. If the skill is new, it is gained at first level and goes up as normal. If Physical skills are chosen, combat bonuses may be added (with the exception of hand-to-hand attacks), but not bonuses to attributes or S.D.C.

Candidates for the skill training are chosen carefully. For one, they must meet the I.Q. requirement listed with the M.O.S. Often, M.O.S. assignments are given according to what O.C.C. the character was before he was transformed. For example, a former CS Technical Officer is likely to be chosen for "Leader" rather than "Hunter" and a former Wilderness Scout is more likely to be "Hunter" than "Thief". So far, Xavier is the only Master Vampire to use this training system, but it could possibly catch on elsewhere (especially if other kingdoms begin to use his militant strategies).

Another requirement is that there must be human slaves or another source around to teach the vampires the skills. Therefore, this is not a common practice until the kingdom is fairly established.

Also, the M.O.S. has a cost, so not every eligible Secondary is put through training. The M.O.S. takes the place of *all* of the additional skills that the vampire **would've** learned (10 total). This can be counter-productive since flexibility is important to a growing kingdom.

One question arises: What about the Master Vampires? True, they could learn an **M.O.S.**, but it requires time that Master Vampires usually use elsewhere. Besides, Master Vampires are normally on a high enough level before they are turned that the skills they have are quite advanced.

The M.O.S. categories and their descriptions are listed below.

Poser

Posers are trained to blend in with regular humans. This proves useful in intelligence gathering and networking the Master through all levels of society. Along with the skills comes a specific cover, an identity that the vampire can assume in the

human world. A vampire clown is a common facade, as is bartender, ringmaster, cowboy, mage (if magical abilities are present) or prostitute. Skills should be chosen to suit whatever cover is selected. Typical previous O.C.C. is Rogue Scholar, Scientist, Line Walker, or any other non-military O.C.C.

These specially trained vampires tend to be quiet and passive, preferring to sit in a corner and watch others than engage in whatever is going on. Though their skills may be finer tuned or knowledge more advanced, these cunning vampires will often "play dumb" or intentionally throw some contest or another, be it a shooting contest, arm wrestling match, or old-fashioned brawl. One advantage that the vampire transformation gives is a feeling of superiority that the vampire feels doesn't need to be backed up or shown off to petty mortals.

I.Q. Requirement: 13

Skills:

1 Language

Disguise

3 from Literacy, Language, Lore, Basic Math, Seduction, Domestic skills, or Cowboy skills.

Hunter

Hunters specialize in tracking and capturing or killing humans. They are often used in seek and destroy missions for Xavier or to capture a specific individual for questioning. Usually the vampire's former O.C.C. was Wilderness Scout with the occasional Vagabond, Bounty Hunter, or Headhunter.

Hunters may gain the most pleasure out of their specialty. Since the candidates for the training were most often men of the wilderness and vampires are elemental in nature, the combination creates a passion for nature almost to the point of communion. They love to hunt more than any other vampire class and will do almost anything to make it more challenging, including giving opponents fair warning, head starts, or ample opportunity to escape. The Hunter vampires are so confident in their skills that they feel they can never lose. Patience is the greatest virtue of this class and a Hunter Secondary can track all night if needs be. Escaped prey will always be hunted down later, even if years later.

I.Q. Requirement: 11

Skills:

Prowl

Tracking

Land Navigation

One Ancient W.P.

One Modern W.P.

Warrior

Warriors are the combat specialists of Xavier's vampire army. They work with the Leader M.O.S. to turn a raging horde of demons into a basically organized unit. They accompany Hunters on seek and destroy missions to do most of the dirty work and serve on the front lines of battles, leading by example and relaying orders. These are the former Grunts, **Headhunters**, and any type of mercenary.

The Warriors tend to be savage, almost to the level of Wild Vampires. They are often mistaken for Wild Vampires since they are jittery, impatient, and overly aggressive. They have no head for leadership and are content to be ground-pounding infantrymen. They hold no prejudice for their Wild Vampires and are

often found in their company. Warriors are merciless in combat and love to kill by slow and evil means if the opportunity offers itself. These grunts often love such weapons as large energy rifles, machineguns or sub-machineguns, and **Vibro-weaponry**.

I.Q. Requirement: 10

Skills:

Hand to Hand: Basic in addition to vampire combat skills. Take level advancement bonuses starting at first level with the exception of the additional attacks per melee (permanently frozen at 5 attacks).

1 physical skill (Boxing offers no additional attacks, see skill notes above).

3 Weapon Proficiencies, Ancient, Modern, or a combination of both.

Leader

Leaders are the keys to keeping the vampire army together and acting as a unit. They relay orders to the Warriors and even command larger units on their own. Typically, Leaders are former military officers or high-leveled mercenaries or grunts. In Xavier's army, all are former CS officers with a few high-leveled grunts mixed in.



Leaders aren't fond of combat from the ground troop's perspective, but prefer to sit on a hill and coordinate the movements of their troops. Leaders view themselves as the highest of their brethren and some let their egos inflate to the point of questioning a Master Vampire. The Leader caste lends itself to self-serving egomaniacs that always feel they have a better way of doing things. Multiple Leaders often quarrel unless being influenced or controlled by a Master Vampire.

I.Q. Requirement: 12

Skills:

Intelligence

3 from Detect Ambush, Detect Concealment, Demolitions, Military Etiquette, Fortification, Recognize Weapon Quality, Camouflage, and Trap Construction.

1 W.P.

Thief

The Thief is the vampire who works the crowds at circuses or in the cities picking pockets, eavesdropping on conversations, starting civil unrest, and doing all of the dirty work that's necessary for the Master to complete his objectives. This can include framing members of the government, starting brawls between rival gangs, and any other mischief. These typically are vampires with histories as Vagabonds, Thieves, and City Rats.

The members of the Thief caste are very cliquish and more often than not hang out with their own kind. By level 3 as a Thief (6 as a vampire), these smooth operators usually have a small fan club of 2D4 other non-M.O.S. Secondary Vampires who look up to them in the quiet reverence that a twelve-year-old has for his favorite sports star. Thieves tend to talk about other vampires behind their backs and make all kinds of schemes or under-the-table deals with local gangs, law enforcement, and even the occasional vampire hunter. Thieves are incredibly clever and are frequently more useful to a Master Vampire if he doesn't keep them on a very short leash.

I.Q. Requirement: 11

Skills:

Choose any five Rogue skills with the exception of Computer Hacking.

The general army is currently running with 900 Secondary and another 150 Wild Vampires. Most Wild Vampires are cast out to distract the various vampire hunters of the region and cause general mayhem. Twenty-five percent of the Secondary Vampires have some sort of training (2% Leaders, 7% Hunters, 14% Warriors, 1% Thieves, and 1% Posers).

Another ten Posers and ten Thieves have been allowed to leave the army to infiltrate and influence various levels of society throughout the region, each with two Secondary and two Wild Vampires at his or her disposal. One Thief, **Jose Histania** (Hoesay **His-tan-ya** — 5th level vampire, Thief caste), and his dozen or so minions have infiltrated and become prominent members of the Bisbee vampire tribe and are preparing to aid Xavier in their takeover.

Several Posers have become known in New West towns as nightclub owners, bar bums, and gunslingers.

Diplomatic Relations of Fort Tombstone

The Coalition States

The CS has taken no notice of the town and is unaware of the threat it brings. Their unwillingness to accept the truth about vampires may be their undoing. The vampire army is primarily supplied through the illegal purchase or capture of CS weapons and equipment and therefore often engages them when encountered or lures them into traps.

The Territory and City of Arzno

Arzno is the sworn enemy of Xavier Stuart and his army. They always engage each other on sight, but will usually settle for a tactful retreat rather than fighting to the death. Xavier has infiltrated the city through his unsuspecting minion, Gannon "Moonshine" Cullen, and is waiting for the right time to use his secret weapon to strike.

Other Vampire Kingdoms

Xavier is preparing to absorb the **Bisbee** vampires into his fold and knows nothing of the vampires in the Colorado Baronies. If Xavier were to learn of Ramirez and his vampires, he would ask him to join his cause only once before exterminating him, probably by exposing them to Arzno. The other vampire empires of Mexico are not pressing on Xavier's mind and are neither friend nor foe for the moment.

The Rest of the Southwest

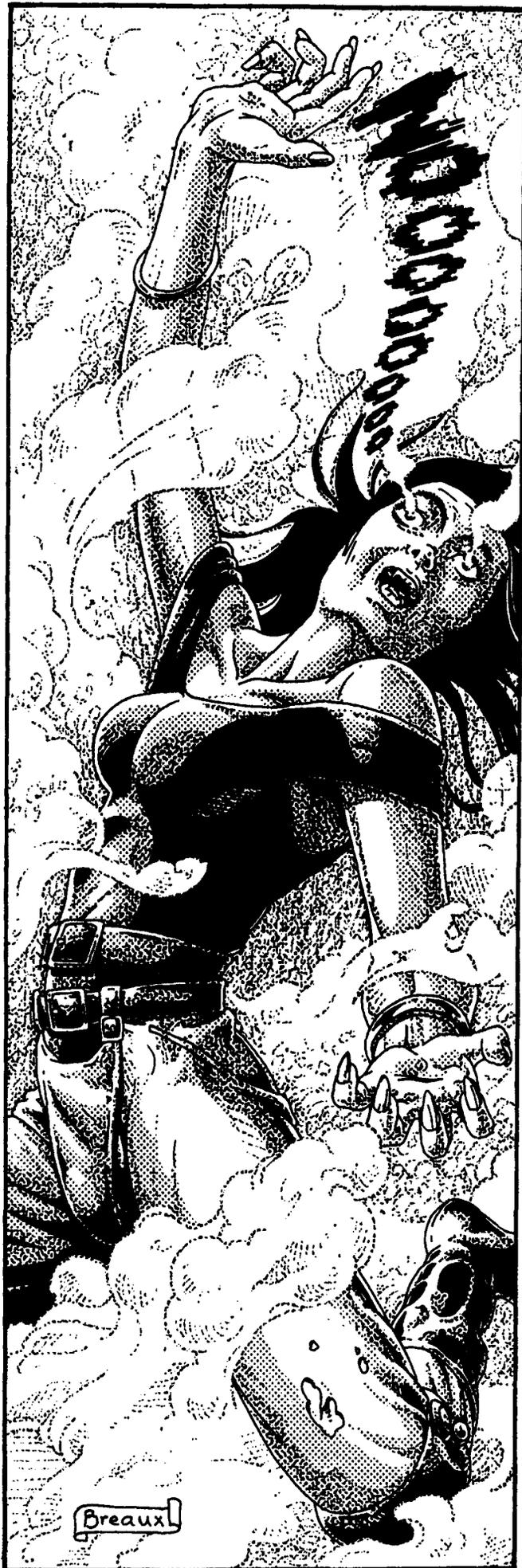
Xavier **doesn't** care about anyone or anything except that which will bring him closer to his goal of domination. People are the enemy and his food. He is unafraid of just about anything or anyone, including the Golden Ones, **Reid's** Rangers, or any other pathetic civilization in the region.

The Abandoned Vampire

The Tortured Soul

*Emmanuel awoke and sat straight up in his coffin, panting and feeling a weight of dread and fear on his shoulders. He looked around the room frantically, thinking that perhaps his brethren had found his hiding place. A short sigh of relief escaped his lips at the realization that he hadn't been discovered, but the dark feeling stuck with him. Again he looked around the room and found it dark. He looked at the clock on the wall to see that it was still mid-afternoon, yet he did **not** feel tired. "What has awakened me?" thought the demon, growing ever more frantic. Again he looked around the room for whatever could've stirred him from his rest.*

It was only then that he noticed the blue fog that was beginning to form around the floor. As it became thicker, a voice penetrated his brain and sent it pounding from the sheer power of it. "You failed me in the worst way, Emmanuel," said the voice to his psyche. "Because of your incompetence I will shortly lose my foothold on this world and all of your brethren will die. Before I retreat from this dimension I am going to make sure that you suf-



fer long to remember the plight of your brothers. Your fate will be worse than theirs. You will pray for death."

Emmanuel was totally taken aback. Never had he heard of an intelligence speaking to a mere Secondary Vampire before. He caught his breath and spoke back aloud, "Master, I didn't know they were following me. I'm sorry, I'm sorry my Master. Don't leave us, please." Whimpering, Emmanuel curled into a fetal position, begging for mercy. He pondered what his punishment could be, worse than death.

Knowing his thoughts, the intelligence answered. "Before these humans who you led to me force me to leave, I am going to take back a gift I gave you. Before I leave them, I will leave you." By this point the fog had filled the room and was circling the whimpering demon. "Get up!" commanded the voice. Still sobbing with the first fear he had felt in decades, Emmanuel found himself succumbing to his master's will. Emmanuel watched as the fog circled him in a tighter and tighter ringlet of luminous steam. At that point he knew what was about to happen to him.

Emmanuel burst into tears of pain and let out a scream of terror as the fog penetrated his body. He felt a thousand swords pierce his skin and light it on fire. He fell to his knees as he felt his very soul being ripped from his own body. His heart beat fast as he felt his strength leave him and he totally collapsed on the ground in a heap of tears and sobs. His mind ached as it lost all of its formidable power that he had grown so accustomed to. Never in his life had he been without psychic abilities and he was now disoriented and confused without the heightened senses. He let out another scream as he felt his fangs recede and saw his vision become unfocused in the dark room, all but blinding him in the pitch-black cellar. For an hour he felt his abilities leave him, one by one, each inciting new revolts of the flesh and mind until the pain was so great that he couldn't even scream anymore. Eventually the fog left the room and Emmanuel felt so very alone. He climbed into his coffin and fell unconscious.

When he awoke and found himself lying in the box of the dead, an uncontrollable panic came over him. He scrambled out of the coffin and onto the ground, landing in a sliver of light in the late afternoon sun. He cringed and though he felt no pain, he screamed maniacally and crawled to a corner of the dugout cellar. He surveyed his situation, realized what he had become, and continued to weep.

The Abandoned Vampire R.C.C.

A vampire becomes abandoned when its lord intelligence "leaves" the body of the demon, basically retracting its presence from it. This has dire consequences to the former vampire as it experiences separation from the intelligence. The creature finds that he is neither demon nor man and can't live the lifestyle of either. He has many of the limitations of both, but none of the perks. His soul is a tragic one fraught with insanity and distress. The torment drives most totally out of their minds and leads many of the rest to living hell or suicide. Only the exceptionally strong survive.

Vampires find these "fallen" beings disdainful and can even see a black aura around them that cannot be masked by magic or psionic means. Only vampires can see this aura, and all do so with no P.P.E. or I.S.P. cost.

Upon being abandoned, the character loses all attributes and abilities from their vampire transformation. Basically, the character is rolled up anew. If the character is actually being played

from conversion from human to vampire to Abandoned, skill selection may differ slightly. See section on skills below.

Note: This R.C.C. is available without limitation as a player character, but not recommended for beginner players due to the difficulty to play such a character.

Horror Factor: None normally, but 10 when in a mad fit (see below).

Alignment: Almost always selfish. The character thinks about nothing but trying to become human or vampire once again.

Size and Weight: Standard for the race of the character, but 20% lighter and very frail looking.

Attributes: I.Q. 2+2D6, M.E. 2+2D6, M.A. 2+2D6, P.S. 3+3D6, P.P. 2+3D6, P.E. 2+2D6, P.B. 5+1D4, Spd. 3D6. Although most mental prowess is diminished to even sub-human standards (due to mental shock from separation), the body is still physically fit (though it doesn't look it), but compared to the vampire state is inferior.

P.P.E.: 3D6

S.D.C.: 2D4x10, regardless of former race (even once-M.D.C. creatures become S.D.C.). The creature no longer has the immunities of a vampire to the extent of their former life, but is resistant to some forms of attack. See the section on Natural Abilities for details.

Hit Points: P.E. + 1D6 per level of experience. Remember that upon being abandoned the former vampire loses all old statistics including former Hit Points.

Psionics: None, even if they existed before becoming a vampire.

On the other hand, they are impervious to vampire mind control (not necessarily good in the eyes of the Abandoned). Well, "impervious" may be misleading. The truth is that *no* vampire will even *attempt* to control any Abandoned Vampire. Scholars believe it is due to disdain for the "fallen" vampires.

Natural abilities: The character has lost virtually all abilities of their vampire life and the one prior. Some abilities do exist to a lesser degree, however. The character is vulnerable to energy, kinetic, and all other attacks, but only takes half damage. Also, the Abandoned Vampire retains the ability to damage other vampires. Use the character's normal punch, kick, and other physical damages in Hit Points to vampires. The character is repulsive to all vampires and will never be fed on by vampires (their blood is disgusting). This also eliminates the chance that he will be turned back into a vampire (not necessarily good in the eyes of the character).

Vulnerabilities: Weapons of silver do double damage to the character and weapons of wood do triple damage, despite the lack of the vampire presence (thought by scholars to be as much a mental weakness as physical). Though the character may crave blood, drinking more than an ounce will cause the Abandoned Vampire to wretch and vomit uncontrollably. Penalties are: Attacks reduced to one, -5 on all combat rolls, -40% on all skills. Effects last for 2D4 melees.

Insanity: The Abandoned Vampire has a number of insanities. Roll once on the phobia table and once on the obsession table. Both insanities will link back to some experience from their life as a vampire. Also, 65% long to become vampires again. For these Abandoned, winning the favor of a vampire (any vampire) and becoming even a slave of one will become top priority. Whenever they approach a vampire they are scoffed (rarely even attacked). After a few minutes of mistreatment and being ignored, the character will go into a mad fit, trying

their best to be evil and just attract some attention. They will run around, howl, bite, and cause random mayhem for ten minutes or until the vampire leaves. During this period, the character has a Horror Factor of 10.

Combat: See skills.

Skills: Skills are handled in one of two ways. Most characters will simply "make up" their background and former O.C.C. The character remembers a great deal of what he knew before he became a vampire. It just takes a while to remember. Choose a character class and take all O.C.C. skills (ignoring "Other" and Secondary Skills) without O.C.C. skill bonuses. The character remains frozen at this level until he gains 2500 experience points. Then, add O.C.C. skill bonuses and take Other and Secondary Skills as a first level character (taking experience points back to zero). The character then advances as normal. The same is done with magic abilities. No spells are known until the character accumulates the 2500 points needed to reach first level.

If the character that was abandoned has been played for the whole nine yards from human to vampire to Abandoned Vampire, simply use the O.C.C. known before the character was "turned". Proceed as described above.

The Blood Priest

Servant of the Intelligence

Of all of the creatures to come through any Rift on Earth, perhaps none is as fearsome or terrible as the Blood Priest. Not because they look hideous or murder people for food and pleasure, but because they are willing servants to the most vile of any of the enemies of mankind: the Vampire Intelligence.

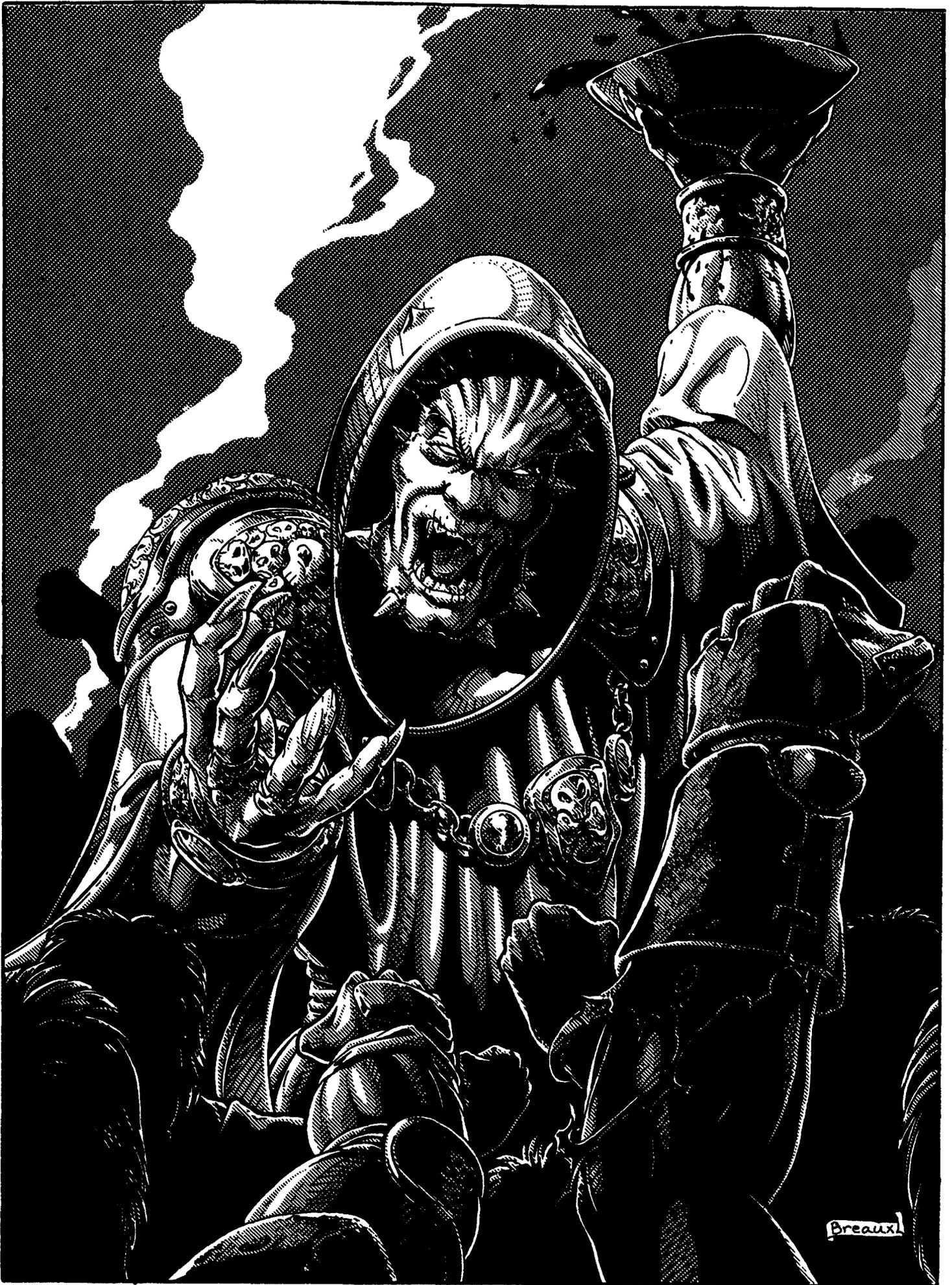
Blood Priests can be of virtually any race, but are usually those such as Gargoyles, Wolfen, Lesser Demons, or a violently mad and evil Elf or human that associates with vampires. Whoever the creature, he gives his soul to the intelligence in exchange for awesome power and eternal damnation.

In game terms, the character is basically a Witch who has entered into a pact with a powerful Vampire Intelligence. Due to the unique nature of the vampire, the resulting gifts are different from the traditional Witch, as is the pact. The powers bestowed mimic the abilities, powers, and weaknesses of the controlling intelligence.

Functions of the Blood Priest

The Blood Priest has several advantages that make him more useful to the intelligence in many ways than a regular vampire. For one, he can be created while the intelligence is trapped in another dimension and used to either prepare the way for his coming or take vengeance on those who last expelled him from that particular realm. The priest is used in establishing a cult to worship the intelligence and his vampire minions, a vital part of establishing a foothold in a region.

The cult that follows the intelligence is one way that the evil creature manipulates and influences local culture to bend it to evil ways. This creates loyal and even fanatical servants without the intelligence or his minions **having** to control them directly. They can be drawn on for their P.P.E. reserves or sent into battle alongside their vampire masters. They can serve as protectors for the demons during the day in exchange for protection from other supernatural threats during the night. They are a constant source



for blood sacrifice and other ritual components. Best of all, they can act on the will of the intelligence even when he is trapped in another dimension, perhaps accounting for the popularity of “gothic” and other vampire worship observed in modern societies. The leader of this movement is a Blood Priest, a being who communicates with and belongs to a master who he may or may not ever see return to Earth.

Why Become a Blood Priest?

Throughout time has existed the desire by humans and other creatures in the Megaverse for supreme power. Being a Blood Priest ensures just that. Hundreds, maybe thousands of cult members bowing to your commands, unreal natural and supernatural abilities, and being totally unique in the kingdom of the intelligence are all reasons, especially the latter. An intelligence may never have at any time more than one Blood Priest to command. The pact and special supernatural link between the two may not be repeated as long as the Blood Priest is alive. This places the priest in an authoritative position. After all, in a large kingdom even the Master Vampire has his peers.

Basically, it all comes down to the desire for power and authority. By entering into the pact with the intelligence, the Blood Priest gains three gifts: Power, Magic, and Union.

The Gift of Power

Choose *four* of the following:

- Add 2D6x10 to I.S.P.
- Add 1D6x10 to P.P.E.
- Super tough: add 200 Hit Points. See notes below on converting S.D.C. or M.D.C. to H.P.
- Cannot be transformed by any means.
- Increased mental endurance: Impervious to vampire mind control, +3 to save vs Horror Factor, psionic attack, and mind control. Add 6 to M.E. attribute.
- Automatically see the invisible, infrared, ultraviolet, and smell blood up to a mile (1.6 km) away.
- Control 1D4 lesser undead (Secondary and Wild Vampires, plus other undead), + 1 per level of experience.
- Receives the psychic abilities of Sixth Sense, Sense Magic, and Sense Evil.
- Supernatural strength and endurance: Add 10 to both attributes, and the priest can damage supernatural creatures (including vampires) in the same manner as a Secondary Vampire.
- Immune to any and all pain.
- The ability to live on blood, as per vampires. This does not carry all of the costs of true vampirism, and only requires one pint of blood per week. The bonus is that the P.P.E. taken from an animal or human sacrifice is doubled. So, not only double P.P.E. is obtained from a blood sacrifice, but a massive four times! Starving penalties are the same as a vampire, but take twice as long to set in.
- Bio-regenerate 2D6 H.P. per melee. This regeneration does not continue past death.

The Gift of Magic

The Blood Priest retains any knowledge he had of magic (frozen at the level when the being became a Blood Priest), plus has full knowledge of blood sacrifices, rituals, tapping ley lines and others for P.P.E., methods of meditation and rest for recover-

ing one's own P.P.E., and the basics behind all types of magic. The priest may not learn new spells through any means. He can use **Techno-Wizardry** devices and recognize runes and wards, though he may not be able to decipher them.

In addition, the Blood Priest has the following abilities:

Commune with Intelligence

Range: Indefinite, even across dimensions.

Duration: An hour of preparation gives five minutes of communication per level of experience of the priest.

Saving Throw: Not applicable.

P.P.E.: 25

When the priest needs to contact his master intelligence, he spills an ounce of his own blood during a ceremony which requires an hour to complete. At that point, a line of communication is established with the master intelligence. This line remains open for five minutes per level of the priest. The intelligence may establish this line of contact at any time at no P.P.E. cost, no preparation time, and no limit on communication time.

Blood Rift

Range: The Rift may be created up to 100 feet (30.5 m) away from the caster, though it must be over the blood pool and on a ley line nexus.

Duration: One minute per level of the priest. The ritual takes one hour of preparation.

Saving Throw: Not applicable.

P.P.E.: 500

By spilling a gallon of fresh blood on a nexus, the priest can open a dimensional Rift to any dimension with which the intelligence is familiar. This is often used to bring in the intelligence's minions from other dimensions or for the priest to dimension hop to and from desired locations. Standard rules for random encounters with open Rifts apply.

Blood Sight

Range: Indefinite, even cross-dimensional.

Duration: One minute, maximum five minutes.

Saving Throw: Not applicable.

P.P.E.: 30 P.P.E. per minute, maximum five minutes.

By peering into a pool of fresh blood, the priest can see other people or far-off places, much like a crystal ball. Either the priest or the one who spilled his blood must be very familiar with the place or person being viewed. It takes roughly a pint of blood to create the pool. The ritual requires 30 P.P.E. per minute of viewing with a maximum of five minutes before the blood spoils and the view is lost. The blood must be from a live victim or donor.

Create Blood Wraith

Type: Ritual only.

Duration: The curse is permanent until the priest is slain. If the priest dies a natural death (not violent) then the intelligence must be killed to free the spirit. The ritual takes 5 hours.

Saving Throw: 16, + 1 per three levels of experience of the priest.

P.P.E.: 1500

This ritual is a long and complicated blood sacrifice that yields no P.P.E., but curses the soul of the victim, dooming it to exist forever as a Blood Wraith, a type of vampiric ghost. The P.P.E. cost is so great that generally the ceremony includes many blood sacrifices to help fuel the ritual. The final step involves the burning of the body to ashes, killing it and condemning its soul forever. See below for stats on the Blood Wraith.

The Gift of Union

After the union with the intelligence, the entire perspective of the new Blood Priest is changed. He or she becomes **confident**, bold, and mentally strong. The priest becomes an excellent planner and very patient, all virtues of his new master. An alignment change is immediate, and the new code of **ethics** and morals becomes that of the master intelligence, almost always Diabolic Evil. The priest always feels superior to regular mortals, but inferior to Master Vampires and ancient Secondaries. The dark priest feels a kinship and equality with Secondary Vampires, though not many of them return his affection.

Even the physical appearance of the priest changes, becoming more attractive and the skin paling, becoming almost white. The most noticeable feature of the priest and one which makes them often mistaken for vampires is that when using psychic or other natural abilities his or her eyes glow blood red, as do a vampire's. The very presence of the priest is enough to inspire respect and fear.

From the union with the Vampire Intelligence, the priest gains *all* of the following abilities:

- Unlike normal Witches, the Blood Priest keeps any psionic abilities he or she had at full strength.
- Additional +3D6xIO to **I.S.P.** All I.S.P. of the priest is available to the intelligence at any time. The same is true with P.P.E.
- Additional +2D4xIO P.P.E.
- Add 4 to P.B. and gains a Horror Factor of 10.
- Summon and command lesser demons and the dead: 3D6 of these may be summoned and controlled as many as 3 times per day. The control lasts one hour per level of the priest, though after the control period is over they will never attack the priest or those protected by him.
- Long life: The priest will live as much as three times the normal life expectancy of his or her race.
- Convert any S.D.C. to H.P., add Hit Points, and then add **3D4x10**. Alternately, if an M.D.C. creature, multiply the M.D.C. number times 100 and then convert to H.P. and add 3D4xIO. Unlike true vampires, the Blood Priest still takes Mega-Damage from attacks inflicting Mega-Damage. This means that they are still vulnerable to most modern energy weapons, magic, rail guns, and **Vibro-weaponry**, though they are resistant to a point. See below.

Physical resistance and weakness

- Energy, kinetic, and most magic attacks inflict half damage to the Blood Priest. Mega-Damage attacks still do M.D.C. and S.D.C. attacks still do H.P./S.D.C. damage. Magic weapons inflict full damage. Remember that one point of Mega-Damage is equal to 100 H.P./S.D.C. This means that the priest *may* be able to resist small amounts of Mega-Damage.
- Weapons of silver and wood do double damage. Mega-Damage attacks still do M.D.C. and S.D.C. attacks still do H.P./S.D.C. damage.
- Water, holy water, the cross, garlic, and **wolfbane** do no damage to the priest, but he is naturally wary and fearful of them, giving them a Horror Factor of 12. Provided the H.F. roll is beaten, the priest can freely move over flowing rivers, circles of garlic, and other barriers that hold back vampires.
- The priest can function in direct sunlight, but is -1 attack, -2 on all combat rolls and saving throws, -10% on all skills, and -

100 Hit Points. He much prefers to sleep during the day, or if he must be up, stay indoors out of the light where his bonuses are full.

The Pact

Vampire Intelligences are different from most supernatural beings in the fact that their existence and livelihood stems from creating minions and establishing holds in other dimensions through the recruiting and turning of master servants. Because of this, the Vampire Intelligence does not require tasks to be done or offer any other benefits through advanced commitment, as is the case with normal Witches. The only requirement is a lifelong servitude and loyalty. Failure or breach of this one requirement means death for the priest, but only after a long period of pain and suffering. Chances are that the demon familiar or a horde of vampires would kill the priest if he went rogue and left his master.

After years of faithful servitude, the priest is often a candidate to become a Master Vampire (assuming the priest is **humanoid**). This usually appeals to the priest, especially if he is aging. Other times, an intelligence finds another superior being to replace his existing priest. Since there can only exist one priest at any given time, the former often finds himself as a Secondary Vampire, just another among the hordes.

Also note that a major difference between the Blood Priest and other Witches is the lack of a demon familiar. The Blood Priest will never have a familiar and therefore does not bear the Devil's Mark.

Blood Priest O.C.C.

Not suggested as a player character

Racial Requirements: Basically the same as any Witch. Humans, humanoids, and Elves are highly desired for the position, especially Blood Druids, Blood Shamans, and Necromancers. Other popular O.C.C.s include practitioners of magic, Druids, and powerful psychics. Often a priest is recruited from across the Megaverse and transported by the intelligence to its chosen staging ground via the Blood Rift. Creatures of magic and supernatural beings can not become Blood Priests, including vampires.

Attribute Limitation: Upon conversion into a Blood Priest, the character takes on the alignment of the intelligence, almost always Diabolic Evil.

O.C.C. Notes: Whatever the character's former O.C.C., all skills, natural abilities, and magic are permanently frozen at their current level and experience points drop to zero. Use the Witch experience table for the new O.C.C. For every odd level of experience starting at level 3, two skills (no bonuses) may be selected from among the following categories: Domestic, Pilot, Medical, Rogue, Science, Technical, and Wilderness. If a skill is chosen one that the character already has, it becomes unfrozen and continues advancing at the next level of experience.

Equipment: It is likely that the priest will be provided everything he needs by the intelligence's vampire kingdom. If for some reason he is not, perhaps the priest is preparing the way for the intelligence's coming or he is traveling and building the strength of the intelligence's cult or preparing for a new kingdom in a different region, he has only the possessions he owned when he was recruited.

Money: The priest, once the intelligence is on earth and its kingdom prospering, will live like a king with all of the wealth he can imagine. The larger the cult, the more tithes brought in, and the richer the priest becomes.

Blood Wraith

N.P.C. monster and villain

A Blood Wraith is the damned soul of an enemy of a Vampire Intelligence, once a living, breathing, sentient being, who has been cursed for all time to live on the blood of other beings. Like a true vampire, the blood of stock animals can't replace the need for humanoid blood, and its thirst is insatiable. This causes the Blood Wraith to feed constantly, rarely leaving victims with a drop of blood left in their bodies. Fortunately, these vile creatures are very rare and limited to those places where large vampire kingdoms thrive. This means that Mexico, South America, and the southwestern portions of the continental United States are the most common areas where these phantoms are found.

The Blood Wraith is easy to recognize and even easier to see. It radiates a dark red glow, is semi-transparent and has a vaguely humanoid form. It seems to float in the air about a foot (.3 m) from the ground and moves slowly, making it easy to escape the creature even on foot. This fact, compiled with the creature's cowardice and dislike for being seen, makes the creature prone to prey on sleeping children, especially babies, who have no way to escape until it is too late. Their intangible bodies also allow them to slide through walls or up from the ground to ambush and surprise victims.

The wraith attacks by allowing its intangible body to slide over the victim, paralyzing it. The sensation felt by the prey is similar to being stung by 1000 needles at once, all over the body, as its blood seeps to the surface through the flesh and into the red aura that makes up the Wraith's form. Despite all attempts, the stunned victim can't mutter anything louder than a whisper. The Blood Wraith can drain one pint of blood per minute in this manner and will only stop when scared away by someone other than its victim.

The Blood Wraith may not be killed, but can be warded off with fire and the creature cannot enter a ring of fire. Even a candle wielded aggressively at the ghost will cause it to turn tail and run.

The Blood Wraith is the product of a curse placed on a blood sacrifice by a Blood Priest, though this is hardly common knowledge. The only way to expel the demon from the earthly realm is to kill the priest who created it, or kill its master intelligence. See the Blood Priest O.C.C. for further details on the creation and destruction of Blood Wraiths.

The Blood Wraith

Alignment: Considered Anarchist.

Attributes: Very low sentient intelligence: **I.Q.** 1D4, **M.E.** 1D6, **M.A.** 2D4, **P.S.** not applicable, **P.P.** 2D4, **P.E.** not applicable, **P.B.** 2D4, **Spd** 1D4+4 floating in the air, half that going through solid material.

Hit Points/M.D.C.: Not applicable, invulnerable to damage.

Horror Factor: 15

P.P.E.: 10

Natural Abilities: Invulnerable, never tires, does not require air, food, or water, float in the air, immune to all magic, psionics, and possession.



Weaknesses: Can not handle solid objects, constantly craves blood, and has a total fear of fire and vampires. Can not drain blood from creatures of magic or supernatural beings.

Combat: 2 attacks per melee, no bonuses. Has no means to damage other than its blood drain, which does 1D6 damage direct to Hit Points every melee. Victims of the blood drain must save vs magic or be completely helpless, unable to move away from the Blood Wraith.

Magic: None

Psionics: None

Average Life Span: Unknown; presumed immortal.

Languages: Doesn't seem to speak or understand any language.

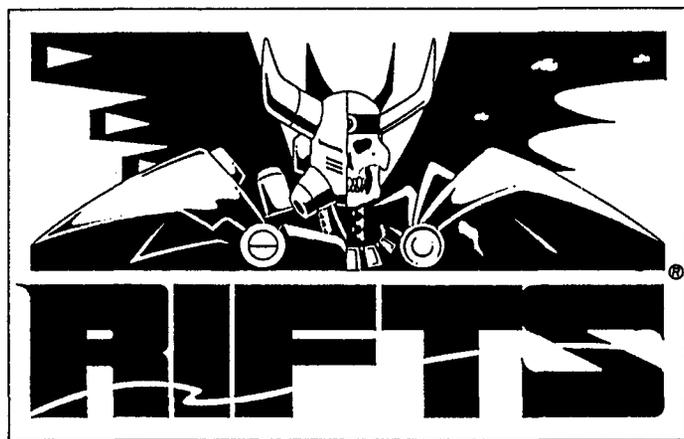
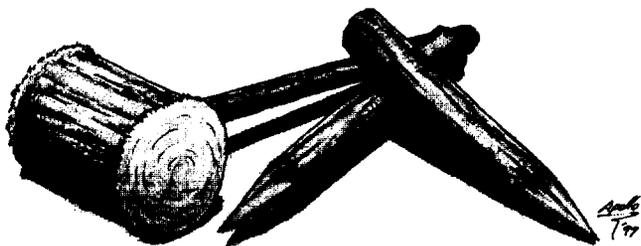
Habitat: Known to exist from South America to the American Southwest.

Allies: Does not associate with other beings.

Enemies: Everyone

Size: Roughly six feet (1.8 m) tall and of humanoid shape.

Weight: Weightless



Bring Out Your Dead!

Optional New Character Classes for Rifts® By Mark Sumimoto

Of the many mystic arts in the **Megaverse**, few are more despicable than Necromancy. Regardless, it is very ancient and

widespread, and over time, certain variations and specialties have arisen among its practitioners. Below are the ones most common on Rifts Earth, some of the most evil creatures to walk the planet.

Cursebringer O.C.C.

Arguably the most powerful of the Necromantic practitioners of magic, the powers of the Cursebringer are drawn from the twin forces of Famine and Pestilence. While the Cursebringer does not have the hard offensive power of the **Warborn** or the murderous talents of the Murder-Mage, he is capable of creating much more misery and pain. When the word "curse" comes to mind, one often thinks of a spell that inflicts bad luck or some minor ailment. But for the Cursebringer, this is only the barest potential of the true curse. To him, a curse includes a deadly plague unleashed upon a village, a drought that endangers the countryside, or a hero turned into a rat. How threatening does a lone homicidal killer seem when compared to a swarm of locusts consuming all in their path? Indeed, it is the ability to curse an entire community that makes the Cursebringer so deadly and so feared.

The Cursebringer uses his power and the fear he instills to coerce others to obey his will. The threat of starvation or plague may be scoffed at first. But when the first wave of drought hits or when a dozen children run hot with fever, these threats are taken very seriously, very quickly. Even brave heroes and gung-ho warriors fold quickly when struck with ill luck that renders them unable to shoot straight. The power of the Cursebringer is such that he need not even be in the area when his might is felt. A village could be beset by the fiercest storm, while its creator sits high and dry in safety a hundred miles away. He can even cast curses with effects that are not felt until after the Cursebringer is long gone.

In addition to magical power, the Cursebringer also has considerable psionic ability. His primary psionic power is the Evil Eye, more commonly known as Bio-Manipulation. Rather than having to spend minutes casting a powerful curse, the Cursebringer can use his psionics to inflict a less powerful, but similar effect in just a few seconds. In addition to the abilities of the standard Bio-Manipulation power, he can cause a victim to burn up with fever, buckle over in nausea, or collapse from fatigue. Standard practice is to use this power to buy time to cast a true curse. It is rarely used as a curse in and of itself, unless the Cursebringer is really strapped for time or just trying to escape.

It is very important to keep in mind that the curses practiced by the Cursebringer are not limited to those labeled as such. A summoned tectonic entity that keeps throwing trash at a single victim or being constantly followed by a pack of dogs can be considered curses. The Cursebringer can summon a possessing entity, send it to possess a victim, and make him do odd things occasionally, like kill a baby or stab a comrade in the back. And don't forget about metamorphosis magic. Imagine having the body of a Great Horned Dragon with the strength of a human. Even worse, imagine that situation in Coalition territory. Clearly, with summoning and metamorphosis magic at his disposal, the Cursebringer can inflict a much broader range of pain and misery than possible with usual curses alone.

More impressive to the Cursebringer than the power of his magic is his ability to make others do his bidding without raising a finger. Many times the simple threat of retribution is enough to



make some people capitulate to the mage's desires. This is most beneficial to the **Cursebringer** since his most powerful magic requires so much P.P.E. to cast. As long as his victims fear him, he need not cast another curse, unless he so desires. Of course, many **Cursebringers** are evil beings who enjoy inflicting pain, so they often keep in practice by casting hexes on innocent victims every now and then. The ability to get what he wants with just a threat makes many a Cursebringer very complacent and lazy. If he gets sloppy, he may find his throat slit in the night by a fed up servant. However, it is a common belief among those familiar with them that killing a Cursebringer will unleash an even greater curse upon the assassin and his people. To some extent, this is true (or at least possible), but is mostly just a myth that the Cursebringer does his best to perpetuate.

A practice that is common among Cursebringers is to sell their services as a curse remover. Those in need of such services are often ready to pay large sums of money to get them, even though most curses are temporary anyway. Of course, only someone knowledgeable in magic or magic lore will know such helpful hints. The Cursebringer certainly knows this, but is not about to tell that to someone about to give him a sack full of gold. In fact, if the curse is within an hour or two of elapsing, the Cursebringer will rush the victim into his treatment room or area and perform a removal ritual that lasts for about an hour or two. The ritual is all faked, of course, and the "removal" occurs when the spell

ends. This is where the Cursebringer's ability to recognize and diagnose curses comes in most handy.

Another common practice, if the victim has powerful friends, is to claim that this particular curse requires a special component in order to be removed and it must be removed within a certain time period or the victim will **die!** Rarely does this component have anything to do with the curse and it is really something the Cursebringer wants for himself. The specified time period is just the amount of time left on the curse, since he can't very well let the victim get better on his own. **Where's** the profit in that?

As you may have guessed, the Cursebringer often creates business for himself by casting curses on people in his neighborhood. As soon as the victim feels its effects, he heads (or is carried) straight to the local medicine man (or the Cursebringer posing as one) to have the curse lifted. This is an easy task since he was the one who cast it in the first place and can dispel it with a thought. Usually, he goes through an elaborate display that seems to take a lot out of him to "remove" the curse. This is done both to show the amount of effort and energy he had to expend to perform the removal and to convince the people of his authenticity. If the Cursebringer is careful in his distribution of his curses, no one suspects his involvement and they blame it on some enigmatic witch in the area. Yes, being accepted as a good and respected medicine man is a status adored by truly evil Cursebringers, who are laughing maniacally in private the whole time.

Cursebringers are most common in Africa where they originated. Many ally themselves with African Witches with whom they share a common interest and spell knowledge. They are already a great problem in Europe, where they prey on the gypsy communities. There, the gypsies are forced to pay a percentage of their stolen goods to the Cursebringer or else he sends them harsh weather and robs their best thieves of their talents. Cursebringers are also becoming more common in the Magic Zone, where small villages and Fadetowns are seen as ideal places to work their magic. In Mexico, the few Cursebringers who have made their way there are a growing problem to vampire hunters and human communities. Allied with the vampires who rule Mexico, Cursebringers summon droughts and destroy woodlands at the request of their allies. This further depletes the amount of weapons which can be used to fight the nearly invulnerable vampires. Reid's Rangers and The Children of Quetzalcoatl deal ruthlessly with these mages and treat them just like they do their undead allies (in some cases, right down to the stake in the heart).

Psionic Powers of the Cursebringer

1. The **Evil Eye**: A more powerful version of the super psionic power, Bio-Manipulation, this power functions just like that power, but with more available effects. Duration is the same (4D4 minutes), but is doubled if the Cursebringer is actually touching the target, preferably near the part of the body to be affected. I.S.P. cost is only 5 and range is increased to an incredible 500 feet (152.4 m). The following effects are in addition to those available from the standard power:

- **Fatigue**: The victim's body will feel twice as heavy to him, as his body begins to produce fatigue poisons at a rapid rate. Penalties are: -4 to P.S., P.E., and Spd and -3 to all combat abilities.
- **Fever**: The victim's body temperature rises to dangerous levels, leaving him weak and tired. Attacks per melee and Spd will be reduced by half, skills are reduced by -30%, and combat bonuses are halved. In addition, the victim will be very disoriented and may even pass out.
- **Hunger**: Instills the victim with a voracious hunger. Penalties while hungry are: -1 to all combat abilities. If the victim acts on this feeling and eats past the point of being full, he will be very sick and will vomit 1D4 times in the next ten minutes. Penalties are the same as when hungry, except that the victim will be totally impaired for one melee round while vomiting.
- **Nausea**: A general feeling of stomach uneasiness strikes the victim. Penalties are the same as with hunger, except that the victim will not need to stuff himself to vomit in the next ten minutes.
- **Sneezing**: Uncontrollable bouts of sneezing overcome the victim. Attacks per melee are reduced by half, the victim is -4 to strike, and prowling is impossible.
- **Weakness**: A loss of breath and a general feeling of fatigue strike the victim. All combat abilities are reduced by -4.

2. **Immunity to Bio-Manipulation**: Bio-Manipulation and similar psionic attacks will not affect the Cursebringer. This includes Psychosomatic Disease, Deaden Senses, Induce Sleep, and anything else which affects the body. Psionic healing is not included.

3. **Induce Fear**: This is an automatic power of the Cursebringer that constantly works at low levels to make those in his presence uneasy and apprehensive around the mage. By

focusing and concentrating for a moment, the Cursebringer can make everyone in his presence fearful and afraid of him. Everyone within 100 feet (30.5 m) of the Cursebringer must roll a saving throw vs Horror Factor or suffer the standard penalties. Alternately, he can direct this power to one specific individual at an even greater range of 300 feet (91.4 m) with the same effects. Horror Factor is 12, +1 at levels 3, 6, 10 and 14. This attack counts as one melee action and can be used at will as often as needed without I.S.P. cost.

4. **I.S.P.:** 1D6×10 plus the M.E. attribute number. 1D6+1 I.S.P. is gained at each additional level of experience. The Cursebringer is considered to be a major psionic and requires a 12 or higher to save against psionic attacks.

Magic Powers of the Cursebringer

1. **Recognize Curses**: With a glance, a Cursebringer can recognize if a person is under the influence of a curse or similar magical influence, including possession. At the cost of 2 P.P.E., he can discern the exact nature of the curse and its effects, the remaining duration, and the level at which it was cast. If the cursed individual's form has been radically changed as a result of the curse, the Cursebringer will be able to see his true form. This includes victims of the Transformation ritual, unwilling victims of metamorphosis and similar magic, and cursed locations and items.

2. **Immunity to Curses and Magic Sickness**: Part of his training in curse magic includes a resistance to it. Normal curses and magic sicknesses will not affect the Cursebringer at all. Those cast by a god, demon lord, alien intelligence, or one of the Four Horsemen can affect the Cursebringer, but duration will be half and he has an extra bonus of +2 to save. In addition, he can use his power of Remove Curse to eliminate the ailment, unless the effects of the curse somehow interfere.

3. **Remove Curses**: Identical in function to the common spell of the same name, except that this magic is more powerful and less costly. P.P.E. cost is only 40 and the ritual version takes half the time to conduct. Against curses that are resistant to Remove Curse, such as Transformation, the chance of working is doubled. In addition, the magic can be used to exorcise possessing spirits (20 P.P.E.) and reverse metamorphoses (60 P.P.E.).

Removing permanent curses is possible, but difficult. 200 P.P.E. and an hour long ritual are required and even then the curse may still exist. The cursed person gets another opportunity to save against the curse, but with only his normal bonuses, additional bonuses from the ritual are not available. The ritual may be attempted again at any time, but three failures mean that the Cursebringer is unable to remove it. However, another Cursebringer may try. The ritual can also be used against cursed weapons and places with a 75% chance of working. A rune weapon that has been cursed from its **creation** cannot have its curse removed.

4. **Mastery over Curse Magic and Initial Spell Knowledge**: The Cursebringer is so familiar with curses and similar magic that he is able to cast those selected from the common spell listing at half the P.P.E. cost of other mages. Summoning and metamorphosis magic are also cast at half the P.P.E. cost, but only when used to inflict harm on another, such as sending a swarm of locusts to a farm or turning someone into a newt. If used on himself or to summon defenders, the P.P.E. cost is standard. All magic selected from the African Witch or Necro-Magic listings

require full P.P.E. to cast. Keep in mind, however, that non-Necromancers normally cast **Necro-Magic** at twice the listed P.P.E. cost and the only other O.C.C. that can cast African Witch magic is the African Witch. See **Rifts® Africa** for details about African Witches and their magic.

Beginning magic knowledge includes the African Witch spells, Taboo, Charge Object With Evil, Pestilence Touch, and Delirium, the Necromantic spells, Curse of Hunger (*new*), Curse of Wasting (*new*), and Maggots, and the common spells, Death Curse, Sickness, and Spoil. At each additional level of experience, the **Cursebringer** will figure out one additional curse, metamorphosis, or summoning spell from either the Necro-Magic or common spell listings or any spells from the African Witch magic list. Additional spell magic can also be learned as usual, but new curses, metamorphosis, and summoning magic will be most coveted. Other areas of interest include any spells which are detrimental to living beings, such as Blind or Befuddle, or anything related to illness. See **Rifts® Mystic Russia™** for details on the *new* Necromantic spells.

5. P.P.E.: **1D6×10** plus the P.E. attribute number. 2D6 P.P.E. is gained at each additional **level** of experience. Much of the **Cursebringer's** magic requires a lot more P.P.E. than he personally has. Accordingly, he relies greatly on ley lines, nexus points, and sacrifices to weave his magic.

6. Magic and O.C.C. Bonuses: +1 to save vs magic at levels 3, 6, 10 and 14, +1 to Spell Strength at levels 4, 8 and 13, +1 to save vs possession and mind control at levels 1, 4, 7, 10 and 14, and +3 to save vs Horror Factor at level one, +1 at levels 2, 5, 8 and 13.

Cursebringer O.C.C. (N.P.C. Villain and Optional Player Character)

Also known as: The Plaguegiver, Cursed One, and Child of Famine and Pestilence.

Alignment Restrictions: Any, but the vast majority are evil. Good-aligned **Cursebringers** are possible, and they will use their powers to combat their evil brethren.

Attribute Requirements: I.Q. 12, M.E. 10, and P.E. 10 or higher.

Race Restrictions: No restrictions, but most are humans or D-Bees.

Player Character Note: Evil **Cursebringers** are the ultimate extortionists. Individuals who do not comply with the **Cursebringer's** demands will find themselves covered with a pox or transformed into a rodent. Powerful **Cursebringers** can blackmail whole communities by threatening them with a drought or a swarm of locusts. Regardless, an evil **Cursebringer** enjoys using his power to manipulate others. Actually, he takes greater pleasure in having his demands met on the merit of the threat alone. If he can get what he wants without having to use his magic, it is taken as a sign of true power. Another common practice among evil **Cursebringers** is to offer to remove a curse, but request that a special component be found for him first. Of course, he will insist that it is essential for the removal of the curse, but is usually just for the mage's own use.

A good-aligned **Cursebringer** is a rarity, but not unheard of. These noble mages use their powers to counter those of evil **Cursebringers**. The ability to recognize and remove curses can be very beneficial in searching ancient ruins or combating evil

mages. Many good **Cursebringers** also learn medicinal skills to become full-fledged medicine men.

O.C.C. Skills:

Languages and Literacy: Two of choice at 95%.

Math: Basic (+15%)

Art (+15%)

Sculpting and Whittling (+10%)

Land Navigation (+10%)

Astronomy (+10%)

Wilderness Survival (+5%)

Hand to Hand Combat must be selected as an "other" skill selection. Hand to Hand: Basic counts as one skill selection, Expert counts as two, and Assassin or Martial Arts counts as three.

O.C.C. Related Skills: Select six skills at level one, plus one additional skill at levels 3, 5, 8 and 13.

Communications: Radio: Basic or Performance only.

Cowboy: None

Domestic: Any (+10%)

Electrical: None

Espionage: Any, except Sniper or Tracking.

Mechanical: None

Medical: First Aid or Holistic Medicine only (+12% for good-aligned characters).

Military: None

Physical: Any, except Acrobatics, Boxing, and Wrestling.

Pilot: Any, except Robots and Power Armor, Tanks and APCs, and Jet Aircraft.

Pilot Related: Any

Rogue: Any (+2%)

Science: Any (+5%)

Technical: Any (+5%)

Weapon Proficiencies: Any

Wilderness: Any (+5%)

Secondary Skills: Select two Secondary Skills at level one, plus one additional at levels 2, 4, 7, 10 and 14 from those listed excluding those marked "None". These are additional areas of knowledge that do not get the advantage of the bonuses listed in parentheses. All Secondary Skills start at the base skill level.

Standard Equipment: Starts with several sets of regular clothing, a cloak or cape, utility belt, canteen, survival knife, a backpack, sleeping bag, bag of rock salt, several pouches of preserving spices, 50 feet (15.2 m) of strong rope, a flashlight, several candles, a lighter or box of matches, several sets of costume jewelry, and some personal items. They tend to dress lavishly or under layers of cloaks and ornate jewelry.

Weapons include one silver-plated dagger or short sword, one ancient style **Techno-Wizard** or other low level magic weapon of choice, and one modern weapon of choice. Body armor can be any light style, but must not be full environmental or composed primarily of metal.

Starts with one non-military land vehicle, horse, or other riding creature of choice. A better vehicle may be acquired later, but since most **Cursebringers** prefer to linger in one place for a while before moving on, this is not likely.

Money: 1D4×1000 credits and 2D6×1000 credits worth of gems and jewelry. The **Cursebringer** makes a lot of money later in life, but doesn't start with a whole lot.

Cybernetics: None to start and will be avoided at all costs. Only

cybernetics to replace missing parts will be considered and even then bio-systems will be most desired.

Cursebringer Experience Table

1	0,000 - 2,200
2	2,201 - 4,400
3	4,401 - 8,800
4	8,801 - 16,800
5	16,801 - 25,200
6	25,201 - 35,000
7	35,001 - 50,500
8	50,501 - 71,000
9	71,001 - 97,500
10	97,501 - 132,000
11	132,001 - 175,000
12	175,001 - 242,500
13	242,501 - 305,000
14	305,001 - 350,000
15	350,001 - 400,000

Death Walker O.C.C.

"The living are weak. Pain, fear, sickness, suffering. They're all the bane of the living. They struggle all of their pathetic lives in a futile attempt to keep death one more day away. Fools. Death is inevitable. Life is nothing more than the path to that ultimate goal. I know. I walk among the dead. My life, forced as I am to lead it, has been spent in the presence of the dead and the undead. Compared to the life-grubbers, my dead and undead allies are the strong. They know no fear. Pain is meaningless to them. Sickness is a distant memory. And suffering is reserved for the weak. Reserved, that is, until the weak finally become the strong."

- A common belief among the dark mages known as the Death Walkers

Caravans of animated dead are a common sight in the Phoenix Empire. Consequently, it is no surprise that one Necromantic character class has arisen that specializes in animating and raising the dead. He is called the Death Walker **because** of his practice of surrounding himself with his undead minions. In addition to the walking skeletons, linen wrapped mummies, and brain-dead humanoid zombies commonly seen with Necromancers, the Death Walker commands a number of monstrous, nightmarish undead creatures and rather intelligent zombies. The nightmare creatures are Monster Zombies, very similar to the nightmare zombies created by Death. The intelligent zombies are like the dead returned to life, a shocking power that allows the dead to exact vengeance on their killers.

Although all of the Necromantic practitioners of magic are secretive by nature, the Death Walker is even more private. Cults and guilds of this magic class are rare. Even among the monsters of the Phoenix Empire, they prefer to pass themselves off as traditional Necromancers, hiding their Monster Zombies from sight until needed. The reason for this is unknown, but it seems that the Death Walker dislikes the company of living beings, even those who worship Death or live among the undead. He only seems to find comfort in the company of his dead and undead servants or other undead, including vampires, ghouls, and Dybbuk.

Another reason for his self-induced seclusion may be related to the great power he possesses. Just having a fearless army of the

dead at your beck and call is enough power for most Necromancers. The Death Walker goes a few steps further with his unmatched ability to create the undead. This power is highly coveted in the Necromantic world and many would attempt to learn or steal its secrets. The power to create Monster Zombies, so much like that of Death itself, makes many Necromancers very envious and resentful of the Death Walker.

Perhaps the most abhorrent and coveted power of the Death Walker is to bring a person back from the grave for what is called "The Night of Vengeance". Basically, this magic creates a super zombie, called the Night Walker, that believes itself to be the returned spirit of that person back to avenge his death at the hands of another. The Death Walker may invoke this magic for any number of reasons. Often, it is because the victim was killed by an enemy of the mage. In this case, the resurrected person is intended to be a psychological and physical weapon to be used against that enemy. Another reason is to use the resurrected person as an intelligent ally. Should the Night Walker accomplish his mission or be otherwise convinced his killer is dead, he will return to the Death Walker and ask to be returned to death. Since the Death Walker is the true power behind the Night Walker, he can do so with a thought. More often, though, the mage tells the zombie that it must perform services for him as payment for his return. After a few days of working for the mage, the Night Walker forgets about returning and continues its new "life" as a minion of the Death Walker.

So far, the long training process and the great secrecy practiced by its masters make the Death Walker one of the least common practitioners of magic. Most are found alone or in small groups scattered across northern Africa. The southern regions are generally avoided because of the **Splugorth** influence there. These mages are also known to have traveled to other continents including Asia, Europe, and the **Americas**. In South America, they find the **Ellal** undead monsters to be very good allies. The Asian continent is covered with demonic monsters who the Death Walker could ally himself with. In Europe, they are welcomed into the cults of the Blood Druids, who admire their abilities, but are not interested in stealing them. The Death Walkers in North America have taken refuge in the New West, where they can pass themselves off as mortuary operators, stealing the bodies of fallen gunmen to create more undead. This cover works well, but many draw suspicion to themselves when they can't resist the temptation of returning a fallen Gunslinger for the Night of Vengeance.

Magic Powers of the Death Walker

1. Animate the Dead: Identical to the power possessed by the Necromancer, except that *five* corpses/skeletons can be controlled per each level of experience. See the Necromancer O.C.C. description for details.

2. Create Zombies and Mummies: The power to create normal zombies and mummies is identical to the magic described in the **Rifts® RPG**. The main difference is that the Death Walker can perform the ritual at half the P.P.E. cost and in half the time. So a mummy requires only 80 P.P.E. to create and a zombie requires 125 P.P.E.

3. Create Monster Zombies: Similar to the power possessed by the Horseman of the Apocalypse, Death, the Death Walker is able to create more powerful versions of the standard zombie. The ritual requires the use of multiple bodies, at least three, and



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takes 1D6 hours to perform. During the ceremony, the Death Walker stitches arms, legs, tentacles, and other limbs from various beings to the body of another. Extra heads may also be added. The result is a mishmash of incongruous parts that vaguely resemble the originating body.

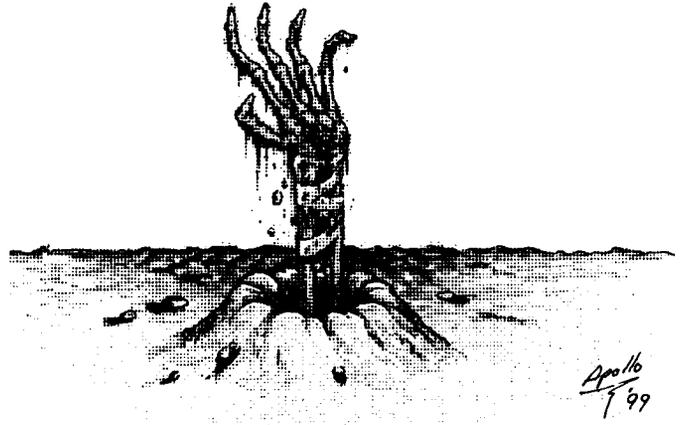
Often, animal and monster corpses are rebuilt with a humanoid head or hands or several animals are stitched together to create a chimera-like amalgamation. Likewise, humanoid corpses can be rebuilt with animal heads or limbs. Giant-sized Monster Zombies can also be created, but require much larger bodies and an additional two hours of work.

The maximum number of heads, arms, and tails a Monster Zombie may have is four, plus one per every other level of the Death Walker's experience, starting at level two. This means a first level Death Walker may create a Monster Zombie with three arms and one head, while a fifth level Death Walker can create one with four arms and two heads. The maximum number of legs it can have is equal to the maximum number of heads, arms, and tails. Wings may be added to the Monster Zombie too, but each counts as an arm and two wings are necessary for flight. Flight is provided magically so the wings need not be fully intact, skeletal wings are okay.

Range of control over the zombies is limited to 100 feet (30.5 m) per level of experience, but the Monster Zombie can venture beyond that if so commanded by its master. After completing its task, it will return to the mage for further instruction. P.P.E. cost is 300 for normal-sized Monster Zombies and 600 for giants, plus 5 P.P.E. temporarily imparted to the zombie for the duration of its existence. The powers and abilities of the Monster Zombie are as follows:

- I.Q. 8, PS. 24, considered to be supernatural, P.P. 20, RE. is effectively unlimited, P.B. 4, and Spd 14. Giant-sized Monster Zombies receive an additional bonus of +10 to P.S., +2 to P.P., and +10 to Spd. Additional legs above two provide a Spd bonus of +2 per leg. Winged Monster Zombies can fly at a Spd of 28, +10 for giants.
- Punch and kick damage depends on the supernatural PS attribute. Claws add an additional 2D6 M.D. Tentacle, tail, and bite attacks inflict half damage.
- M.D.C. is 2D6x10 for human sized zombies, plus 10 per level of the Death Walker. M.D.C. for giants is 4D6x10, plus 15 per level. Damage is regenerated at the rate of 1D4x10 per hour. Even if reduced to below zero M.D.C., the Monster Zombie will still regenerate until back to full strength. The only way to permanently destroy it is with the Exorcism power, the Remove Curse magic, or by killing the Death Walker who created it.
- Horror factor: 14 or 16 for giants.
- Attacks per melee are equal to the combined number of arms, heads, and tails possessed by the Monster Zombie.
- Combat bonuses are: +2 to initiative, +3 to strike, +4 to parry and dodge, and +1 to entangle. An additional bonus of +1 to strike and parry is gained with every arm or tentacle beyond the first two.
- Impervious to fear, drugs, poisons, and any magic or psionics that can only affect a living body.
- Skills of the Monster Zombie are limited to climb 75/65% and swim 50%. Tails and tentacles add a bonus of +5% to climb per appendage. Flipper like legs add a bonus of +20% to swim (and +10 to Spd when swimming), but instill a penalty of -5 to the Spd attribute on land.

- Possesses 5 P.P.E. drawn from the Death Walker. If the Monster Zombie is destroyed, this P.P.E. flows right back to its creator. Conversely, if the Death Walker is killed, the Monster Zombie falls to pieces.
- Can be held at bay with the Banishment spell or Circle of Protection.
- Silver and fire inflict Mega-Damage to the Monster Zombie equal to their normal S.D.C. damage. Mega-Damage and magic fire inflict double damage.



4. Night of Vengeance: By calling upon ancient magics and conducting a lengthy (2D4 hours) ritual, the Death Walker is able to resurrect a victim of foul play for one night of vengeance. The ritual can only be performed at night, the results of which are not seen until the next night. As soon as the last ray of sunlight vanishes over the horizon, the resurrected person, referred to as the Night Walker, erupts from the ground in front of the Death Walker for a chance at revenge on the one who killed him.

Actually, the magic does not really bring the person back to life. What the ritual does is bond a Haunting Entity to the body of the person to be brought back. If the ritual is done right and the person really was killed by another, the Entity will imprint on the last memories left in the body and believe itself to be that person returned from the grave. Other aspects of the magic enable the Entity to animate the body and provide it with much heightened power. The cost of the ritual is a temporary expenditure of 500 P.P.E. plus 10 P.P.E. temporarily imparted to the zombie for the duration of its existence. The duration is effectively unlimited and can be ended with a thought.

Once the resurrected person kills its killer, it loses purpose and effectively becomes just another zombie in service to the Death Walker, though more powerful and intelligent. The zombie has 48 hours to find and kill its killer. If it cannot do so or if its killer is already dead, then it will revert to its creator's control. The ritual only works on people killed in the last 48 hours and cannot be performed on supernatural creatures. Range of control is limited to voice command, but the Night Walker can conduct operations far away from its master. The powers of the Night Walker are as follows:

- I.Q. 10 or whatever the person had in life, whichever is lower. The entity animating the zombie effectively duplicates every aspect of the person, right down to small personality quirks. More importantly, the Night Walker has half the skills available to it in life, except for spell casting abilities and spell knowledge, with only a -10% penalty in proficiency. Innate magic powers, superhuman abilities, and psionic powers are

lost as well. W.P. skills are performed at half the skill level the person had achieved in life.

- PS. 26 and is considered to be supernatural, PP. 14, P.E. is effectively unlimited, P.B. 6, and Spd is 12.
- M.D.C. is **1D6×10**, +5 per level of the Death Walker at the time of resurrection.
- Horror factor: **14**
- Hand to Hand Combat skill is equal to one level lower than what the zombie knew in life.
- No **pain!** The Night Walker feels no pain and can function even if reduced to -20 M.D.C. If destroyed, it will regenerate by the next night, unless a successful psionic or magic exorcism is performed on the body.
- No **fear!** Even if the zombie was a spineless coward in life that will not carry on into its afterlife. Only a threat from the Death Walker will cause it to cower.
- Possesses **10 P.P.E.** drawn from the Death Walker. If the Night Walker is destroyed, this P.P.E. flows right back to its creator. Conversely, if the Death Walker is killed, the Night Walker falls to pieces and the motivating Entity is released.
- Most magic and psionic attacks have no effect on the undead Night Walker. However, magic and psionic energy attacks inflict full damage. Only powerful constraining magic, such as Banishment, and Circle of Protection (superior) are effective against the zombie. Constrain Being, Protection Circle: Simple, and similar weak magic are ineffective against this powerful zombie. Only Exorcism or a powerful Remove Curse, such as those cast by a god or a **Cursebringer**, can be used to separate the animating Entity from the body.
- Fire and silver inflict Mega-Damage equal to their normal S.D.C. damage and M.D. and magic fire inflict double damage.

5. Impervious to Vampires: Identical to the Necromancer ability of the same name.

6. Recognize the Undead: The Death Walker's close link to the undead allows him to recognize them on sight. This includes zombies, mummies, vampires, Dybbuk, and all undead creatures. No matter how much the undead tries to conceal itself or its true nature the mage will be able to spot it and determine the nature and type of the undead instantly. Furthermore, if confronted with animated dead, he can instantly recognize who their master is, even if he is cloaked by magic. This power is automatic to the Death Walker and requires no P.P.E. to use.

7. Strength in Numbers: While surrounded by his undead agents, the Death Walker himself gains a Horror Factor of 10, +1 for every one zombie or mummy under his command, including Monster Zombies and Night Walkers, or ten animated dead. The minions have their own Horror Factors, as well, but for simplicity's sake, just roll a single saving throw against the Horror Factor listed here.

8. Initial Spell Knowledge: In addition to the special abilities listed above, the Death Walker knows the following spells: Aura of Death, Animate Body Parts (*new*), Assemble Bones (*new*), Bone and Joint Bonding (*new*), Command Ghouls, Command Vampires (*new*), Crawling Bones (*new*), Eyes of the Dead (*new*), Grip of Death (*new*), Hide Among the Dead (*new*), and Ignite Fire. Additional magic can be learned as usual with the same restrictions as the Necromancer. However, the Death Walker rarely learns more than a handful of additional spells since he prefers to rely on his undead servants to carry out his

wishes and for defense. See *Rifts® Mystic Russia™* for details on the *new* Necromantic spells and Bone Magic.

9. P.P.E.: Base P.P.E. is **2D4×10+10** plus the P.E. attribute number. Add 2D6 P.P.E. at each additional level of experience. Additional P.P.E. may be drawn from ley lines, nexus points, talismans, and other beings as usual.

10. Magic Bonuses: +1 to save vs magic at levels **3, 6, 10** and **14**, +1 to Spell Strength at levels **4, 7** and **12**, +4 to save vs Horror Factor at level one, +1 at levels **2, 4, 6, 8, 10, 12** and **15**, and +2 to the M.E. attribute.

11. Penalties and Insanities: Walking among the dead makes the Death Walker rather detached from the world of the living. As time progresses, he becomes further detached and out of touch with reality. Roll once on the Necromancer Insanity Table at levels two, four, seven, ten, thirteen, and fifteen.

Death Walker O.C.C.

(N.P.C. Villain and Optional Player Character)

Also known as: Zombie Tamer, The Necro-Master, or, simply, The Master.

Alignment Restrictions: None, but the vast majority (90%) are evil with most of the remainder (7%) being Anarchist. Although this magic O.C.C. does not require murder or any other injury to living creatures, the close relationship and domination of the dead is too depraved for most good and sane people to practice.

Attribute Requirements: I.Q. 12, M.E. 15, M.A. 12, and P.E. 13 or higher. The higher the better for these attributes.

Race Restrictions: None, but most are humans (40%) or D-Bees (35%). Supernatural creatures and demons make up another good percentage (20%) with the remaining being various aliens and creatures of magic.

Player Character Note: The Death Walker is usually quiet and even tempered. He rarely speaks above a whisper when he does speak and his motions are smooth and deliberate. This is because most of his minions don't need to hear his voice to carry out his will and those who do are very attentive to his hand signals. It is rare that one would find a Death Walker by himself. If one is encountered alone, it is usually an illusion. His minions will most likely be hidden nearby, usually underground or hanging from the ceiling like meat in a warehouse.

A good or selfish aligned Death Walker is an aberration. Despite his good intentions, a good Death Walker finds it very difficult to gain trust when he is surrounded by his zombies. He may have to limit his use of the undead to desperate situations. Another tactic is to hide his servants with thick clothing or full environmental body armor. Even then more than a few people will be suspicious of the Death Walker's quiet friends.

O.C.C. Skills:

Language: Dragonese and one of choice at 90%.

Lore: Demons and Monsters (+20%)

Lore: D-Bee (+15%)

Basic Math (+20%)

Wilderness Survival (+5%)

Skin and Prepare Animal (and humanoid) Hides and Bones (+15%)

W.P. Knife, W.P. One of choice.

Hand to Hand Combat must be selected as an "other" skill. Hand to Hand Combat: Basic counts as one skill selection, Expert counts as two, and Assassin (or Martial Arts, if good) counts as three.

O.C.C. Related Skills: Select six skills at level one, plus one additional skill at levels 3, 6, 9 and 13.

Communications: Any

Cowboy: None

Domestic: Any (+5%)

Electrical: None

Espionage: Disguise and Intelligence only (+10%).

Mechanical: None

Medical: First Aid or Holistic Medicine only (+5%).

Military: None

Physical: Any, except Acrobatics, Boxing, or Wrestling.

Pilot: Any, except Robots and Power Armor, Tanks and APCs, or any aircraft.

Pilot Related: Any

Rogue: Any (+7%)

Science: Any (+5%)

Technical: Any (+10% to Lore, Literacy, and Language skills).

Weapon Proficiencies: Any

Wilderness: Any (+2%)

Secondary Skills: Select two Secondary Skills at level one, plus one additional at levels 2, 4, 7, 10 and 14 from those listed excluding those marked "None". These are additional areas of knowledge that do not get the advantage of the bonuses listed in parentheses. All Secondary Skills start at the base skill level.

Standard Equipment: One robe or cloak, a set of clothing, work gloves, a couple of large sacks, a backpack, several hundred yards/meters of linen strips, 1D4 large linen sheets, 2D6 candles, incense, a good lighter or box of matches, sleeping bag, utility belt, a canteen or waterskin, sunglasses, air filter or gas mask, several sewing needles and a lot of surgical thread, a laser scalpel and set of conventional scalpels, one week worth of food rations, and some personal items.

Weapons include one silver-plated dagger and two light weapons of choice. He prefers to rely on his servants for protection. Body armor can be any light style, except for full environmental or those made mostly of metal. He also has 1D4 extra suits in storage. These are battered (-30% M.D.C.), salvaged suits that are intended for use by his undead minions.

Vehicle can be any light land vehicle, a dead horse or other dead riding animal of choice. A true undead riding creature may be created later. Most high level Death Walkers enjoy riding a platform, carried by animated dead and zombies.

Money: 2D6x1000 credits and 2D6x1000 credits worth of black market items to start. Death Walkers usually have little need for money since their minions provide most of their labor needs.

Cybernetics: None to start and most will avoid cybernetics like the plague. Only bio-systems for medical purposes will be considered.



Death Walker Experience Table

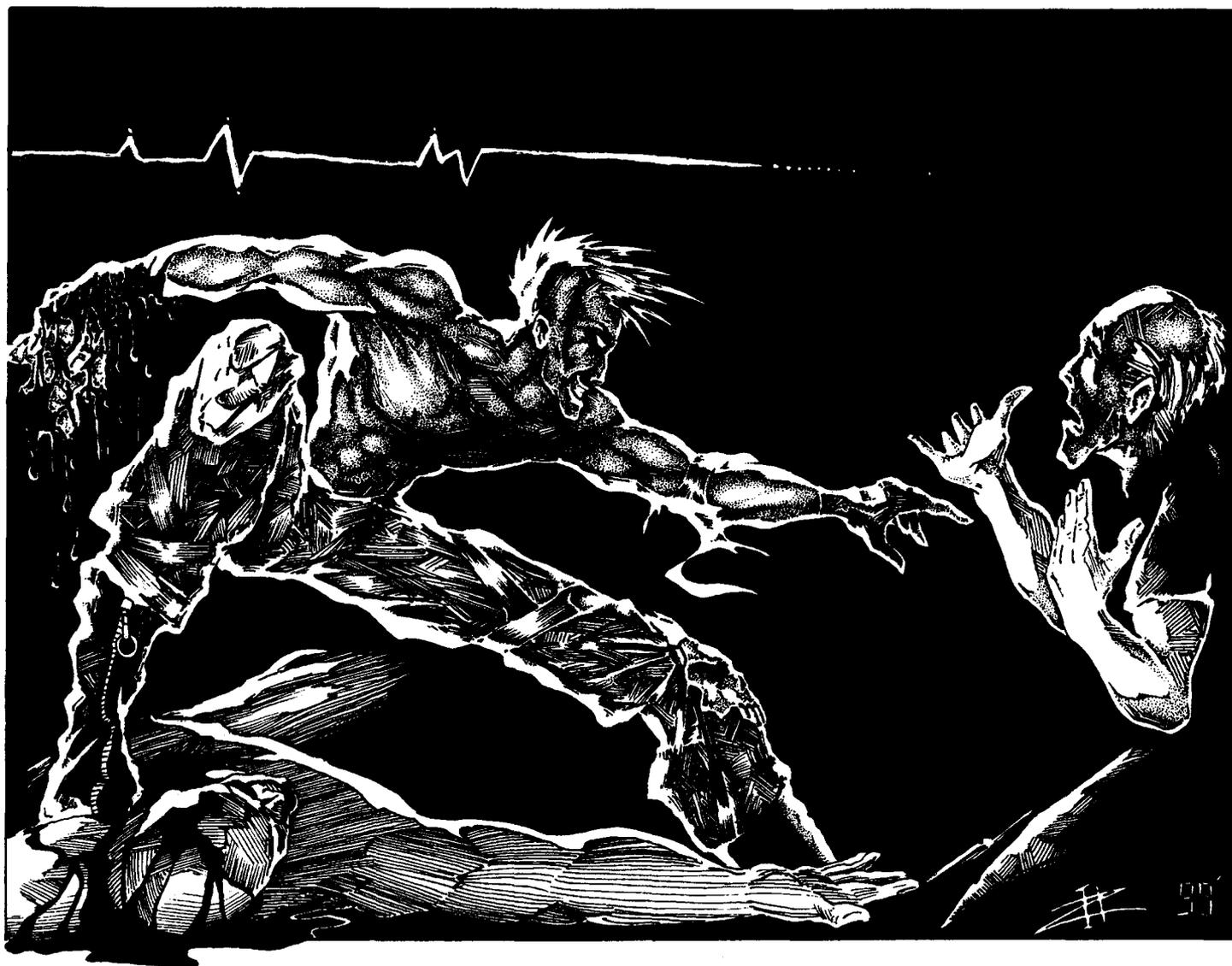
1	0,000 - 2,250
2	2,251 - 4,500
3	4,501 - 9,050
4	9,051 - 18,100
5	18,101 - 27,200
6	27,201 - 37,000
7	37,001 - 51,500
8	51,501 - 72,500
9	72,501 - 98,000
10	98,001 - 138,000
11	138,001 - 188,000
12	188,001 - 232,000
13	232,001 - 280,500
14	280,501 - 345,500
15	345,501 - 425,000

Murder-Mage O.C.C.

"I had never seen anything like it before. One by one, four knights were torn to pieces right before my eyes by a single man. Maybe "man" is not the word. This being was like a passage of murderous poetry in motion. Every strike it made was smooth and swift. With one open hand strike, it shattered my best friend's armor like a fine vase dropped on a hard floor. Another of my allies ran to his aid, but was cut down by a kick delivered with the grace of a ballerina. The two remaining warriors double teamed the creature. I knew their skill in swordplay was unmatched. Their opponent was unarmed. The battle should have been quick and decisive. It was. One laid out with his blood soaking into the earth. The other had his heart torn out with a single blow. Still beating in its hand, the being raised the heart to its mouth and consumed it in two bites. It walked back to my best friend who was still too dazed to escape. In a single move, the beast broke my friend's neck and let him drop to the ground. In the midst of all that bloodshed, the creature raised its arms to the sky and released the most primal scream I had ever heard. All around it swirled faint wisps of energy, which then spiraled toward it. Before my eyes, the creature actually looked to be getting stronger from the experience.

Then, it turned its gaze towards me. I continued to sit and watch the beast, my legs still pinned beneath the wreckage that was our ATV and mobile home. I had plenty of E-clips, but no weapons within reach. Not that it would do me any good, helpless as I was. Granted, it caught us offguard and my friends were still as disoriented as I was by the crash, but I still knew this beast was the most skilled killer I had ever seen. It hovered over me. I stared directly into the slits in its face mask. The beast would kill me, but it would not kill my spirit. It raised its hand to shoulder level and I still stared as I waited for the death blow. Instead, it lifted its visor to reveal a perfectly human face beneath. I was shocked. The revelation that a human could inflict such damage with only its bare hands and be so cruel knocked the courage from my face. A sinister smile graced its all too human features. Then, it replaced its visor and simply walked away. Perhaps seeing the fear on my face was satisfying enough for its twisted cravings. Of course, I was still trapped beneath a ton of steel in the middle of the desert. Maybe that's why it let me go. Its need for dispensing pain was satisfied by the knowledge that I would suffer a very slow and agonizing death."

- Last journal entry of Lucas Scott, Knight of Camelot



Without a doubt, the darkest and most foul aspect of Necromancy is the practice of killing another being in order to steal its power. Death releases a great deal of energy from the living; a creature's P.P.E. doubles at the moment of death. This energy is the fuel for powerful magic and those who practice it. The power released by living creatures is so sweet to many Necromancers that it is literally intoxicating. So much so, that the act of murder itself brings the Necromancer extreme pleasure and joy, comparable to that of a drug high. Repeated acts of murder increase his craving for power and pushes him to add even more victims to his count. Most Necromancers and many wizards have turned to the sacrifice of living creatures as a source of additional power, but still rely primarily on their own energy and the power of ley lines. However, one mage has emerged who draws upon this energy as his main source of power. This bloodthirsty being is known to the world as the Murder-Mage.

Called "the easy path to power" by many of the scholarly Necromantic practitioners of magic, the Murder-Mage is dedicated wholly to the acquisition of power by taking it from other beings. While many think this road is easy, an apprentice of this dark magic must go through quite a bit to become a true Murder-Mage. First, it must be determined if he has what it takes to carry out the grim business of murder. This test can be something small and personal, like killing a loved one or one's own family, or something more large scale, like slaughtering an entire village.

Regardless, the act of murder must be carried out in person, preferably with his bare hands. Poisoning a victim's food or a shooting him from long distance will not suffice. The blood of the victim must be on the potential Murder-Mage's hands.

If he passes the test and still desires to continue, the student is put through a punishing training session to get him toughened up, physically, mentally, and spiritually. All day long, he must practice the fighting arts and learn how to kill without weapons. His hands, feet, and other parts of his body are hardened by striking them against living trees, slabs of meat, *and/or* restrained humans or D-Bees. A taste for raw meat and organs must be developed as that is all he will be given and allowed to eat. Even water cannot be used to quench his thirst, only blood. Between practice, the apprentice is taught all the secrets of how best to kill a victim or opponent. This includes a familiarity with the various intelligent species and their anatomy. At night, all thoughts must be focused on death and murder, as he meditates for hours in the freezing cold or next to a blistering bonfire. Even his dreams will be infested with dark thoughts and nightmares, aided by hallucinogens and other mind-altering drugs. Only after months of this preparation will he be allowed to learn the dark mystic arts, which he must master quickly or be cast aside.

After more months of mystic training and continued physical toughening, the budding Murder-Mage is ready for the ultimate test, The Ritual of First Blood. Here it is discovered if the soon-

to-be Murder-Mage has truly mastered the mystic art. With a single blow, he is expected to plunge his hand into a helpless victim and remove the heart or brain, whole and intact. A flawed removal that damages the organ means the student has not mastered the art and must undergo more rigorous toughening and retraining. If the second attempt is a failure as well, the disciple is cast out into the wilderness, condemned as just a common murderer, unfit to become a true Murder-Mage. The rejection is so traumatic to the apprentice that he devolves into a mindless killing machine bent on earning enough kills to regain his position. These rejects are never reaccepted and are usually slain by another predator or a hero trying to stop his rampage. Should the apprentice succeed in the test, the victim's P.P.E. will flood his body and he will have his first taste of the "true" power of the Murder-Mage. Only then does he become a true Murder-Mage; an event he celebrates by consuming the removed organ.

Usually armed with only his bare hands, the Murder-Mage is a truly evil creature. Although still physically mortal, his power and cruelty is much closer to that of a supernatural predator. His regard for life is nil. Death is a resource to be plundered and murder is his method of doing so. Other intelligent beings are the source of this bounty and the targets of his deadly intentions. Their souls becomes his. His lifeblood was once theirs. His life only has value when it's stolen from someone else.

Although still rare, the number of Murder-Mages has steadily grown over the years. They operate primarily in the African continent, the southern parts of Europe, western Asia, the Magic Zone of North America, and scattered in much smaller numbers on every other continent. Both the leaders at the **NGR** and the city of Dweomer of the Federation of Magic have expressed growing concern about these Necromancers. The fear is that they will eventually grow to numbers that will send an army of heartless murderers marching into helpless towns and settlements. For now, the Murder-Mages are small enough in number so as not to cause great distress, but they are still under vigilant observation.

Magic Powers of the Murder-Mage

1. Death Strike: The most important weapon the Murder-Mage has is his own ability to deliver the killing blow. Through physical training and in-depth study of pressure points and weak spots, he has learned how to deliver the conventional Death Blow as revised in **Rifts® Japan** or **Coalition War Campaign™**, but it only costs one melee attack to use, rather than the usual two. Through mystic training, he has learned to deliver an even stronger blow that will harm even Mega-Damage and supernatural creatures. This is similar to the Chi M.D. Death Blow or M.D.C. creature Death Blow described in the aforementioned books, but with the following modifications.

The Mega-Damage Death Blow costs 5 P.P.E. to inflict and is spent only if the blow connects. The desire to kill must be clear in the Murder-Mage's mind; no other thoughts must interfere. The strike must be delivered with the Murder-Mage's own body. Weapons cannot be used, although gloves or gauntlets may be worn. The attack counts as one melee attack and inflicts M.D. equal to double the character's normal S.D.C. damage. The Death Blow is so devastating that the victim cannot bio-regenerate the damage inflicted by it for 1D4 hours. The attack is effective even against vampires and other invulnerable beings. It will also work against inanimate M.D.C. structures and materials, but at half

damage (i.e. standard S.D.C. damage as M.D.) since it is intended to be a *killing* attack. It may not be used against S.D.C. beings; that is the purpose of the conventional Death Blow. Also note that the Death Strike cannot be used in conjunction with any other magic attack, such as the Fist of Fury or the magic spell also called the Death Strike.

Beings who already have supernatural strength or can otherwise inflict Mega-Damage with their bare hands do not have to rely on the Death Strike to kill M.D.C. beings, but can still inflict the M.D. Death Blow. The attack inflicts double the character's usual M.D. damage and also cannot be regenerated for 1D4 hours. This strike also only takes one melee attack, instead of the standard two. It cannot be used on non-living materials to inflict double damage nor can it be used on S.D.C. creatures (not that they'd survive a Mega-Damage attack anyway). The attack can be made to affect creatures who are invulnerable to Death Blow attacks, such as vampires, by spending 5 P.P.E.

2. Consume Life Force: After delivering the fatal death blow, the Murder-Mage automatically channels his victim's life force into his own body to increase his power. Aside from the surge of the doubled P.P.E. of the victim, the Murder-Mage also gains experience points. This increase is in addition to any awarded by the G.M., if any is awarded, for delivering the kill. This is how the Murder-Mage gained the reputation for being the easy way to power. However, while this does allow a young Murder-Mage to rise very quickly, he will find it very difficult to maintain his rapid rate of advancement. This is because his requirements increase dramatically after achieving mid-level experience. Many Murder-Mages peak at seventh or eighth level and those who do try to move further are killed as they try to slaughter whole communities defended by militias or powerful champions. Almost no Murder-Mages are known to reach tenth level. See the Murder-Mage experience level table to see how difficult things get. Also take note of the dramatic increase in P.P.E. and other bonuses gained at new levels. While animals, alien and domestic, can be killed for their increased P.P.E., they will not offer any additional experience to the Murder-Mage. Only sentient creatures and true creatures of magic killed with one's own hands will offer additional experience. Experience gained with each kill is as follows:

- Normal humans and D-Bees - 250 experience points.
- Human and D-Bee babies and children (they have more P.P.E. than average adults) - 350 experience points.
- War veterans, assassins, and those who are familiar with death - 500 experience points.
- Mortal practitioners of magic - 750 experience points, plus 10 per level of the victim.
- Necromancers and practitioners of Necromancy (yes, they prey on their own) - 1000 experience points, plus 20 per level of the victim.
- Lesser supernatural creatures, like Brodkil and Gargoyles - 1200 experience points.
- Supernatural creatures and creatures of magic, like dragon hatchlings - 2,000 experience points.
- **Godlings**, adult dragons, and other greater supernatural creatures - 10,000 experience points (a rarity).
- Gods and supernatural intelligences - 80,000 experience points (G.M.s and players, please note that this should never happen and is only listed here as a reference).

3. Strength of the Dead: After consuming a victim's life force, the Murder-Mage can immediately use the released P.P.E. to increase his own S.D.C. or M.D.C. The effects are identical to the Necromantic spell of the same name, giving the Murder-Mage half the base S.D.C. and Hit Points (or M.D.C., if the victim was an M.D.C. creature) that the being had in life. If the Murder-Mage is an M.D.C. being and his victim was S.D.C., he only adds half the victim's Hit Points (not S.D.C.) to his M.D.C. Duration is an expanded 10 minutes per level of the Murder-Mage or until depleted. P.P.E. cost is 20 P.P.E. or whatever was released by the death of the victim, whichever is lower. The magic takes one melee action to use.

4. Consume Power and Knowledge: Rather than gaining increased damage capacity from the victim, the Murder-Mage can steal knowledge and power from it instead. The effects are identical to the Necromantic spell of the same name, requiring the Murder-Mage to consume one of the victim's organs to work the magic. Duration is the same as listed in the spell description, but P.P.E. cost is only 10 or whatever was released by the death of the victim, whichever is lower. The magic takes one melee action to use and each power gained counts as a separate use, even if the Murder-Mage eats more than one organ at a time.

5. Horror Factor: Like the Necromancer, the Murder-Mage exudes an aura of death and evil, but his is even stronger. Initial Horror Factor is 12 at level one, +1 at levels 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 11 and 14.

6. Initial Spell Knowledge: Although well versed in the mystic arts, the Murder-Mage is not interested in learning a great deal of spell magic. He starts with the Necromantic spells of Death Strike (different from his own power), Death's Embrace (*new*), Death Bolt (*new*), **Necro-Armor** (*new*), and Deathword, and the conventional spells, Magical-Adrenal Rush and Superhuman Strength. New spells can be learned as usual, but common spell magic is cast at twice the normal P.P.E. cost, unless associated with Necromancy. See *Rifts® Mystic Russia™* for details on the *new* Necromantic spells.

7. P.P.E.: Beginning P.P.E. is low compared to other practitioners of magic, 4D6 plus the P.E. attribute number. However, he gains much more P.P.E. as he increases in experience, 5D6 per each additional level of experience. This is because he gains much of his experience and power from his victims. In addition, he also draws a great deal of temporary P.P.E. from his victims. Stolen P.P.E. can be spent immediately on magic or held for up to two hours per every one of the Murder-Mage's P.E. attribute points; twice as long as other mages. P.P.E. can also be drawn from ley lines, nexus points, and P.P.E. batteries as usual.

8. Magic and Other Bonuses: +15 S.D.C. (or +5 M.D.C.) at every level of experience, starting at level one, +1 to PS. and +2 to Spd at levels 1, 2, 4, 6, 9 and 14, +1 to P.P. and P.E. at levels 2, 5, 8 and 13, +1 to save vs magic at levels 1, 3, 6, 9 and 14, +1 to Spell Strength at levels 4, 8 and 13, +4 to save vs Horror Factor at level one, and +1 to save at levels 3, 5, 8 and 13, +1 to save vs psionics at levels 2, 5, 8, 11 and 15, +1 to initiative at levels 1, 2, 5, 9 and 14, +1 to damage at levels 1, 3, 5, 8 and 14, +1 to strike, parry, and dodge at levels 1, 3, 7, 11 and 15, and +1 to save vs mind control and possession at levels 1, 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, 12 and 14.

9. Penalties and Insanities: Not surprisingly, the Murder-Mage suffers from some psychological problems. In addition, the process of consuming the life force of other beings takes its toll on his own soul and body. At each level of experience, he loses

one point from both his M.A. attribute and his P.B. attribute. Minimum M.A. or P.B. attribute is 2. Roll on the Necromancer insanity table found on page 104 of *Rifts® Africa* or page 91 of *Rifts® Mystic Russia™* at each level of experience, starting at level two.

Murder-Mage O.C.C.

(N.P.C. Villain and Optional Player Character)

Also known as: The Agent of Death or Soul-Eater.

Alignment Restrictions: Diabolic! Miscreant characters are acceptable, but even they would find it difficult to carry out all the senseless killing that the Murder-Mage indulges in. Aberrant Murder-Mages are even rarer. These honorable killers prey primarily on criminals and evil supernatural creatures. Anarchist or better alignments are impossible.

Attribute Requirements: M.E. 12, P.S. 10, P.P. 10, and P.E. 12 or higher. The higher the better for these attributes and a high I.Q. and Spd are recommended, but not required.

Race Restrictions: Humans and D-Bees only. M.D.C. D-Bees are acceptable, but supernatural creatures and creatures of magic cannot become Murder-Mages.

Player Character Note: Not recommended as a player character! The Murder-Mage is an evil being who must prey upon other beings for his powers. Outwardly, they appear to be vicious beasts who beat their victims to death. But close inspection of their handiwork will show well-placed strikes with surgical precision. In truth, the Murder-Mage is an artist who delivers death with grace and skill. Whether or not the Murder-Mage is allowed as a player character is entirely up to the G.M. If allowed, the player will have to keep in mind that his good-aligned comrades will not tolerate his murderous habits. It is possible to hide these practices from them, but is difficult considering his penchant for killing opponents with his bare hands. It is also possible for a Murder-Mage to go through a change of heart and reconsider his evil ways. This is a rare event considering the rigorous indoctrination he must go through, but may be possible for a player character. The main drawback to being a good-aligned Murder-Mage is that he must work extra hard to rise in experience.

O.C.C. Skills:

Language and Literacy: Two of choice (+35%).

Math: Basic (+20%)

Interrogation Techniques (+20%)

Boxing

Gymnastics

Body Building

Running

Prowl (+15%)

Biology (+10%)

Preserve Food (+10%)

Skin and Prepare Animal Hides (+15%)

Lore: D-Bee (+15%)

Lore: Demons and Monsters (+10%)

W.P.: Two Ancient of choice.

Hand to Hand Combat: Assassin; can be upgraded to Hand to Hand Combat: Commando (See **Coalition War Machine™** for details) at the cost of one "other" skill selection.

O.C.C. Related Skills: Select four skills at level one, plus one additional skill at levels 3, 5, 8 and 13.

Communications: Any

Cowboy: None
 Domestic: Any
 Electrical: None
 Espionage: Any (+5%)
 Mechanical: Basic only.
 Medical: First Aid (+5%) or Pathology (+10%) only.
 Military: Any (+5%)
 Physical: Any (+10% where applicable).
 Pilot: Any, except Robots and Power Armor, Tanks and APCs, and Jet Aircraft.
 Pilot Related: Any
 Rogue: Any (+10%)
 Science: Any
 Technical: Any (+10% to Lore and Language skills).
 Weapon Proficiencies: Any
 Wilderness: Any (+5%)

Secondary Skills: Select three Secondary Skills at level one, plus one additional at levels 2, 4, 7, 10 and 14 from those listed, excluding those marked "None". These are additional areas of knowledge that do not get the advantage of the bonus listed in parentheses. All Secondary Skills start at the base skill level.

Standard Equipment: Starts with a set of regular clothing, a set of combat clothes (often the preserved skin of his victims), utility belt, canteen, survival knife, a backpack, sleeping bag, bag of rock salt, several pouches of preserving spices, 50 feet (15.2 m) of strong rope, a roll of duct tape, a flashlight, and some personal items. Anything else he may need is likely to be taken from his victims.

Light or medium body armor will be preferred, but must be non-environmental and made of materials other than metal. Armor made from M.D.C. leathers and bones is likely to be acquired later. Starts with one silver-plated dagger for ceremonial killings and one other ancient style weapon of choice. Additional weapons are likely to be acquired later from fallen opponents or victims. The Murder-Mage prefers to use his bare hands and magic in combat, but may use **Techno-Wizard** and modern weapons if it seems sensible.

Starts without transportation, but is likely to acquire some later.

Money: Starts with 2D4x100 credits and 1D4x1000 credits worth of saleable items or precious stones. Additional money will be taken from later victims.

Cybernetics: Starts with none and will avoid them at all costs. Only cybernetics for medical reasons will be considered and bio-systems will be preferred.

Murder-Mage Experience Table

1	0,000 - 2,750	
2	2,751 - 5,500	
3	5,501 - 10,500	
4	10,501 - 20,400	
5	20,401 - 40,800	
6	40,801 - 82,500	
7	82,501 - 155,000	
8	155,001 - 245,000	
9	245,001 - 350,000	
10	350,001 - 460,000	13 850,001 - 1,100,000
11	460,001 - 650,000	14 1,100,001 - 1,400,000
12	650,001 - 850,000	15 1,400,001 - 1,750,000

Warborn O.C.C.

*"Victory is all important. Though we have taught you that war is ultimately self-defeating, victory is still the goal. How can this be if war by its nature has no victor? Those amateurs who commonly send their people off to war do so for the sake of some other goal. Be it land, religious beliefs, or simple hatred, these fools take up arms in a futile attempt to gain something else. We do not. For us, war is its own reward. Whether we fight in it ourselves or simply goad others into **fighting** it for us, our one ultimate goal is to create as much conflict and destruction as possible. Our sole reason for going to war is for the sake of war itself. We do not fight for any other reward than the satisfaction that war has been waged. And that is why we are always **victorious**."*
 - A common teaching among the Warborn

The Warborn is a brutal and violent warrior, trained in both the physical and metaphysical arts. He is a master of both magic and technology. Unlike the **Techno-Wizard** who combines the two together, the Warborn uses magic to command technology and combine it with his own body. The only limitation to this power is that the technology in question must have been forged for the sole purpose of warfare. Born in the aftermath of the defeat of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse from a small sect of their worshipers, the Warborn is a fierce warrior and mage, dedicated to the Horseman, War. In fact, the name "Warborn" was selected to symbolize that these mages are the spawn of War. A student of this art is trained from an early age to be an unstoppable fighting machine. Physical training and practice in the use of weapons are augmented and enhanced by the study of magic, most of which has been derived from the abilities of their patron.

Warborn are a rare breed. Potential Warborn have high attribute requirements, due to the intense training that goes into building this warrior mage. This keeps the O.C.C.'s popularity low and their numbers in check. Acolytes who do not meet the requirements, but still want to dedicate themselves to war and the War entity can still study the ways of the Warborn, although at a much lower level of power. These acolytes are known as the **Warbabies**, described elsewhere.

Those who do make the cut move on to learn the ways of the Warborn. This training includes intense physical exercise, instruction in the use of all forms of weaponry, and schooling in the traditional arts of war. Techniques taught include modern warfare, hand to hand combat, and **sharpshooting** skills. The physical training is similar to **modern** armed forces' basic training, but much more intense, even more so than that taught to special forces. In addition, the student is forced to witness the horrors of war, like seeing bodies blown across the landscape, in not-so-simulated combat. Only after surviving all of this will the training move on to the mystic arts. The other training continues during this period along with teachings involving the philosophies behind war and combat. This is done to make sure they understand the true value and complexities of war. They are taught not only how to wage war, but to provoke others to create it as well. In addition, they are taught the techniques of war-mongering and how to rally troops behind a lost cause. The true key to war, they teach, is to make others believe in the cause, despite the blatant futility of it all.

After enduring full training, the Warborn is ready for action and unleashed upon the world. Found mostly in Africa, these



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warrior mages have moved on to taint the **Americas**, Atlantis, and Asia. The scarce few **Warborn** who can be found in South America are scattered all across the continent trying to instigate even more violence in that region of smoldering conflict. A number of those in North America have joined Alistair Dunscon and his "true" Federation of Magic. The noble factions of the Federation worry that they may bring the region to war much sooner than is inevitable. The Lords of Magic in Dweomer are already considering action, since the Warborn is an even (possibly superior) match for their Battle Magi and Controllers. In Atlantis, the Warborn have become very popular in the arena as combatants. Lord Splynncryth has already hired several for missions where he would prefer to remain anonymous. In Asia, a large number of Warborn led by their high level master have gone in search of Sun-Tzu, who they believe is an ancient god of war. They believe he holds all the ancient secrets of war and has the power to return the Horseman of the Apocalypse, War, back to Earth (not true, or is it?).

Powers and Abilities of the Warborn

1. Union with Weapons: Like War himself, the Warborn can use magic to link himself directly to his weapons. The bond is eerie to see as the weapon physically merges into the hand of the mage. The link provides him with enhanced skill with the weapon and allows him to use his other powers on it. Hand-held weapons need only be in hand for the power to be used. Cost to link with it is 5 P.P.E. Two-handed weapons, like rifles, can be linked to each hand, but only one can be fired at a time. Large two-handed weapons can be linked to one hand, but the other must be free to handle it. There is a penalty of -2 to strike when using a large two-handed weapon with one hand. Large, two-handed ancient weapons must also be used in this way. The duration of the link is effectively unlimited, although he must deactivate it in order to regain full use of his hand.

Body armor can also be linked to the Warborn. In this case, the armor must be worn to use the power. The power of the link reshapes the armor to conform to the contour's of the **Warborn's** body. So tight is the fit, that the armor becomes like a second skin. Any movement or prowl penalties the armor usually has are reduced to zero. This power also works on power armor, but in this case the armor does not conform to the Warborn's body. Instead, he gains the benefits of one additional attack per melee, an additional bonus of +1 to strike with all weapon systems, and the ability to pilot it at Elite proficiency, even if he **doesn't** ordinarily have the skill with that armor. A link with a robot or military vehicle provides the Warborn with the ability to pilot it at 88% proficiency or Elite level, if a robot vehicle, and an additional bonus of +1 to strike with the vehicle's weapon systems. The mage must be sitting in the pilot's seat for this power to work. Cost for bonding with body armor is 5 P.P.E. Bonding with power armor or exoskeletons requires 10 P.P.E. Robots and other vehicles require 20 P.P.E. Maximum duration is one hour per level of experience. Other circumstances, such as sleep or bathroom breaks, may shorten that duration dramatically since the link is broken as soon as the Warborn removes the armor or gets up from the pilot's seat.

The link also provides him with intimate knowledge of the war machine's inner workings. Every aspect of the machine will be etched into the Warborn's mind, similar in manner to the Telemechanics **psi-power**. For one hour per level of experience

after linking to the machine, the Warborn will be able to diagnose problems with the machine with a skill proficiency of 93%. Repairs can also be done at 80% proficiency or with a bonus of +35% to the appropriate skill, whichever is higher.

2. Power Weapons: When linked to an energy weapon, the Warborn can use his own P.P.E. to refuel them when their **E-clips** run dry. Every energy blast that inflicts 4D6 M.D. or less that is powered by the Warborn costs him one P.P.E. point. Energy blasts that inflict more than 4D6 M.D. cost 2 P.P.E. points. S.D.C. non-energy weapons can be reloaded in this way, but the bullets are replaced with telekinetic rounds that inflict 1D6M.D. and cost 1 P.P.E. per round. Most rail guns can also be reloaded in this way, but the cost is four P.P.E. per burst. Super rail guns, such as the Glitter Boy Boom Gun, require 8 P.P.E. per burst. Missile and grenade launchers cannot be reloaded in this manner, nor can crossbows or other bow weapons. **Techno-Wizard** weapons which are normally fueled by P.P.E. are recharged in the conventional manner.

This power can charge ancient style weapons with magic, enabling them to inflict Mega-Damage. The cost is 5 P.P.E. per weapon. Damage is equal to the amount of S.D.C. damage the weapon would normally inflict. Duration is twenty minutes per level of experience.

Body armor can also be energized using this power. This costs 10 P.P.E. and charges the armor with an energy field that effectively doubles its M.D.C. (maximum additional M.D.C. is 100). Power armor can be enhanced with a force field with 100 M.D.C. Duration is ten minutes per level of experience. Larger vehicles cannot be reinforced. However, a vehicle that requires fuel can be recharged at the cost of 30 P.P.E. per hour of use. Similarly, exoskeletons that require recharging can be re-energized by spending 10P.P.E. per hour of use and can also be reinforced with the same energy field that body armor can.

3. Mastery of Weapons: The Warborn's skill with hand-held weapons increases dramatically while linked to them. This is an automatic ability gained through his union with his weapons and provides the Warborn with the following skills. All are in addition to bonuses from W.P. skills:

W.P. **Sharpshooting** Specialties: The same as listed in *Rifts® Conversion Book One* or *Rifts® New West™*, except that it only applies to weapons the Warborn is linked to. Only weapons that can be used with the Sharpshooting skill apply (no heavy weapons) and all trick shots are possible. These bonuses are in addition to those gained from Weapon Proficiency skills.

Quick-Draw Initiative: Any weapon linked to the Warborn, including heavy weapons and ancient types, can be drawn and used with great speed. This translates into a bonus to initiative when using these weapons, similar to that of the Gunslinger O.C.C.s: +1 to initiative for every two P.P. points above 16 (Maximum bonus is +7 with a P.P. of 30 or higher). Remember, this skill only applies when using weapons which the mage is linked to. Of course, unless the Warborn is already linked to his weapons, he will not receive this bonus if put on the defensive, but since he usually instigates most of his battles this is rarely a problem.

Paired Weapons: When linked to a pair of pistols or one-handed ancient weapons, the mage gains the ability to use both simultaneously. Skill with paired ancient weapons is the same as described in the hand to hand combat section of the *Rifts® RPG*. A pair of pistols can be fired simultaneously against one target,

inflicting full damage from both, but counting as only one melee attack with one strike roll. Alternately, the guns can be fired at two separate targets at the same time, but each shot must be rolled separately and the bonus to strike is half. Parrying is not possible when a paired strike is used, but a dodge can still be attempted (often followed by a double shot counterattack).

Other Bonuses: In addition to other bonuses, the **Warborn** gains the following bonuses with weapons he is linked to: +1 attack per melee at levels 3, 6 and 10, +1 to strike on "called" shots with modern weapons at levels 1, 4, 8 and 13, +1 to strike, parry, and disarm with ancient style weapons at levels 1, 3, 5, 7, 10 and 14, and +1 to disarm with modern weapons with a "called" shot at levels 1, 4, 7, 11 and 15. Remember, these bonuses only apply to weapons the **Warborn** is currently linked to.

4. War Cry: The Warborn exudes an aura that makes others feel edgy and uncomfortable. If the Warborn has a high **M.A.** attribute, this aura will add a bonus of +10% to his intimidation skill. Even more potent is his ability to augment this aura into a weapon of fear. By screaming a short arcane verse, the aura explodes into an unnerving **omni-directional** pulse. Everyone within the sound of the **Warborn's** voice, about 800 feet (243.8 m), must save vs Horror Factor of 11, +1 at levels 2, 4, 7, 10 and 14, or suffer the usual penalties. This attack can be used as often as needed without P.P.E. cost, but each counts as one melee attack.

5. Initial Spell Knowledge: The Warborn starts with the following spells: Armor of **Ithan**, Aura of Power, Magic Shield, Fist of Fury, Death Bolt (*new*), Superhuman Strength, Power Weapon, and three offensive spells from levels 1-5 from either the common spell listings or the Necro-Magic listing. New spells can be learned as usual. Offensive and defensive spells are most coveted with augmentation and transportation spells being next in line. Spells which are not combat oriented or otherwise **relatable** to war and fighting require twice the listed P.P.E. cost and are cast at half proficiency. See *Rifts® Mystic Russia™* for details on *new* Necromantic spells.

6. P.P.E.: Starts with 2D4x10+10 P.P.E. plus the P.E. attribute number. 2D6 P.P.E. is gained at each additional level of experience. Additional P.P.E. can be drawn from ley lines, nexus points, and other beings. They most enjoy tapping the great sum of P.P.E. released during and after a great battle.

7. O.C.C. Bonuses: In addition to those listed above, the following bonuses are available with or without weapons: +1D4x10 S.D.C. or +3D6 M.D.C., +1D6 to P.S., +2 to P.P. and P.E., +1 to **M.A.**, +1 attack per melee, +2 to initiative, +2 to strike, +3 to parry and dodge, +2 to entangle, +1 to disarm, +3 to roll with **punch/impact**, +1 to save vs magic at levels 3, 5, 8, 11 and 14, +1 to Spell Strength at levels 5 and 10, +4 to save vs Horror Factor at level one, +1 at levels 3, 6, 9, 12 and 15, impervious to shell-shock, +2 to save vs psionics, and +4 to save vs mind control or possession, all in addition to skill and attribute bonuses.

8. Insanities and Penalties: The Warborn is already a violent maniac to begin with, but his mental stability further degrades at later levels of experience. At levels three, six, ten and fifteen, there is a 25% chance of developing insanity. If a 1-25 is rolled on the percentile dice, roll again on the following table to determine the specific ailment.

01-15: Affective Disorder: outraged by acts of violence. Oddly enough, the Warborn becomes irrationally upset when exposed to violence which he has not perpetrated himself. This

will make him attack the instigator without hesitation. Additional bonuses while enraged are: +1 to strike and +2 to damage.

16-30: Affective Disorder: hates music and music makers. Anyone or anything playing music within earshot of the Warborn will find itself attacked by the mage. Only the sound of his own war cry soothes the Warborn, who may overindulge in its use.

31-40: Psychosis: Schizophrenia. He hears voices shouting different conflicting ideas at him. At times, it seems like a full-fledged shouting war is going on right in his head. 1D4 times a day, he will be engulfed in a war of words that he cannot escape. There is a 25% chance that the Warborn will lash out blindly at the voices, doing great damage to anything in the vicinity in the process.

41-50: Psychosis: mindless aggression. Identical to the description in the insanity section of the **Rifts® RPG**.

51-65: Roll once on the phobia table in the **Rifts® RPG**.

66-80: Roll once on the obsession table in the **Rifts® RPG**.

81-90: Multiple Personalities. See the Crazy Hero section of the **Rifts® RPG** for details and to determine the catalyst for switching personalities.

91-00: **Frenzy!** See the Crazy Hero section of the **Rifts® RPG** for details and to determine the catalyst of the frenzy.

Warborn O.C.C.

(N.P.C. Villain and Optional Player Character)

Also known as: The Children or Spawn of War.

Alignment Restrictions: Any, but the vast majority are Anarchist or evil. Those who are Anarchist are true anarchists, drumming up discord and chaos wherever they go. Warborn of good alignment are next to nonexistent, but there are a few.

Attribute Requirements: M.A. 12, M.E. 11, P.S. 11, P.P. 15, and P.E. of 13 or higher. The higher the better for these attributes. A high I.Q. and Spd are also suggested, but not required.

Race Restrictions: No restrictions, but most (70%) are human.

Ogres and Wolfen are also common (15%). The rest are comprised mostly of other sub-humans and lesser supernatural beings. Even creatures of magic and greater supernatural beings can follow this path to magic, but rarely do so (less than 1%). These beings tend to rely on their own magic and abilities and see a dependance on weapons as a weakness.

Player Character Note: Brutal, violent, and quick-tempered are all words that describe the Warborn well. Whether involved in a battle of wits or a test of strength, he will be very competitive and do anything to win. Cheating is always a good way to win; all is fair in love and war, after all. Rules are interesting guidelines, but meant to be broken. Lethal force is a first resort and the desired way to go. Overall, the Warborn is just a bully who likes to get things on his terms and will blow up anything that gets between him and what he wants.

Player characters of good or Unprincipled alignment will be nearly as competitive as evil ones, but not nearly as violent. Force is used, but sparingly, and lethal force is never used. This is because Warborn are not only taught how to fight and wage war, but to enjoy it. This makes them very susceptible to its violent influence, which most give in to. Good-aligned Warborn are those few who manage to reject their teachings and remain stable. Should a good Warborn give into his violent tendencies, he will slide down the alignment ladder very quickly.

O.C.C. Skills:

Languages: Two of choice at 90%.

Math: Basic (+20%)

Recognize Weapon Quality (+30%)

Armorer (+30%)

Basic Electronics (+10%)

Weapon Systems (+15%)

Intelligence (+25%)

Pilot: Two military vehicles of choice (+20%).

Military: Two of choice (+20%).

Sniper

W.P.: Four Modern of choice.

W.P.: Five Ancient of choice.

Hand to Hand Combat: Expert; can be upgraded to Martial Arts or Assassin (if evil) at the cost of one "other" skill selection, or to Hand to Hand Combat: Commando for two selections.

O.C.C. Related Skills: Select five skills at level one, plus one additional skill at levels 3, 7, 10 and 14.

Communications: Any

Cowboy: None

Domestic: Any

Electrical: Any, but each skill counts as two skill selections.

Espionage: Any (+10%)

Mechanical: Any, but each skill counts as two skill selections.

Medical: First Aid or Field Surgery only (+10% to the latter).

Military: Any (+15%)

Physical: Any, except Acrobatics (+5% where applicable).

Pilot: Any (+15% to military vehicles).

Pilot Related: Any (+5%)

Rogue: Any

Science: Math: Advanced only.

Technical: Any

Weapon Proficiencies: Any

Wilderness: Any

Secondary Skills: Select two Secondary Skills at level one, plus one additional at levels 2, 5, 9 and 13 from those listed, excluding those marked "None". These are additional areas of knowledge that do not get the advantage of the bonuses listed in parentheses. All Secondary Skills start at the base skill level.

Standard Equipment: Starts with a handful of personal items, such as a few sets of clothing, a flashlight, a backpack, 1D4 weeks of food rations, several hundred feet of rope, a survival kit, canteen, and sunglasses (prefer non-mirrored black shades).

Initial weaponry includes: four normal ancient style weapons, one magic or **Techno-Wizard** ancient style weapon, two modern S.D.C. weapons, and three energy weapons of choice. Obviously, he cannot carry all of these weapons on him at once, so some must be kept at a safe location or in his vehicle. Body armor can be any type, but most prefer heavy. Unlike with other practitioners of magic, heavy, metal, full environmental armor can be worn without penalty.

Beginning vehicle can be any light military type, but most prefer either a fast hovercycle or heavy A.T.V. Tanks, power armor, robots, and/or other heavy vehicles will be acquired later.

Money: Starts with 1D6×100 credits and 1D4×1000 in black market items. Most of his money has already been spent on weaponry.

Cybernetics: None to start and will avoid them because they interfere with magic. The **Warborn** may use his magic to merge with technology, but he will not resort to other methods to have it become a part of him.

Warborn Experience Table

1 0,000 - 2,400

2 2,401 - 4,800

3 4,801 - 9,600

4 9,601 - 19,200

5 19,201 - 28,000

6 28,001 - 39,000

7 39,001 - 52,000

8 52,001 - 75,000

9 75,001 - 100,000

10 100,001 - 140,000

11 140,001 - 200,000

12 200,001 - 250,000

13 250,001 - 300,000

14 300,001 - 360,000

15 360,001 - 450,000

Warbaby O.C.C.

"Not everyone can be an officer. So too is it true among the Children of War that some are born to serve rather than lead. But, despite your name, do not view yourselves as inferior. That you are true Children of War is proof enough of your superiority over all those fool enough to oppose us. For in the larger picture, we are all servants. Even those of us who stand as the elite Children of War are mere soldiers in the battle of life and not the generals we appear to be. So stand proud my brethren and let others concern themselves with your status. For while they laugh at your title, they will be open for the kill. Yes, you are mere "babies" in our order, but you are nothing less than walking death to all others."

- A common teaching among the Warbabies

Not everyone who travels the path of the Warborn has what it takes to become one. Actually, most of them "flunk out" of the incredibly demanding training. Those who cannot complete the training, but still wish to be disciples of War, can do so by becoming lesser Warborn, more commonly known as Warbabies. For every one Warborn, there are about two to four Warbabies. Although the name is less than flattering, the Warbaby accepts it as a sign of his lower stature.

Mystic training is pretty much the same as the **Warborn's**, but less intensive. Magic techniques are also toned down and the unique powers of the Warborn are not taught. They are told that this is because the Warbaby is not considered worthy of the true "gifts" of war. In reality, the Warbaby simply lacks the willpower or stamina to undergo this training and survive intact, mentally and/or physically. To compensate for this loss, the Warbaby is taught more in the way of mechanical skills and they also develop psionic abilities that make them more in tune with the weapons they handle. This helps them to serve as support personnel for the true **Warborn**.

On the other hand, skill knowledge does not need any power source to use. Even if entirely depleted of I.S.P. and P.P.E., the Warbaby is still just as proficient with his weapons as ever.

Meanwhile, a **Warborn** who has run out of P.P.E. is fairly vulnerable and unable to use his weapons with any special ability. Of course, a Warborn rarely needs to worry about such depletion on the battlefield where fallen opponents and allies alike provide him with a bountiful supply of energy. **Still**, the situation may arise sometime and that's when the **Warbaby** can shine.

Warbabies can be found pretty much wherever the Warborn are. Experienced Warborn typically have an entourage of 2D6 Warbabies who serve as their personal army. A number of Warbabies can also be found operating on their own just about anywhere the Warborn are. In addition, there are a number of renegade Warbabies operating in and around these areas too. These renegades are either trying to achieve Warborn status through other means or have turned their backs on their teachings. A good number of Warbabies of good alignment are helping Lo Fung and his allies in their struggle against the insane Pharaoh Rama-Set. Many more are fighting against the Gargoyle Empire in Europe, both as heroes and simply for the sake of a good challenge.



Powers and Abilities of the Warbaby O.C.C.

1. Mastery of Weapons: Like the Warborn, the Warbaby is taught advanced weapon proficiency skills. They are not as advanced as those of the Warborn, but at least the Warbaby does not have to be linked with his weapons to gain the added skill. All the following bonuses are in addition to those gained through W.P. skills:

W.P. **Sharpshooting** Specialties: The same as listed in **Rifts® Conversion Book One** or **Rifts® New West™**. This ability applies to two Weapon Proficiencies of choice. See the W.P. Sharpshooting skill description for details and the types of weapons this skill can be applied to. Select only one trick shot for each W.P. skill.

Quick-Draw Initiative: Any weapon the Warbaby has the W.P. Sharpshooting skill with can be drawn and used with great speed. This translates into a bonus to initiative when using these weapons, similar to that of the Gunslinger O.C.C.s: +1 to initiative with a P.P. attribute of 14 and an additional +1 for every four points past 14 (Maximum bonus is +5 with a P.P. of 30 or higher). Remember, this skill only applies when using weapons which the Warbaby has the W.P. Sharpshooting skill with.

Other Bonuses: In addition to other bonuses, the Warbaby gains the following bonuses when using weapons he has the W.P. Sharpshooting skill with: +1 shooting attack per melee at levels 5 and 10, +1 to strike at levels 2, 6 and 13, and +2 to disarm with a "called" shot. He also has the following bonuses when using ancient weapons he is proficient with: +1 attack per melee, +1 to initiative, +1 to strike and parry at levels 1, 3, 7, 10 and 14, and +1 to disarm at levels 2, 5, 9 and 15.

2. Psionic Powers: Although not as good as the merging ability of the Warborn, the Warbaby does develop psionic abilities that simulate the Warborn power of Union. Psionic abilities include: Telemechanics, Telemechanic Mental Operation, Computer Ghost, and Mind Block. These powers function normally, except that they can only be used on machines specifically designed for war and combat. For example, an energy rifle or tank can be controlled with Telemechanic Mental Operation, but not a dump truck or personal computer.

3. I.S.P.: Initial I.S.P. is 1D4×10 plus the M.E. attribute number. Add 1D6+1 I.S.P. at each additional level of experience. The Warbaby is considered to be a major psionic and requires a 12 or higher to save against psionic attacks.

4. Initial Spell Knowledge: Although not as proficient as the Warborn, the Warbaby does know a number of spells related to his line of work. **Initial** spell knowledge includes: Armor of Ithan, Magic Shield, Fists of Fury, Death Bolt (*new*), and four offensive spells from levels 1-4 from either the common spell listings or the Necro-Magic listing. New spells can be learned as usual. Offensive and defensive spells are most coveted, with augmentation and transportation spells being next in line. Spells which are not combat oriented or otherwise relatable to war and fighting require twice the listed P.P.E. cost and are cast at half proficiency. See **Rifts® Mystic Russia™** for details on *new* Necromantic spells.

5. P.P.E.: Starts with 1D6×10 P.P.E. plus the P.E. attribute number. 1D6+1 P.P.E. is gained at each additional level of experience. Additional P.P.E. can be drawn from ley lines, nexus points, and other beings.

6. O.C.C. Bonuses: In addition to those listed above, the following bonuses are available with or without weapons: +4D6 S.D.C. or +2D6 M.D.C., +1 to P.S., P.P. and P.E., +1 to initiative, +1 to strike and parry, +2 to dodge, +1 to entangle, +3 to roll with **punch/impact**, +1 to save vs magic at levels 3, 6, 9 and 13, +1 to Spell Strength at levels 5 and 10, +2 to save vs Horror Factor at level one, +1 at levels 3, 6, 10 and 14, +4 to save vs shell-shock, +1 to save vs psionics, and +2 to save vs mind control or possession, all in addition to skill and attribute bonuses.

7. Penalties and Insanities: Other than the lower status when compared to the **Warborn**, the **Warbaby** suffers no additional penalties or insanities.

Warbaby O.C.C.

(N.P.C. Villain and Optional Player Character)

Also known as: War Orphans.

Alignment Restrictions: None, but most are selfish or evil. Good **Warbabies** are much more common than good **Warborn**. In fact, a leaning toward a good alignment is often one of the reasons why a **Warbaby** doesn't make the cut to **Warborn**.

Attribute Requirements: M.E. 8, P.S. 10, P.P. 12, and P.E. of 10 or higher. The higher the better for these attributes. A high I.Q. and Spd are also suggested, but not required.

Race Restrictions: No restrictions, but most (85%) are human. Elves and Ogres are also common (10%). The rest are comprised mostly of other humanoid D-Bees and sub-humans. Supernatural creatures and creatures of magic never "flunk out" of **Warborn** training and none would ever voluntarily choose this path.

Player Character Note: Although not trained with the same aggression reserved for the **Warborn**, the **Warbaby** is still reminiscent of a force of nature in combat. Perhaps because of resentment for not being good enough or as a belated attempt to prove himself worthy, the **Warbaby** is known for fighting with even more intensity than the **Warborn**. Of course without the same power to back him up, the **Warbaby** does not make the same impact as the **Warborn**, but does come close. Without question, the **Warbaby** is just as violent and cutthroat as the **Warborn** with an even greater penchant to cheat.

A good-aligned **Warbaby** is seen as an even greater failure than his evil brethren and is often hunted down as a training exercise. If the renegade puts up a good fight or, worse yet, manages to get away, his pursuers usually decide that he is not a complete failure and decide to let him free. The line of thought behind this is that the rebel will eventually embrace his true nature and return to the fold one day. Sometimes this happens, but usually a free and noble **Warbaby** moves on to use his skills to defend the innocent and punish the guilty, even if the guilty include his former comrades.

O.C.C. Skills:

Languages: Two of choice at 90%.
 Math: Basic (+15%)
 Recognize Weapon Quality (+20%)
 Mechanical Engineer (+15%)
 Weapons Engineer (+20%)
 Basic Electronics (+10%)
 Weapon Systems (+10%)
 Read Sensory Equipment (+15%)
 Military: Two of choice (+10%).
 W.P. Energy Rifle

W.P. Energy Pistol

W.P.: Three Ancient of choice.

W.P.: One Modern of choice.

Hand to Hand Combat: Expert; can be upgraded to Martial Arts or Assassin (if evil) at the cost of one "other" skill selection.

O.C.C. Related Skills: Select four skills at level one, plus one additional skill at levels 3, 6, 9 and 13.

Communications: Any (+5%)

Cowboy: None

Domestic: Any

Electrical: Any (+5%)

Espionage: Detect Ambush, Detect Concealment, and Wilderness Survival only.

Mechanical: Any (+10%)

Medical: First Aid or Field Surgery only (+10% to the latter).

Military: Any (+10%)

Physical: Any, except Acrobatics or Wrestling.

Pilot: Any (+5% to military vehicles).

Pilot Related: Any (+10%)

Rogue: Any

Science: Any

Technical: Any (+5% to Computer skills).

Weapon Proficiencies: Any

Wilderness: Any

Secondary Skills: Select four Secondary Skills at level one, plus one additional at levels 2, 4, 7, 10 and 14 from those listed, excluding those marked "None". These are additional areas of knowledge that do not get the advantage of the bonuses listed in parentheses. All Secondary Skills start at the base skill level.

Standard Equipment: Starts with several sets of clothing, two sets of work clothes, work overalls, tool belt, mini tool kit, a full-sized tool kit, a flashlight, a backpack, 1D4 weeks of food rations, several hundred feet of rope, a survival kit, canteen, and sunglasses.

Initial weaponry includes: one ancient style weapon, one modern S.D.C. weapon, and three energy weapons of choice. Techno-Wizard weapons are most coveted because the **Warbaby** can power them with his own P.P.E., much the way the **Warborn** powers his weapons. Body armor can be any type, but most prefer light and medium styles for maximum mobility. Unlike the **Warborn**, the **Warbaby** cannot wear metal or full environmental armor without hindering his magic.

Beginning vehicle can be any light military type, but most prefer either a fast hovercycle or heavy A.T.V. Tanks, power armor, robots, and/or other heavy vehicles will be acquired later.

Money: Starts with 1D6x100 credits and 2D6x1000 in black market items. Most of his money has already been spent on weaponry.

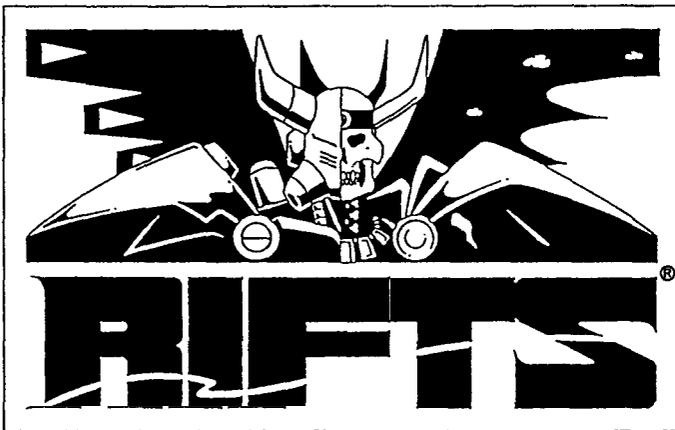
Cybernetics: None to start and most will avoid them. A few may get one or two cybernetic implants later in life, usually sensory or black market, but don't get any bionics since they interfere with magic and psionics. If a lost limb or organ needs to be replaced, bio-systems will be preferred.



TH

Warbaby Experience Table

1	0,000 - 2,050
2	2,051 - 4,100
3	4,101 - 8,300
4	8,301 - 16,600
5	16,601 - 25,200
6	25,201 - 34,500
7	34,501 - 48,000
8	48,001 - 67,500
9	67,501 - 95,000
10	95,001 - 125,000
11	125,001 - 175,000
12	175,001 - 225,000
13	225,001 - 275,000
14	275,001 - 330,000
15	330,001 - 395,000



Three Words

A Short Story by Jason Marker

In the blink of an eye it was over. **Norr** had watched Billy draw the homemade bone knife from the waistband of his ragged jeans and lunge at the CS guard. The rest happened with dreamlike slowness: The knife glanced off the hard ceramic of the guard's breastplate. The faceless guard pushed Billy back into line, then casually drew his **sidearm** and burned Billy's face away. The old goat's corpse tumbled heavily to the ground and lay twitching at **Norr's** feet.

Another blink, and now **Norr** simply stood and stared at his friend's cooling body, his six eyes watching the heat slip from the old goat like a soul seeking salvation. **Norr** shifted the battered hoe he carried and thought some more. Thinking was something that took considerable effort for **Norr**. The faceless guard that had shot Billy was approaching him now, and everything became slow again. **Norr** thought harder, and remembered the past.

* * *

Subject **4291203** stepped from the GED vat, dripping the milky Lone Star mutagen.

The engineers were delighted that the experiment had worked. They had never combined arachnid DNA with a human's before. Now what was quite possibly the greatest espionage agent ever

created stood before them, staring blankly with its coal black eyes. The spider genes had given it unnatural stealth and strength, cold cunning, an extra set of arms, and the ability to excrete a sticky web-like substance that was perfect for "pacification". The human genes gave it an athlete's build and the intellect to learn and control its power. That, at least, was the plan. After the mutant was sterilized it was whisked away to an evaluation center and jacked into countless machines, which all reported that the subject was perfect in every way but one: It was an idiot. Subject **4291203** possessed the intellect of a three-year-old human and was unable to follow the simplest of commands. The researchers threw up their hands in disgust, but instead of destroying the mutant they shipped it to a menial labor camp that was excavating a site for another new research building.

* * *

The guard stopped, smoke still curling from the muzzle of his pistol, and stared coldly at **Geck**, the first slave in the chain. **Geck's** ropy muscles were tight under his scaly skin as he clenched his pickaxe. He stared back at the guard with hard eyes, and the guard waited for any excuse to shoot him down as well.

Norr thought harder.

* * *

Life was hard for subject **4291203** at the labor camp. Three days after its arrival, its body had bloated and its athletic figure had sagged around it like a fleshy sack. The engineers had attributed this to an unstable genetic code and ordered it put under watch for any further unexpected mutations. This, plus its obvious mental deficiencies, made it the butt of one cruel joke after another.

The soldiers kicked it and pushed it for moving too slow. They antagonized it and tried to get it to attack them so they could get rid of it. And when it made a mistake or broke one of the hundreds of rules the guards made up, they would not punish it, but the rest of the mutants in its gang. In retaliation, the other mutants would steal its food. They would snag its chain to trip it and abuse it all day, and then tie it to its bunk at night and terrorize it. It never flinched or struck back, or showed any reaction. It thought this was the natural order of things and accepted the abuse and terror as life. And then everything changed.

* * *

The guard moved past **Geck** and stood staring at **Norr**, waiting. **Norr** stared back with his blank, black eyes, not moving. Viscous, poisonous drool ran down his mandibles and dripped onto his sagging gut. The guard snorted and said something derisive to his fellows, their laughter ringing hollowly from their helmets.

* * *

The goat-headed mutant that walked through the bunk house door was so tall he had to bend almost double to avoid knocking himself out. His limbs were long and gangly, but knotted with muscle. He moved like a cat and his pride and serenity were almost tangible in the fetid half light of the **bunkhouse**. His



horned head turned slowly from left to right as he took in the motley inhabitants. **Geck**, who was mean and dumb and considered himself the leader of the mutants, approached the newcomer with a manner that was all swagger and belligerence. "I'm in charge here," he spat. "I give the orders and you'll be happy to take 'em."

The goat swung his gaze around to **Geck**. "I take orders from a higher power, mutant," he said in a strangely warbling voice. "Not you."

There was a moment of strained silence as the scales on **Geck's** face darkened. "I'll show you a higher power, goat-boy," he hissed. He took a step backward, and then swung a plated fist at the tall mutant's head. The goat swayed to the left like a reed in a breeze and caught the incoming fist in his huge hand. A heartbeat passed as **Geck** stared at the goat in surprise. Then the goat began to squeeze.

The other mutants flinched as they heard bones snap in **Geck's** hand. As **Geck** began to squeal in pain, the goat balled his other hand into a fist and slammed **Geck** in the jaw. **Geck's** head snapped back, black blood spraying from his mouth, and his legs buckled as consciousness fled. The goat let loose of **Geck's** hand and the big lizard crumpled into a bleeding heap at his feet.

The **bunkhouse** was silent as the newcomer stepped over the inert body of his victim and strode to the center of the room. Standing nearby was subject 4291203, watching the unconscious lizard's blood pooling on the floor. It slowly lifted its head as the goat filled its vision, expecting to be attacked as well.

The tall mutant extended his broad hand. "I am Billy," he said. "What is your name, mutant?"

Subject 4291203 stared at the goat's hand for a moment, not understanding, and a sound escaped from between its mandibles.

"Nrrrrr."

There was an unnerving high-pitched tittering and a leathery sound as another mutant, the **snakeman Whip**, slithered up to Billy. "Don't wathte your **tiiiime**," Whip lisped. "He **ith** an **iiiiid**-iot and can't **thpeak**. He **ith uthleth**." Suddenly Whip swung his tail around and stung Subject 4291203 on its forearm with a crack. Subject 4291203 just stared at its arm where an ugly welt began to rise on its pasty skin, then it dropped its head and looked at the floor.

Whip tittered again but was brought up short as the tall mutant turned a raging glare on him. Whip shrunk back from Billy's gaze, and suddenly felt he would be safer elsewhere. As the mutant slithered hurriedly away, Billy turned back to Subject 4291203. "It is very nice to meet you, **Norr**."

* * *

The soldier glanced once again at **Norr** and warily **holstered** his **sidearm**. He knew the ugly mutant was dumb and harmless, but the soldier had always had a secret fear of spiders and the silent **Norr** unnerved him. He turned his back on the spider, happy to avoid the gaze of its coal black eyes, and crouched down to roll the dead goat over. The chains jingled as the spider shifted its weight.

* * *

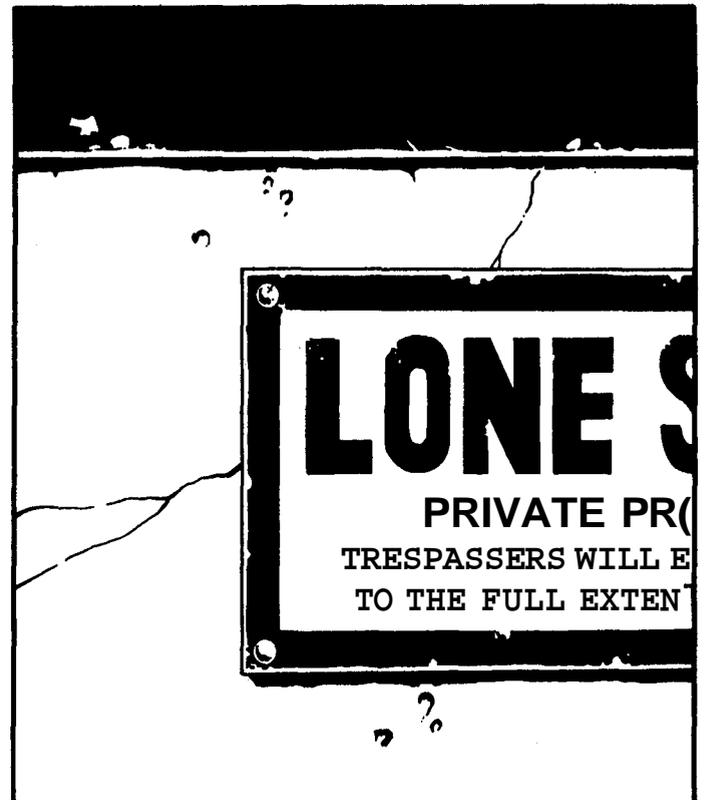
Months passed, and Billy took **Norr** under his wing. Billy protected him from the abuse of the other mutants. He shared his food with **Norr** and **pummeled** any mutant who laid a hand on him. Billy worked hard to teach **Norr** a few basic words, but **Norr** could only ever manage three. The tall mutant told **Norr** stories in the dark about many things he couldn't understand. Billy spoke of meeting "**The Maker**," a beautiful goddess who came to him bathed in a blue light and whispering secrets. She taught Billy how to lead his people, the mutants, to a place called "**The Den**" where they would find paradise. Billy's eyes would fill with fire when he spoke this way, but **Norr** just repeated his three words. Billy would smile a crooked smile and clap **Norr** on the shoulder. "Yes, **Norr**. I am."

* * *

The soldier turned Billy over with rough hands and pulled a small plasma cutter from his belt. He sparked it and began to remove the chains from the corpse. A terrible rage welled up inside of **Norr**. He had never experienced anything like it before and it confused him, as things often did, but suddenly he understood something. Billy would never tell him another story again. Billy would never teach him another word or shelter him from the violence in his life. **Norr** had only had one thing in his pitiful life, and this faceless soldier had taken it away in a heartbeat.

With blinding speed **Norr** brought the hoe from his shoulder down on the head of the crouching soldier, shattering the handle. The soldier grunted and pitched face down in the dirt. A blink of an eye, and sadness filled **Norr** as oily black tears seeped from his two largest eyes. He turned on the shouting guards, clutching the broken haft of the hoe tightly in his fists. As they raised their rifles, **Norr** said his only words.

"Billy **Norr** friend."





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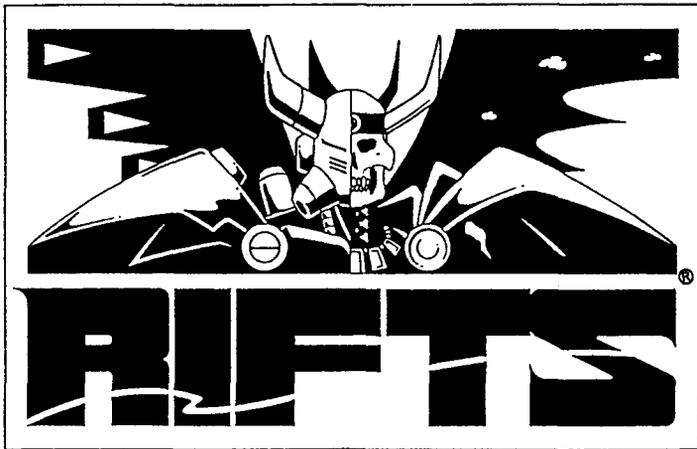
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The Hammer of the Forge

By James M.G. Cannon

Chapter Eight Pyramid Scheme

Atlantis is dead.

Or so Clan Acherean will tell you, from their home on Alexandria. Alexandria is a rough and tumble world in the outer rim of the United Worlds of Warlock, a place where Rift storms still occasionally rumble through the countryside despite the many pyramids the Achereans have built to control the magical energies of the world. Clan Acherean brought civilization to Alexandria, but they didn't bring Atlantis back to life.

Atlantis was a mistake, they still contend, and its destruction a sign of their own hubris and arrogance. They do not wish to recreate those days, and so they allow the wizards of the United Worlds of Warlock to administer the daily operations that keep an advanced world running smoothly. The Atlanteans of Clan Acherean help out by monitoring the pyramids and keeping a watch on Rift activity, but they prefer to stay out of politics. In this respect they resemble the rest of the Atlantean race, scattered about the Megaverse and avoiding much in the way of responsibility, but Clan Acherean is unique in that most of the clan resides on a single world, in the same dimension, living together.

In a way, they have rebuilt Atlantis. But they're redoing it differently this time; trying to avoid the sins that destroyed their previous civilization.

— excerpt from the unaired trideo documentary, Alexandria: Gem of the UWW, Unicorn Entertainment Group

Every muscle in his body hurt. His bones hurt. Everything from toes to hair was in agony, but Caleb Vulcan, newly knighted servant of the Cosmic Forge, couldn't give up yet. He had survived an agonizing battle with an ancient killing machine and the death of a star, and by rights it should have been naptime, but his

mentor and ally **Lothar** of **Motherhome** was missing. The shockwave that accompanied the supernova had sent Caleb and the Zodoran energy leech in the same direction, but Lothar had disappeared, swallowed up by the nebula that formed with the star's death.

Where could he be? Caleb wondered. He wasn't exactly sure where he was, and could hardly begin to guess what had happened to Lothar. As a **Cosmo-Knight**, Caleb possessed a kind of sixth sense, a cosmic awareness, that was supposed to give him a mental map of the universe and where he was within it. But either the supernova had knocked something loose in Caleb's head or the nebula was ruining the reception, because Caleb was just plain lost.

The strange swirling gases and lights of the nebula were not familiar, and he couldn't get his bearings. *There should have been a planet or something here, right?* Caleb asked himself, craning his neck and staring at a pocket of ionizing gas. *Now it's just helium or something.*

This stinks.

And then, suddenly, a circle of darkness appeared before him, a small patch the size of a record album that expanded quickly. Caleb lurched backward, unsure what to do, and the darkness followed. In moments it had grown as wide as Caleb was tall, and it overtook him. He screamed incoherently as the darkness enveloped his crimson form . . .

. . . and then he crashed to the floor, flailing his limbs. "Ah, excellent," Dr. Abbot said from above, his British accent more maddening than usual. "I was afraid I wouldn't be able to find you. There is still a great deal of 'cosmic static' left over from the nova."

Caleb levered himself to his feet and realized he was back on the bridge of **Lothar's** borrowed freighter. Dr. Abbot stood a few feet away, his shadowy form indistinct beneath his battered trenchcoat and hat, except for his eyes which glowed an eerie orange. Lothar himself was reclining in the captain's chair. Caleb was relieved to see the Wolfen Cosmo-Knight alive, and that his armor was just as battered and worn as Caleb's own. "What just happened?" he asked.

"I warped space and time to recall you to the ship," Dr. Abbot explained. "I found Lothar first purely by chance. Is the Zodoran machine destroyed?"

Caleb nodded as if space warps were nothing new and dispelled his armor with a crimson flash. "Yeah, I wrecked it. But it was a pretty close thing. I was lucky to end up in its vicinity when the explosion subsided. I'd hate to think of what would have happened if we'd lost it in that goop."

Lothar nodded wearily. "A grave miscalculation on my part," he admitted with a growl. "It's been a long time since I last rode a supernova. But I'm glad you finished the job, **pu**— Caleb." Caleb couldn't help the smile that split his face at the sound of Lothar using his given name rather than the derogatory "pup."

Abbot didn't miss it either. "You do care, don't you, you old softy you," he said, patting Lothar's emerald plated shoulder with a shadowy hand.

Lothar brushed him away with a snarl. "Don't start, Abbot." He turned to Caleb. "How are you feeling?"

Caleb grabbed the back of the co-pilot's seat and spun it around so he could sit down. "Like I just went fifteen rounds with Muhammad **Ali**. But you know, it isn't so bad. We saved some lives today." He ran a hand through his short red hair, feeling

crusts of dried blood; the Zodoran machine had been able to generate pulses of negative energy that cut through even a **Cosmo-Knight's** formidable defenses. Caleb was suddenly reminded of how close to death he had come out there. "Then again. . ."

"This was a rough task for your first real test as a knight," **Lothar** said. "And you did well. I'm beginning to think the Forge knew what she was doing when she made you one of us."

"Thanks," Caleb said. "I think."

"Captain Orestes hailed us while I was looking for you," **Abbot** interrupted. "He is heading back to Xerxes for repairs, and to buy you two those drinks he promised."

Lothar yawned suddenly, revealing sharp teeth. "I'll send a message to the **Gabriel** and thank him, but we have other business to attend to."

"What?" Caleb asked, incredulous. "I need a shower, sure, but I can do that on the way to the station. We just saved the universe, **Lothar**. It's time to kick back and have a few beers and celebrate the fact that we're still alive. Besides, I still need to be deputized."

Lothar leaned back in his chair. "That can wait a little longer, I think. As for celebrating, we don't indulge in that sort of thing. Our job is to defend the Three Galaxies from all threats; doing our job well doesn't entitle us to wasting time with frivolous antics."

"You are so repressed, you know that?" Caleb said. "You sound like my father."

"Then your father was a wise man," **Lothar** answered. "Listen, **Abbot** helped us, and now we have to help him." He turned to the tall, shadowy figure. "You did say something about a 'spot of trouble,' didn't you?"

"I did," **Abbot** admitted. "I'm surprised you remembered in all the excitement. It isn't too terribly pressing, though. I'm sure we can stop at Xerxes and get young Caleb a badge and a beverage."

Caleb's face reddened despite himself. "I'm sorry, man. I forgot."

"Quite all right, I assure you," **Abbot** told him. "There are extenuating circumstances."

"Why don't you explain what the trouble is, and then I'll decide where we go next?" **Lothar** growled. "And try to keep it to as few words as possible for a change."

"Perfectly reasonable solution," **Abbot** agreed. "It isn't really me who is in trouble, I must admit. It's **Kassy**. She's been kidnapped by an obnoxious fellow by the name of **Paj Pandershon**."

Lothar groaned and put a hand on his forehead. "I shouldn't be getting a headache, but there it is," he grumbled.

"Who's **Kassy**?" Caleb asked. "And **Paj**?"

Abbot's shadowy face softened in what Caleb was beginning to recognize as his version of a smile. "**Kassiopaeia** Acherean is one of our friends."

"One of your friends," **Lothar** growled.

"Our," **Abbot** corrected him. "She has helped us both in the past on numerous occasions, and though she is a bit of a free spirit —"

"A trouble magnet."

"— she is also one of the most kind and generous people I've met in the entire **Megaverse**." **Abbot** shot **Lothar** a withering glare, continuing, "Mine is certainly not a minority opinion, although **Lothar's** is, and **Kassy** has had her share of admirers over the years. One of them is **Paj Pandershon**, a Delakite warlord of some renown. A week ago **Kassy** disappeared from her

home on Alexandria, and I've traced her to **Pandershon's** fortress on the planet **Korobas**."

"So you need our help busting this **Kassy** out of the bad guy's palace?" Caleb said. "Doesn't seem so bad, after going toe to toe with an ancient engine of destruction."

"I'm glad you feel that way," **Abbot** said, smiling again. "What do you think, **Lothar**?"

Lothar scraped his claws across his helmet, attacking an imaginary itch. "I'll set the navigation controls to **Korobas**. You start talking about **Pandershon's** defenses."

"I knew you wouldn't let us down," **Abbot** beamed.

* * *



It turned out that **Korobas** was only a hop, skip, and a jump away, relatively speaking. It still required an eight hour flight, but there was no need to push the ship as hard as they had to reach **Teneb-742**. **Lothar** sent a quick hyper-link message to **Captain Orestes**, while **Caleb** hunted down the crew quarters and found himself a shower. He was dismayed to learn that the showers weren't normal; they pumped out high-frequency sound that worked as well as water and soap, but didn't provide the comfort of a nice hot shower.

Feeling cleaner helped, though, and **Caleb's** energies were quickly replenishing. There was a bright glowing furnace within **Caleb**, and given time it healed his every ache and pain. By the time he was finished cleaning up, he felt rested and healthier, as if he had slept for hours. He knew, too, that when he next summoned his armor, it would be unblemished and in perfect condition. He shook his head. The gifts of the Forge were indeed impressive, but they demanded an exacting toll. He hadn't yet been in **Lothar's** company for more than forty-eight hours, and in all that time this was his first real chance to rest. Even so, they were still heading into another adventure at breakneck speed.

He pulled on his silver shirt and slid the red grav boots onto his feet and headed for the bridge. He was going to have to find more clothing if he was going to keep bleeding on these ones; he had thrown them into the sonic shower to clean them, and they came out dry and spotless, but he would have preferred it if he could have just changed into something new. He sniffed the shirt; smelled clean. But it didn't have that fresh from the dryer warmth.

Space was certainly beyond cool, well into awesome territory, but it did have its drawbacks.

Abbot and **Lothar** were chatting amicably on the bridge, or at least as amicably as the two of them got. Abbot was talking, sipping at tea though he had no visible mouth, and Lothar was keeping his head down and trying to ignore the doctor. Abbot looked up as Caleb appeared and offered him a smile. "Can I get you some tea?"

"Uh, yeah." Caleb didn't usually drink tea, and he no longer needed to eat or drink anything at all, but he would have felt rude refusing. Abbot produced a thermos and a mug and poured Caleb a steaming cup of the brew. Caleb accepted it with a smile, and then sniffed it gently. It had a curious aroma, almost flowery, with a hint of cinnamon. He took a tentative sip, wary of the liquid's heat. "Mmmm," he offered. "This is good. What is it?"

"My own brew. I'm glad you like it," Abbot said. "I wish we had some scones or biscuits, but this ship is appallingly understocked."

Lothar sighed. "I didn't expect company when I borrowed it."

"Of course not," Abbot quickly agreed, but his tone suggested that he would have done otherwise in **Lothar's** position. "So Caleb, I was telling Lothar what we can expect when we arrive on Korobas. It's a small world, mostly water, with only a few landmasses scattered like islands along its equator. They aren't connected to the floor of the world ocean, however, so they float along on the currents, carried hither and yon by the sea."

"That's kind of strange," Caleb muttered. While Abbot had talked, he had recalled that no tea, however hot, could scald his tongue anymore, and gulped down all of it. The initial sip had not prepared him for the bizarre aftertaste, though, and his remark was as much about that as the conditions on Korobas. "How will we find this Paj guy, then?" He stuck his tongue out and scraped his teeth along it, as if that could somehow get rid of the taste.

"Easy," Lothar said. "He'll be on the big island with the black fortress and all the guns." He glanced back at Caleb. "That's a sipping tea, pup. Not wise to swallow it all at once; your mouth will taste like genku posterior for days now."

"Genku posterior?"

"Ignore him, Caleb," Abbot said. "More tea?" He offered Caleb the thermos, but Caleb declined, setting his mug down on a nearby console. "Lothar is essentially correct, though it may not be that easy. Paj should be expecting some sort of rescue, however. As soon as we arrive in system, we may receive a welcoming party."

"You don't seem very concerned that Paj may harm this **Kassy**," Caleb pointed out. Why did he have to accept the tea? He pursed his lips and pressed his tongue against the roof of his mouth, but that only made it worse.

"No," Abbot admitted. "I am fairly certain that Paj is more interested in winning **Kassy** over than hurting her. I'm also fairly certain that Paj couldn't hurt her if he tried; the only way he could have captured her in the first place is through subterfuge."

Caleb shrugged. Lothar and Abbot knew what they were doing. "Is there anything else to eat or drink around here?"

Lothar uttered a sharp bark. "Abbot can show you where the galley is. You won't find much besides basic amenities, but if you eat enough **nutri-wafers** they might kill the taste. I'd suggest the strawberry flavored wafers."

Caleb eventually did find the wafers, and he had to eat about a dozen of the things before the "genku posterior" taste began to dull. The wafers were surprisingly large, about the size of the pancakes his mother made for him when Caleb was a boy. It seemed that even though Caleb didn't require food to function, he could metabolize it quickly enough when he did eat. He brought a few of the wafers to the bridge and Lothar ate some, though Abbot declined. Caleb asked Lothar more questions about the phase drive and **contra-gravitonic** drive and how the ship worked; the Wolfen proved as close-mouthed as usual, but Abbot answered as best he could. Caleb was strangely reassured to learn there were topics the enigmatic Abbot knew very little about.

When Caleb attempted to learn something of Abbot's origins, the doctor deftly deflected each question, and offered instead to lecture some more about ancient galactic cultures. So Caleb got to learn about the ruins of **Monro-Tet**, lost Atlantis, the **Burschian Dominion**, and the **Ghostworld** before Lothar alerted them that they were arriving in the **Korobas** system.

It was the first thing Lothar had said in hours. "You weren't meditating that entire time, were you?" Caleb asked.

Lothar shrugged **noncommittally**. "I've heard it all before. Disengaging the phase drive." His hands flew over the controls, and the ship returned to regular space. Outside the viewport Caleb could now see the stars and the blackness of space. Lothar turned the ship to the right, and a planetoid came into view, a small blue world that lacked satellites of any kind. It slowly grew in the viewport as the ship advanced.

"Korobas," Lothar said, explaining the obvious. "Any sign of that welcoming party, Abbot?" he asked.

The doctor checked his own instruments and shook his head. "Nothing yet."

Lothar grunted in **mild** surprise. "We should be appearing on their scopes."

"Maybe they have something special planned," Caleb suggested.

"Perhaps," Abbot said. "But they could hardly expect us."

"Maybe not us specifically, but they did kidnap somebody. They've got to be expecting some sort of retaliation."

Lothar arched a metallic eyebrow. "You could be right Caleb. Raise shields and power up the laser batteries." Abbot complied, his orange eyes narrowed with concern.

"Anything I can do?" Caleb asked, but Lothar shook his head.

"Just sit tight," he said. The ship suddenly lurched as Lothar increased speed, and in a moment they were blasting through the atmosphere of **Korobas**. Fire flickered across their bow, and red lights erupted all across Abbot's console.

"Is it wise to go in at this speed?" Abbot said archly. Lothar simply grunted, and a moment later they were clear of the ionosphere and blasting through **Korobas** sky. Clouds sizzled as the ship flew through them, still burning hot from re-entry. They were on the planet's day side, and it appeared to be a rather pleasant day. There were clouds, but not too many, the sun shone brightly, and beneath them all they could see was water.

"Most of the sights are beneath the waves," Abbot explained. "Korobas has an active tectonic system, and the undersea mountains are truly breathtaking, particularly the volcanic ranges. Most of the native creatures live down there as well; none of them sentient, but quite a few of them very beautiful to look at." He smiled. "And dangerous."

"You certainly get around a lot," Caleb grumbled. "Or did you just memorize the encyclopedia?" Abbot just smiled.

"Coming up on the ring of islands," Lothar reported. "If I'm not disturbing you. What have you got on the sensors?"

Abbot glanced at his board. "The third island, due west, has massive technological readings. That should be Paj's hideout." Lothar nodded and nudged the ship towards the island. They found it easily; not only was it the largest island in this part of the world ocean, but it was the only one with a huge black fortress growing out of it. Even through the viewport the castle looked foreboding and deadly, with several gunports prominently displayed. Lothar circled the island a few times, but received neither hails nor gunfire.

"This is very peculiar," Abbot said. Caleb silently agreed.

Lothar looked at them both. "I suppose we should go down there." He hit a few keys, and then stood up. "The ship will hang here until we get back. Shall we fly down, or would you like to magic us down there, Abbot?"

"I'd be delighted to help," Abbot said. He stood up and grabbed his cane from where it leaned against the chair. "Caleb?" Caleb stood as well, unsure of himself, and then Abbot's eyes flashed, and the ship around them shifted, reforming into a tropical paradise. One moment the three of them were on the bridge, and the next moment they stood on the island, green grass beneath their feet. Caleb looked around wildly, and despite himself clutched his stomach. Teleportation was disorienting to say the least.

"I shouldn't have eaten all those strawberry wafers," he muttered.

"Everything okay, Caleb?" Abbot asked, leaning on his cane. In the bright sunlight his shadowy form looked even more insubstantial, and Caleb thought he could actually see through Abbot. It was more unnerving than the teleportation effect.

To distract himself Caleb looked around. They stood on a grassy knoll, a hump of rock and vegetation that sloped downward to the beach on their right, and towards the looming fortress to their left. Palm trees grew nearby, their fronds swaying gently in the breeze. There were flowers everywhere. The air smelled strongly of salt and sea, and the roar of the ocean filled Caleb's ears. If not for the blocky black fortress in the background, it looked to Caleb like a postcard of Hawaii.

"This doesn't look much like a bad guy's hideout," he complained.

"You should suit up, pup," Lothar suggested.

"I will when somebody starts shooting," Caleb told him. "In the meantime, I'll enjoy the fresh air and sunlight." Lothar glared, but said nothing. Caleb ignored him. "What do we do next?"

"We knock on the door," Lothar decided. He led the way down the hill towards the fortress, Caleb and Abbot in tow.

The front section of the fortress did indeed have an entrance, but it was blocked by a pair of massive blast doors. Lothar surmised that they provided access to the hangar; not large enough to house a starship, but possibly a few fighters.

"I'm beginning to think no one is home," Lothar grumbled. "Caleb and I could burn through the doors, but it would take time. Do you want to field this one, Abbot?"

The doctor nodded and stepped forward. He hooked his cane in his elbow and then held both hands outward. His eyes glowed brightly for a moment, and then a sphere of orange light appeared between his palms. He pushed gently, and the sphere sailed through the air towards the blast doors, spinning lazily and flashing brightly. It connected with a burst of light and a thunderous boom that blew the doors inward, and rattled the entire fortress.

"What the heck was that?" Caleb asked when his ears stopped ringing.

"Sphere of Annihilation," Abbot explained. "They should know we're here now."

Lothar summoned his ax and led the way forward, across the threshold littered with fragments of the blast door. The chamber beyond did indeed house a half dozen starfighters, five wedge-shaped fighters that Lothar identified as Katana-Class, and a larger, more ominous looking tri-partite fighter called a Fire-Eater. The ships appeared to be in good repair, fueled and ready to go, but there weren't any pirates to fly them.

At the other end of the chamber were three elevators. "We might as well split up," Lothar said. "This place is obviously empty. But we may find some clues, maybe Kassy herself." Abbot looked doubtful, but acquiesced.

"Hey," Caleb interjected. "How will I recognize Kassy if I see her?"

"Well," Abbot said, "she's fairly attractive for her species. And she has tattoos up and down both arms." He keyed the first elevator, and as he waited for it to arrive, he said, "But I'm beginning to agree with Lothar. I don't think Paj and Kassy are here."

"Abbot, you check the lower levels," Lothar ordered. "Caleb, you start at the top and work your way down. I'll take the next level up and keep going; we'll meet in the middle." The elevator doors opened, and as Abbot stepped into one and Lothar into another, Lothar added, "Keep your eyes open and senses sharp."

Then the door closed and Caleb was on his own. Again. He stepped into the remaining elevator and hit the button for the top floor. The legend was in some alien language he couldn't read, but the placement of the buttons was simple enough. As the elevator ascended, he contemplated summoning his armor, but decided not to bother. If the place really was empty, there was nothing to worry about. And if there was an ambush waiting for him, he might surprise them by not tipping off the fact that he was a knight.

The elevator groaned to a halt, and the door slid open with an Earth-like "ding." Caleb stepped out into a narrow hallway that branched off to the left and right. Across the way another corridor led to a pair of arching double doors. Tapestries and other items were hung on the walls, creating a somewhat homier atmosphere than blank, black walls would have.

The double doors looked promising, so Caleb headed for them. As he approached, he noticed one of them was slightly ajar, and as he drew closer still, he heard noises from the other side. Caleb broke into a quick jog and threw open the door.

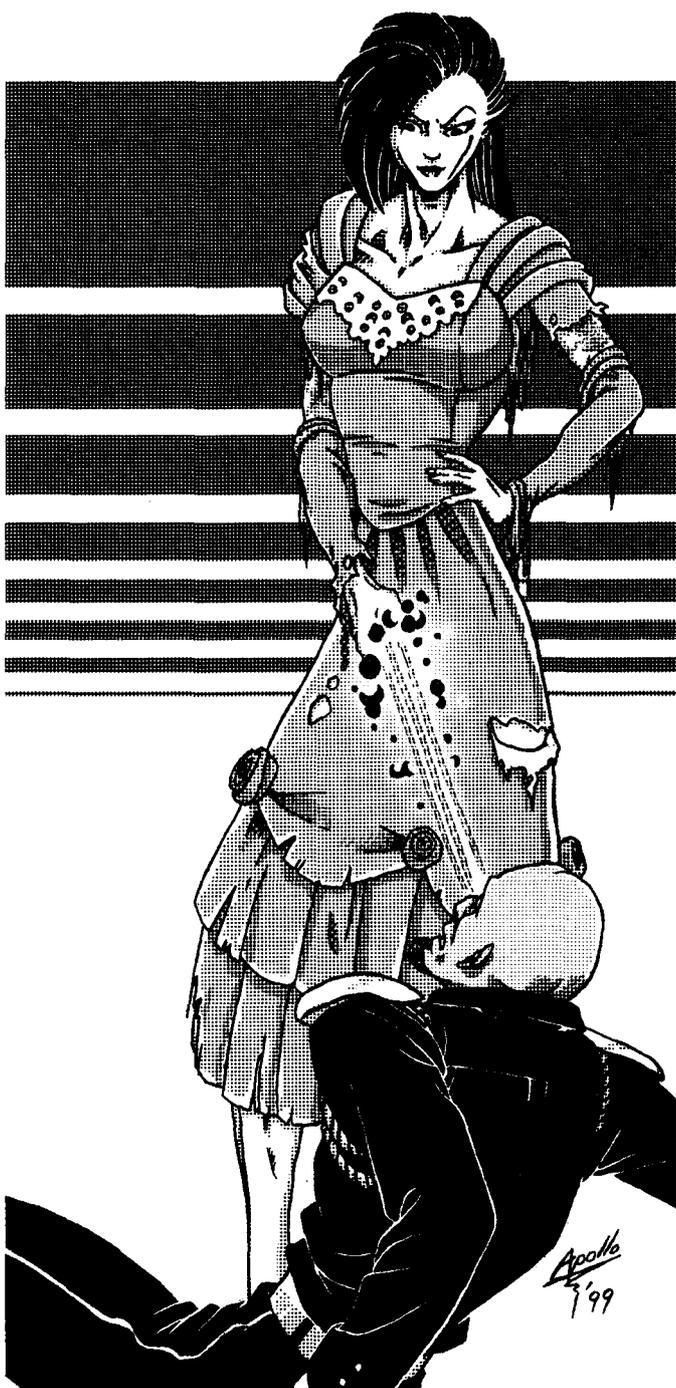
The room on the other side was some sort of throne room, with a huge black steel chair in the center, decorated with a red cushion and cover. Consoles were built into the walls, with computer screens that showed various levels of the fortress as well as the outside, including a dozen that were tracking Lothar's ship. There

were blast burns in the walls, and several consoles were smoking and sparking. Four humanoids were laid out on the ground, apparently unconscious or worse, while in the center of the room a blue and white tiger contended with a green skinned man, and a woman in a blue dress waved a sword with violet flames at another green skinned man who was similarly armed.

"What the hell is going on?" Caleb shouted, unable to contain the outburst.

The green fellow with the sword spared a glance in his direction, and the woman in blue took advantage of the moment to disarm him with a practiced gesture. As his sword flew through the air and clattered to the ground, she pressed the tip of her flaming blade against his throat.

"Surrender," she ordered, and the man complied, dropping to his knees. The other man, cornered by the tiger, raised his hands in defeat as well.



Caleb walked towards the woman, keeping one eye on the weirdly colored tiger. She was tall, about Caleb's own height, with long black hair and piercing blue eyes. Her brow was furrowed in suspicion, and her full lips were pulled into a frown that deepened as Caleb approached. She was very pale, in sharp contrast to the bright blue of her dress. The dress itself looked like a bridesmaid's outfit, with too much frills and lace and of such a sickening blue that it hurt Caleb's eyes to look at it. One of the sleeves was torn, revealing a pale, bare arm that was covered from wrist to shoulder in whirling designs, all blues and white. When Abbot mentioned tattoos, Caleb had instinctively pictured the crude pictures of a biker or **carny**; the images on the woman's arm were abstract and artfully designed, each image melding into the next to create a whirling pattern that drew the viewer in. Each design was done in differing shades of blue and highlighted with white, creating a distinctive image that still melted into the others. Whoever had drawn these, they had not done them with ink.

"**Kassiopaeia** Acherean, I presume," Caleb said. Abbot had been right; she was beautiful. And the tattoos actually enhanced her beauty rather than detracting from it.

She nodded, still suspicious. "And who are you?"

"I'm Caleb Vulcan." He tried to smile engagingly. "I'm here to rescue you."

Kassy widened her eyes in surprise. "**That's** sweet, but I think I have things under control."

"Obviously," Caleb agreed. She was even prettier than Joanna Freeman. *Oh man, please don't let me say something stupid.* "Nice dress."

"What?"

"I mean, Doctor Abbot and **Lothar** are downstairs," Caleb said quickly. "**That's** our ship on the **viewscreen**."

"Abbot and Lothar are here?" Kassy said. "Why didn't you say that in the first place?" The sword in her hands disappeared in a cerulean flash. "Stay there," she told the kneeling green man, and then raised her skirts to run over to a console that had a speaker. She flipped a switch and then said, "Hey guys, come on upstairs. You missed the party." Then she turned back to Caleb. "Who are you again?"

"Uh, Caleb Vulcan. I'm **Lothar's** apprentice."

"**You're** a **Cosmo-knight**? Excellent. You can keep an eye on these guys while I go find something decent to wear."

"**That's** not your dress?"

"Are you kidding?" she said with a grimace. She gestured at the kneeling man. "It's Paj's idea of a bridal gown. Normally I wouldn't be caught dead in something so tacky. The tricky thing was, he had the dress specially made so that I couldn't access my tats through the fabric. Took me longer than I thought to figure out how to rip through it too; it isn't ordinary fabric. After that, the rest was easy." She smiled then, and Caleb's heart skipped a beat.

"Anyway, why don't you wait for Abbot and Lothar. I'll be right back." The tiger suddenly disappeared with a burst of blue light, and then Kassy headed towards the double doors.

"Urn, okay," he said. Caleb watched her go, and then turned to Paj and his adjutant and tried to look menacing. Either it worked, or Kassy had already cowed them sufficiently. So Caleb sat down in the throne and waited for everybody else to arrive.

It wasn't long before Lothar and Abbot appeared in the doorway. They surveyed the scene with a glance, and Abbot remarked, "I thought I heard Kassiopaeia's voice over the loud-speaker."

"You did," Caleb agreed. "She just went to make herself presentable."

"This is good work, Caleb," Lothar pointed out. "You seem to have terrified these pirates."

"Wasn't me," Caleb corrected him. "Kassy was finishing up when I arrived. I think you guys made the same mistake Paj did; you underestimated her. Big time."

Abbot's smile was easy to see in the dim light of the throne room. "Well put."

Then Kassiopaea herself swept into the room, clad in a sleeveless jumpsuit and heavy boots, both marked with what appeared to be Greek lettering. Her hair was tied back into a ponytail, and for the first time Caleb noticed that the tattoos reached all the way up to her jawline. "Abbot and Lothar," she exclaimed, grabbing the doctor and embracing him. "I'm so glad the two of you could make it. I have to admit, I was afraid no one would notice I went missing, so I effected my own escape."

"An excellent job, Kassy," Abbot said, returning her hug. "I expected as much, but I feared Paj found some way to block your tattoo magic." Lothar just grunted a hello.

Caleb edged towards his mentor. "Magic?" he asked.

Lothar looked askance at him. "Atlantean tattoo magic, inherited from the Chiang-Ku dragons. They inscribe images on flesh that can be brought to life."

"That explains the sword and the tiger. Pretty cool stuff."

"Useful in its own way, I suppose. Kassy is an Undead Slayer, so she has more tattoos at her disposal than most Atlanteans do."

"Undead Slayer?" Caleb repeated. "What, like vampires and ghosts and stuff?"

"Exactly," Lothar told him, flashing some teeth.

"What are you two chattering about?" Abbot asked, interrupting.

"Nothing," Caleb told him.

Lothar grunted again. He took a look at Paj and the other five pirates. "We'll have to bring them back to Xerxes with us, and leave them with the authorities. There should be enough room in one of the cabins for them all. They are still alive, aren't they Kassy?"

"Mostly," she agreed. "They aren't very good at hand to hand, and they have very soft heads. I hope they're better pilots, otherwise they haven't a hope in the Megaverse."

"Will you be accompanying us to the station, my dear?" Abbot asked.

Kassy thought for a moment. "Well, my initial plan was to beat these guys up and then take that Naruni fighter back to Alexandria, but I think joining you three will be a lot more fun."

"Hardly," Lothar said quickly. "There will be paperwork to fill out, and then Caleb needs training. You might as well go home."

Kassy laughed. "Now I know I should stick around, if Lothar is trying to talk me out of something. What are you guys up to?"

"We're going after some Invincible Guard guy," Caleb spoke up. Lothar shot him a glare that could have flayed flesh from bone, but Caleb ignored him.

"Yes," Abbot agreed. "A deadly chap by the name of Elias Harkonnen."

"Harkonnen? Why does that name sound familiar?" Kassy asked. "It shouldn't; the Megaverse is far too big to waste time memorizing the names of TGE soldiers, and yet . . ."

"He's an Elf," Abbot told her.

Lothar harrumphed, but Kassy's eyes suddenly widened. "Right, the only Elf who graduated into the ranks of the Invincible Guard. I have heard his name before. He's at the heart of quite a few horror stories."

"Maybe you can tell them to us on the way," Caleb said, elbowing Lothar in the ribs.

The big Wolfen knight growled at Caleb, but told Kassy, "All right. You can come. Just don't do anything stupid."

Kassy's eyes twinkled. "Like teasing a dragon?"

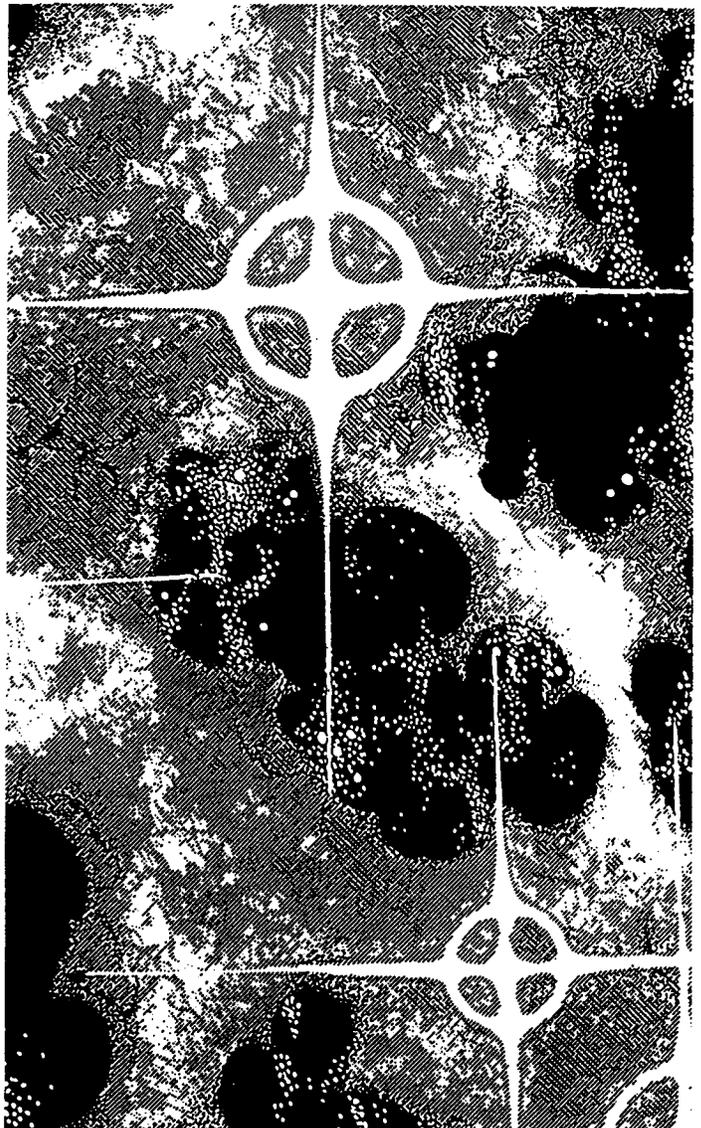
"That wasn't my fault," Lothar growled. "In point of fact, it was you who put me in that awkward position."

"Whoah," Caleb interrupted. "I want to hear this from the beginning."

Kassy smiled. "I think this is going to be a long trip for old Lothar here, then."

"The sooner we're done, the better then," Lothar growled. "Let's get going."

Loading the prisoners on the ship proved to be easier than Caleb would have expected, but the presence of two Cosmo-Knights, in addition to the Undead Slayer who bested them and a mysterious figure of unknown ability, kept the Delakites on their best behavior. In no time at all, they were on their way to Xerxes station, and Kassy was regaling them with the story of Lothar's encounter with a very affectionate Horned Dragon.



The Siege Against Tolkeen

By David Haendler

Chapter 32

There is no glory in this, thought the psychopath, as he trudged down the busy city streets. This is a cowardly method of combat. But it must be done. This is a necessary task. The murderer looked down again at the package which he clutched to his chest, and shuddered. Then he looked up at the sign on the theater gates, and he shuddered again. He stared at the name of the band that was playing tonight, and he resisted the urge to throw up. His eyes feasted on the words written up there in gaudy neon letters, so that all of the nausea could be expelled from him now. He had to make himself numb to the atrocities inside there if his mission were to be completed. The psychopath felt the bundle of paper and twine in his hands, and felt a little bit safer and saner. He walked up to the admissions booth, up to the young woman who wore far too much makeup, and he handed her the ticket. The murderer then walked into the den of iniquity, knowing that he was better than the scum inside.

* * *

"So," asked Sonja, her cheerfulness grating the wounded, weary Perrin. "How did it go? Did you get the APC?"

"Yup," growled Perrin, throwing open the refrigerator at the HFA headquarters and pulling out a beer. "I got the personnel carrier to the Naruni garage safely. That hacker kid got Larsen's passcode into the city just right. They thought that I was just one of his goons."

"But?" asked Sonja. "What else happened? You don't look so good."

"There is a traitor among us," said Perrin. "When I was flying into the mercenary camp, a small bomb exploded in my hoverbike. Nearly dropped me right into the electrified cut-wire. I'd be dead right now if I hadn't jumped off."

"Are you absolutely sure that it was a bomb? Maybe one of the mercenaries tagged your bike. Or maybe it was an engine failure."

"All of the mercenaries were covered in rhino-buffalo juice and puking their guts out when the blast hit. And the bike's sensors would have told me about an engine failure like that a full fifteen or twenty minutes before an explosion happened. We've got a rat in the house."

"This is terrible! I never would've thought that anyone in the HFA would do something like that..."

"No!" said Perrin sarcastically. "Who ever would have thought that a band of cutthroats and muggers could ever do something dishonest? It boggles my mind!"

"You're upset," replied Sonja coolly. "Have a couple of beers, maybe catch a movie or something to calm down. When you're collected enough to think straight, then come back, and we can go over who might have done this together."

"I guess you're right," muttered Perrin angrily, collapsing onto a nearby chair and nearly spilling his beer. "Any good movies out tonight?" Sonja grabbed a nearby newspaper and tossed it to the



pilot. Her chemically-enhanced strength caused the **rolled-up** paper to fly at a speed comparable to that of a bullet. **Perrin** fell backwards, dropping his half-full can, as the paper hit him squarely in the forehead.

"Oh, no!" yelped the Juicer, running over to help her leader. "I'm sorry, Jack! I guess that I just don't know my own strength sometimes!"

"Jeez," growled the pilot, picking himself up off of the ground. "Seems like everyone's trying to kill me today. Wonder if the usher at the movies is gonna slip arsenic into my popcorn." He angrily thumbed through the Living-Arts section of the *Tolkeen Review*, until he finally settled upon the movie section.

"Good reviews on the new McBain movie," he said. "I guess I'll go see that. See you in a couple of hours."

Perrin walked out of the beer hall, running a comb through his disheveled hair and hoping that he didn't look too much like the wounded terrorist leader that he was. He had barely gotten out of the door, however, when he let out a loud cry of shock and surprise. Sonja, thinking that her leader had been ambushed, sprinted through the door after him, and was caught off guard just as Perrin had been.

Hubert Possman was on the doorstep, half-unconscious, and bearing the signs of torture and abuse all over his body. He was clad in bloody robes a few sizes too big for him, and seemed to be in shock. Perrin quickly grabbed the ranger, and pulled him inside the door. "I thought you were dead, man!" the pilot exclaimed.

"So did I," muttered Possman grimly. "So did I."

* * *

Shaard looked into the computer screen, doing his best to project an image of sympathy and concern. He was telecommunicating with **Larsen**, the mercenary leader, who was in a foul mood and venting his frustrations. The ice dragon thought that for the amount of money that the one-eyed **headhunter** was being payed he could afford to be civil, but managed to keep from actually saying it. **Larsen's** Brigade had been serving an important purpose during the war, and Shaard didn't want to lose them over a matter of etiquette.

"**That APC** cost me 23 million credits!" stormed Larsen. "And that's not including the extra armor plating, the new paint job, or all of the extra weapons systems installed on it! I want it back and I want it back now! Otherwise, you can kiss your deposit goodbye!"

"Really, Vincent, you know that we will do our very best to find it for you. I've got the composite sketch which your boys sent to me, and it's running through my computers now. If your mysterious thief has ever been convicted of a crime or suspected of a crime, then he'll be in the databases, and we can catch him."

Larsen looked a bit placated by this, but still felt irritated. "See that you do," he said. "Oh, and I just thought that I'd inform you, we are moving the victimized camp a couple of kilometers to the south."

"Why? You'd said to me a couple of times that the base placement was ideal."

"It was. We just can't get the smell out. I swear, when I catch that son of a... you know, I practically wish that he had killed one of my men, so I'd have an excuse to send bounty hunters after him. As it is, I don't want to have to justify that expense to my accountant."

Shaard smiled gently. "Don't worry, when I catch him, I'll send him over to you for his punishment. I'll talk to you again soon." The dragon then clicked the connection off. He briefly chuckled at the idea of a mercenary camp held at the mercy of a freak with some stink bombs and a hovercycle, but couldn't find much humor in it. He really didn't like the idea that an enemy of Tolkeen's would be able to do that, and was even less amused by the thought that now, said enemy had a heavily armed combat vehicle.

Suddenly, the words "DATABASE MATCH FOUND" began flashing at the top of the screen. Shaard opened up the file which appeared before him, the file of Coalition **RPA** Ace Pilot and former prisoner of war Jack Perrin. The dragon snarled in frustration as he read the personal history section. This Perrin fellow had been a superb pilot, and had an impressive kill listing. He had managed to penetrate Tolkeen's air defenses a while back, had been captured, and then broken out of prison by several scumbags suspected to be from the Human Freedom Association. Perrin was currently believed to be in a high-level position amongst the **HFA**. This would be trouble. The dragon could feel it in his bones.

"But what's this?" he mused, noting the "Known Relatives," partition of the screen. "Wife, Elizabeth Perrin, deceased." The dragon switched to the selection of the database devoted to known Coalition aces, and sure enough found a section on the terrorist's wife. Killed in action against an Elemental several months ago. "I can use **this**," Shaard said slyly. "As a matter of fact, I've got a very good idea of what to do about Mr. Perrin here..."

* * *

The psychopath covered his ears, to block out the demonic noise which was considered music. It was worse than he had thought, so much worse. Screamed, demonic lyrics, mixed with the worst kind of profanity and blasphemy. The psychopath looked up on stage, and tears began to roll down his cheeks as he saw the "musicians," both human and non-human, dressed in leather, playing musical instruments covered with fake blood and **occasionally** desecrating a holy statue on stage. The filth was so horrible, so **horrible...the** psychopath knew that he could stand no more. He had planned to quietly walk out, leaving the package on his chair, but that was no longer an option. The murderer knew that he could not sleep at night if he let this atrocity perish in a quick blast of smoke and flame. He dropped the package under his chair, and began to wade through the mob of screaming, cheering teenagers in bizarre clothing with the band's name upon them.

The psychopath began to climb up onto the stage, but was caught from behind by a seven-foot tall monster with rippling muscles and a pair of huge, awkward tusks emerging from its lips. The thing wore a partial suit of body armor, with the word, "SECURITY" painted in black letters on the chestplate. "Where do you think you're **going?**" the D-Bee grunted.

The psychopath reached back with a quick elbow strike to the neck, which nearly caved in the monster's windpipe. The security guard fell down upon his hands and knees gagging, where he was punished with a second strike, a kick to the face which shattered his nose and left him lying on the ground, bleeding like a stuck pig.

The other security guards saw this and attacked, many of them wielding Neural Maces and clubs. The psychopath pulled his **Vibro-Blades** out from beneath his coat, and proceeded to do battle with the enemies of Heaven. The ignorant crowd laughed and cheered him on, thinking that the decapitations and the disembowelments were simply special effects, a skit organized by the band. When a **Vibro-Blade** sailed through the neck of a father of three, they applauded. When a powerful kick caved in the chest of a man simply doing his job, they laughed. It was only when the psychopath leapt onto the stage and began to slaughter the band that they realized perhaps something was going wrong. And when the band had been murdered, and the psychopath had fled through an open window, then the crowd definitely knew something to be amiss. Unfortunately for them, it was already too late.

As the psychopath walked through the streets of downtown Tolkeen, his swords concealed beneath his coat, the theater burst into flames. Unlike the thousands of shocked and terrified people around him, he did not look back. Instead, he laughed. Justice had been served, at least in the view of his maniacal thoughts.

Chapter 33

A gang of the HFA members had coalesced in the beer hall, gathered around a tiny television set, staring at the news reports. They didn't know whether to cheer or cry when the images of the twisted, mangled, D-Bee bodies came on screen. None of them bore any love for non-humans, but this seemed... wrong, somehow. A few of the terrorists had listened to the slaughtered band, and were in a state of mild mourning for their heroes.

The camera panned over the flaming wreckage once more. A female hand, adorned with numerous silver rings, shot out of a pile of ashes. It struggled for a few moments, trying to find something to grab onto, and then flopped over. A few of the Bursters and Fire Warlocks who volunteered as firemen ran over to pull her out. They dug and struggled with the detritus, and finally managed to pull out a limp young woman dressed in black leather with too much makeup and lots of silver jewelry. One of the Warlocks tried to take her pulse, then sadly shook his head. Another of the sorcerers nodded, and then began to haul the body over to be put on the pile.

"Damn," said Perrin softly. He felt worse about this than he thought he would. It was just D-Bees and City Rats in that theater; the Dog Boys back at Chi-Town killed dozens of D-Bees and City Rats every day and Perrin had never cared. Of course, Perrin had never talked to or known a D-Bee or a City Rat before. The camera switched to the image of an older woman with horns and a small goatee crying over her dead son's corpse, and that was when Perrin, a Coalition veteran, had to walk away. He couldn't take the TV anymore.

"How's Possman **doin'**?" he asked Sonja. The Juicer was kneeling by the half-dead Ranger, who was sprawled out on an old couch.

"All right, I guess. His body really isn't in such bad condition. But I get the feeling that his mind got nearly fried by those monsters. He might not be the same ever again."

"Is there anything we can do about it?"

"Psychic surgery or something might do the trick. Until then, I don't think we can do anything but keep him comfortable and keep him on an IV."

"Do we have the supplies that you need?"

Sonja shook her head. "We've got just a couple days worth of nutrient fluid left. It won't kill him to be without the stuff for a day or two, but after that..." Her voice trailed off towards the end, as she looked up at the nearly empty IV bag.

"Okay. I'll try to get you some of the stuff. And I'll see what I can do about finding a healer." With that, he walked back into the room with the TV. Now, the security camera footage was playing. The murderer was right in the middle of hacking up the band, while in the background a woman's voice droned on about some hotline you were supposed to call if you saw this person. The murderer's face was hidden by darkness and his big floppy hat, but something seemed familiar about him...

Towards the back of the room, Nicholas Thompson stood, nearly paralyzed by disbelief, the crime scene footage reflected in his glasses. It couldn't be, he thought. The maniac had sworn that he didn't do anything like that! He had sworn it! Thompson had only one real choice now, and he knew it. He gently reached into his jacket pocket, and gingerly touched the automatic pistol that lay hidden inside. There would have to be a confrontation.

* * *

Lucius Mallen pulled up to the bombed theater in his **TW**car, right by the bright yellow police tape. Lots of uniformed policemen were picking through the rubble, and even a few of the elite Inquisitors had gathered. Corpses in body bags were piled up like **cordwood** by the side, and puddles of blood or slivers of bone still lay on the ground. Lucius grimly walked under the tape, to where Fransisco and Uzieth were standing. They were right where the stage had been. The Seraph was close to the ground, seemingly sniffing at the air.

"What's the situation here?" the Wolfen detective asked. "What happened?"

"Looks like it's our boy," said Fransisco. The Mystic was in bad shape. He looked really shaken by this. It was obvious that he hadn't shaved, and his eyes were bloodshot. That was the problem with cosmic awareness. It opened one up to the tragedies of the world as well as the joys and the secrets. "The killer hit hard this time. Sliced open a hell of a lot of people, and took out everyone else in the theater with a bomb. The bomb squad thinks it was a case of plasma cartridges, so far."

"Plasma cartridges? I thought only Naruni guns used those."

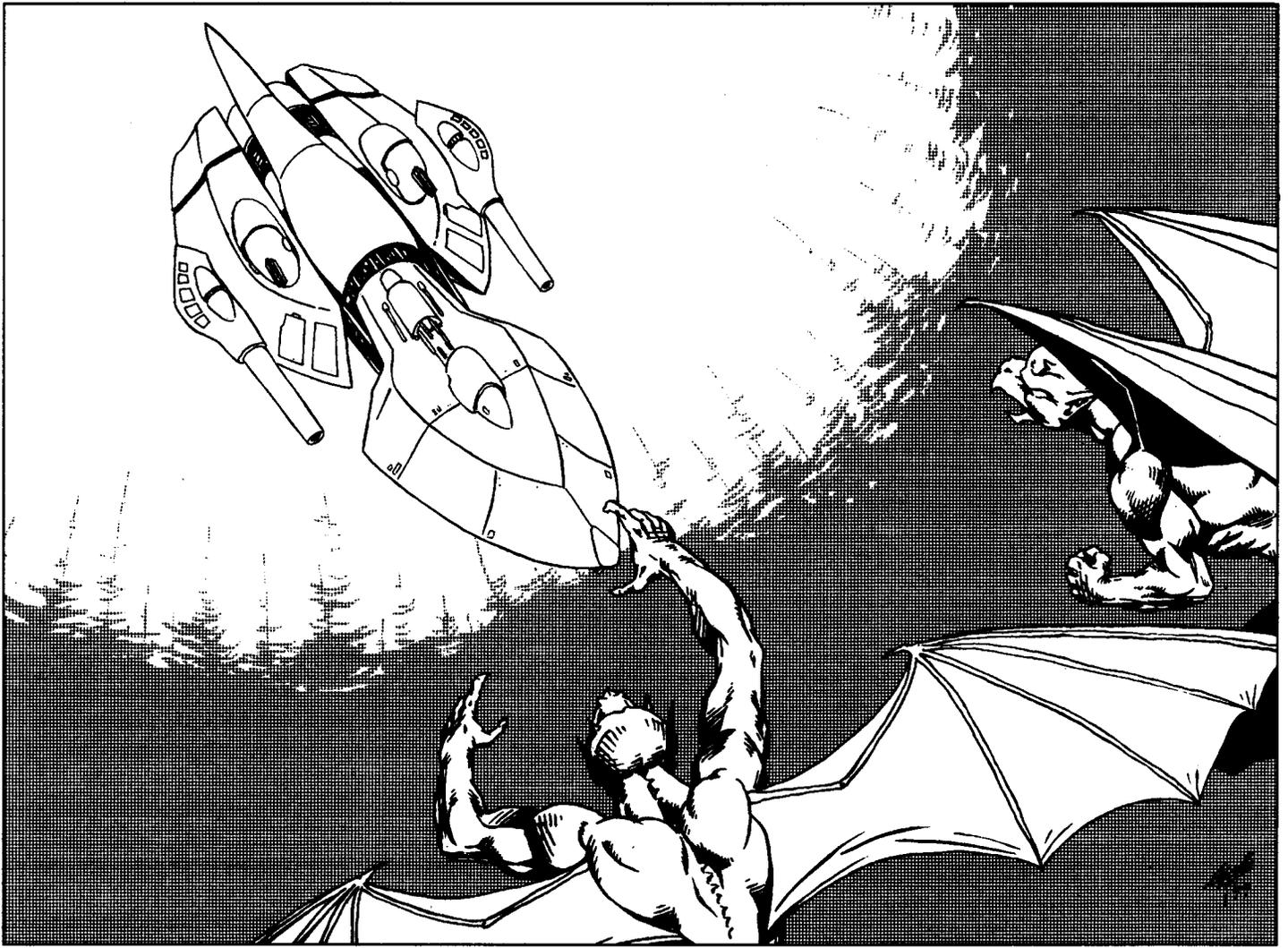
"Yeah, that's what the squad says. There's only one Naruni dealer in town. Unauthorized, to boot. We should have shut the guy down a long time ago. I'm going to pay the scumbag a visit. Wanna come along?"

"Sure thing. What about you, Uzieth?"

The Seraph stood up. "I will come, too. I have the killer's psychic scent. It's very strange, very chaotic. If I visit the dealer, I will be able to tell if he's been there. So I will of course come."

Lucius looked at the spirit. She had the same sort of cosmic awareness that Fransisco had, and more of it. Being at this scene of slaughter must have affected her. She seemed angry and vengeful, even **more** so than usual. That was good. Vengeance was exactly what the doctor had ordered here. The three piled into Lucius's car, and sped off into the depths of the city.

* * *



The NGR "Mosquito" jet slowly began its descent towards the Coalition base, flanked by a pair of brand new **XM-280** fighter jets. Onboard the flying **APC**, Hans Reiser apprehensively stroked his whiskered chin, while gazing at the jet's precious cargo. He was in for a tough couple of months. This assignment was a killer.

Officially, Reiser had no rank within the NGR military, exceedingly few official documents or records bearing his name, and a civilian job as a cargo loader for a major exporting company. In truth (and truth is often far different from the official record), Reiser was a spy for the New German Republic. He was a good one, too. In just four short years, he'd racked up five assassinations, three intelligence drops, and six acts of sabotage. With luck, this particular job would turn out to be another feather in his cap.

The NGR had offered to make a foreign exchange program. The CS was clearly being stalemated at Tolkeen. They simply couldn't make any meaningful **dents** or wedges in the tight defenses of their **magic-wielding** enemy. With luck, the people of Tolkeen would fall from starvation and attrition. But luck was never something that the military high command liked to rely on. Skill was somewhat more of a bankable quality. In its great generosity, the NGR government had offered to loan several of their finest aces to the cause for a few months — along with the power armor units of those aces. An assortment of twenty four suits of high-tech power armor was certainly nothing to sneeze at, especially when they came with highly experienced pilots.

Mostly, the Germans had wanted to test their best against the best of the Americans. Right now everything was fine and dandy between the two nations, but you never know. A few years down the line, maybe knowing which side had the better pilots would be useful information. And part of why the CS had accepted was because they wanted to know, too.

But the pilots had nothing to do with Reiser's involvement. The NGR high command also wanted to know what the CS was up to. They wanted to know which tactics were popular with the Coalition generals, and what the Coalition troops thought of the war and their nation, and whether or not the Coalition's military was up to anything devious on the front. Reiser was to find these things and others out, while masquerading as a mechanic and laborer. It would be tough, no doubt about that. The CS was always paranoid, and was probably made even more edgy since foreigners were running around their camps. Still, if he did well, then he would be showered with honors back home. And if he did poorly, well, he had broken out of prisons before.

Suddenly, the plane shuddered, and a dull roar filled the cabin. The pilots, who had sitting around playing cards or sleeping, rushed over to the windows, along with Reiser. What the heck was going on? They looked outside, and saw both of the escort ships burst into flames. Gargoyles then flew down by the windows, tapping on them and laughing cruelly at the shocked expressions of their victims. The escort ships were replaced by **Techno-Wizard** fighter jets, straight from the runways of Tolkeen. A flash of bright blue light suddenly filled the cabin,

and a gang of Tolkeen's finest Special Ops troops were suddenly in the cabin.

"No **prisoners!**" commanded a stocky Dwarf who looked to be their leader, as he leveled his **Hellfire** rifle at the aces. "The Gargoyles would kill us if we took it easy on these humans!" As the volley rang out, Reiser ducked behind a Jager, realizing just how much of a pain this assignment would be. He silently drew his favorite laser pistol, and gently kissed it for luck.

Chapter 34

"**Uzieth!**" cried Lucius Mallen. "What the heck are you doing?!"

The Seraph was crouched over the prone body of an Uteni arms merchant, energy pouring out from her eyes. In one of her hands she was clutching the D-Bee's right forearm. Fortunately for him, the merchant was clad in some sort of light plate armor. If not for that armor, his bone would have been snapped like a twig in the grasp of the angel.

"**This** scum tried to draw a gun on us," Uzieth snarled. She motioned with her head, revealing a gleaming black plasma cartridge pistol lying on the grimy floor. The Seraph reached over and grabbed the gun, and then held it to the D-Bee's head. "Were you trying to kill us? Is that it? Maybe we should kill you."

"Please, no!" blubbered the merchant. "I thought you were robbers or something!"

"Shut up!" the angel snapped. "I don't want to hear your pathetic excuses. Just show us your customer list and **MAYBE** you won't spend the rest of your life in a jail **cell!**"

"You're crazy! Besides, I don't keep a list of my customers!"

"But surely you keep some records," the angel snarled fiercely. "Phone numbers of people you've set up records with. Addresses for deliveries. I want those records."

"All right. I'll give that stuff to you. Just don't send me to jail, and don't hit me again." Uzieth grudgingly released her grip, allowing the merchant to stand up. He dusted himself off, and then walked over to his desk. He opened up a drawer, and began to reach inside.

"Pull another gun out of there and I'll rip out your spine," the angel said.

"I'm not pulling out any gun!" The merchant smiled inwardly, and then pressed a hidden button, built into the desk itself. There was a brief pause, and then there was a huge boom, and the wall next to the detectives shattered like glass. A gleaming black robot strode in from behind the rubble, its plasma cannon smoking.

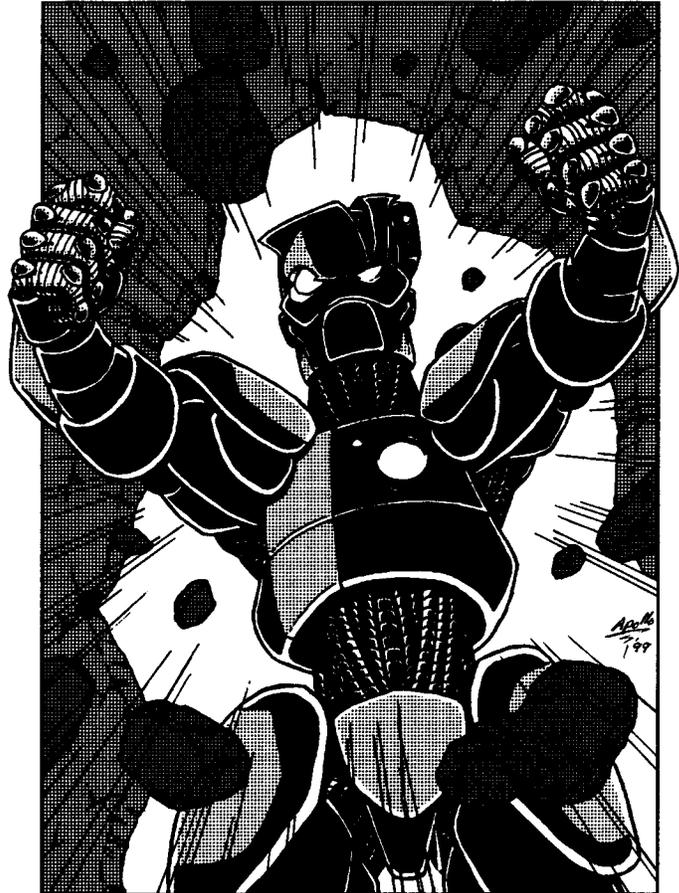
"How may I serve you?" it asked, in its mechanical voice.

"Kill the intruders!"

"What the ...?" Mallen grunted as he tried to stand. He was directly at the feet of the metal monster, the protection which his magical force field provided had been nearly exhausted by that explosion, and his gun was holstered. This was not good. He'd never seen one of these cyborgs before, but it looked to be an advanced model.

Before Lucius had time to take another breath, the thing slammed into him with a kick that sent the Wolfen flying into a wall. The detective felt an enormous impact, heard something in his spine give way, and then collapsed into a heap, momentarily unconscious.

The Seraph lunged at the metal monstrosity, a blade of pure flames suddenly clutched in her hands. She slashed mercilessly at the Repo-Bot, nearly breaking down its force field. But nearly was not quite enough. The cyborg put its plasma cartridge cannon to Uzieth's forehead, and fired. There was another deafening boom, and the angel fell backwards. The skin on her face had been blown off, revealing a densely packed musculature underneath. In between the muscles and tendons which now made up Uzieth's face, sparks of magical energy flared. Her mouth, now just a few teeth and a ragged tongue, tried desperately to talk, but produced more blood than sound.



The cyborg took aim for another shot. Its directives had been absurdly easy to accomplish, which was as close as the robotic killer came to feeling joy.

Suddenly, there was a gun's bark, and the head of the Uteni behind the desk snapped backwards. The D-Bee arms merchant collapsed, dead on the floor. The cyborg turned, to see Pete Fransisco standing just a few feet behind him, holding a smoking **TW** pistol.

"That's the nifty thing 'bout being a Mystic, you know?" said the detective. "When you want to, you can step between the shadows, where nobody bothers to look."

"Does not compute."

"Figures. Anyway, step away from my partners or I'm gonna blow you away, tin man." Fransisco leveled his gun at the cyborg, and smirked with false bravado.

The Repo-Bot swung one of its massive forearms around, nearly catching the Mystic in the face. However, Fransisco fell backwards at the last moment, landing on the ground. He aimed up towards the cyborg's armpit, and then held the trigger down. After the first few shots, there was a shower of sparks when the

force field finally gave way. But the blasts which actually were scoring against the armor weren't doing much. The cyborg prepared for another blast with its plasma cannon.

Suddenly, it was hit from behind, and thrown forward. The **Repo-Bot** got to its feet as quickly as possible, to see Uzieth standing before it, her face starting to grow back bit by bit. In her hands was the flaming sword which she had used to great effect a few moments before. "You will die, abomination!" she spat.

As the Repo-Bot realized that its objectives would not be easy to fulfill after all, it felt the closest that it could ever get to frustration.

* * *

"Oh, **nol**," growled Hans Reiser, hiding behind a crate of rail gun ammunition. It had been a tough job to crawl back there without attracting the attention of the Tolkeen Special Ops, and now they were searching through the cargo compartment. Hans toyed with the thought of climbing into a nearby Jager and fighting off the invaders, but knew that the **NGR** shipped its war machines with their weapon systems disconnected. Connected guns were prone to going off in extreme turbulence, or upon crash landings. While it was by no means hard to reconnect the weapons (it was just a matter of plugging a few wires back in) it would take precious time which Hans didn't have at the moment. He'd have to improvise.

A Dwarf toting a bizarre-looking **Hellfire** rifle came around the side of the box where the German was hiding. Hans noted with pleasure the plasma grenades hanging off of the stocky D-Bee's utility belt, and decided on a plan of action.

"Hoi!" cried the dwarf, raising his rifle to fire.

"Give me that, you little **creep**!" Hans said in American, grabbing the Dwarf's rifle and wrestling it away from him. He reached down and pulled the pins off of nearly half a dozen of the Dwarf's grenades, and then shoved him over the crate and ducked back down into cover. Hans grabbed up the fallen rifle, knowing that he would have to use it in a moment.

"Help!" yelled the Dwarf to his comrades, trying frantically to pull his utility belt off. His stubby fingers were stumbling over the buckle mechanism. If not for stress or short fingers, the D-Bee would have made it. But since he was cursed by both, he instead burst into crimson flames, taking out most of his fellow soldiers and a nearby suit of power armor with him.

Hans leapt back to his feet. The cargo compartment was full of fire and thick black smoke. There were at least four enemy commandoes left alive, waiting for him behind crates and suits of armor and in the cover of smoke. Hans heard footsteps to his side, and **reflexively** turned and fired. His gun bucked in his hands, and suddenly a human holding a Vibro-Sword was dead on the floor beside him, nearly cut in two by the intense flames which had burst out from the rifle. "Make that three," chuckled Hans in Euro.

Nine minutes later, Hans was in the cockpit of the cargo jet, feeling quite unnerved. The Hellfire rifle had given out just as he had been about to shoot the pilot and co-pilot. He had wound up breaking the pilot's neck, and using the man's Vibro-Knife to dispatch the survivor. Messy business, that. Now he was in command of a badly damaged ship which he couldn't fly very well, surrounded by enemy vessels and Gargoyles. The agent picked

up the transmitter, hoping that none of the pilots around him really knew how the man he just killed had sounded.

"Ah, we've had a little scuffle onboard the ship," he announced. "One of the Germans took out a few of our boys with a grenade. But we got him. The systems are reporting that we're having trouble with the wiring on the weapons systems due to that little blast. But it's really nothing to worry about I don't... what th'... oh **no**!! Get out of here, the ship's going **cra**—!" Hans took momentary pride in his acting ability as the enemy fighters began to veer away. Then, he put the autopilot on, and leapt over into a gunner's compartment. Fortunately, this ship had been armed with lasers and a full complement of missiles. Hans chuckled again, and began to exercise his trigger finger.

When most of their fighters were gone, the Gargoyles realized that they had been had, and began to swarm the Mosquito. They managed to do some damage, Hans gave them that. But the combination of heavy laser fire and the fact that many of the Gargoyles died when they stupidly got in front of the ship quickly whittled away their numbers.

Hans took control of the ship and veered away from Tolkeen. He was still in trouble, though. The Mosquito was far too damaged to make it into Coalition territory, and it was suicide to try to land in Tolkeen. More enemy fliers would soon be there, and were probably already on their way. Hans picked up the radio again, and put it back on the CS frequency.

"Mayday, mayday! This is an **NGR** transport ship, in Tolkeen airspace. The Tolkeen air forces are trying to shoot me down, and I've already sustained heavy damage! I need airfield clearance, within 400 miles of uh... I'm over Grand Alamar right now. Help!"

* * *

"Uh, boss?" asked one of the **techies** at the beer hall, handing his radio headset over to Jack **Perrin**. "We got something here that I think you should take a listen to."

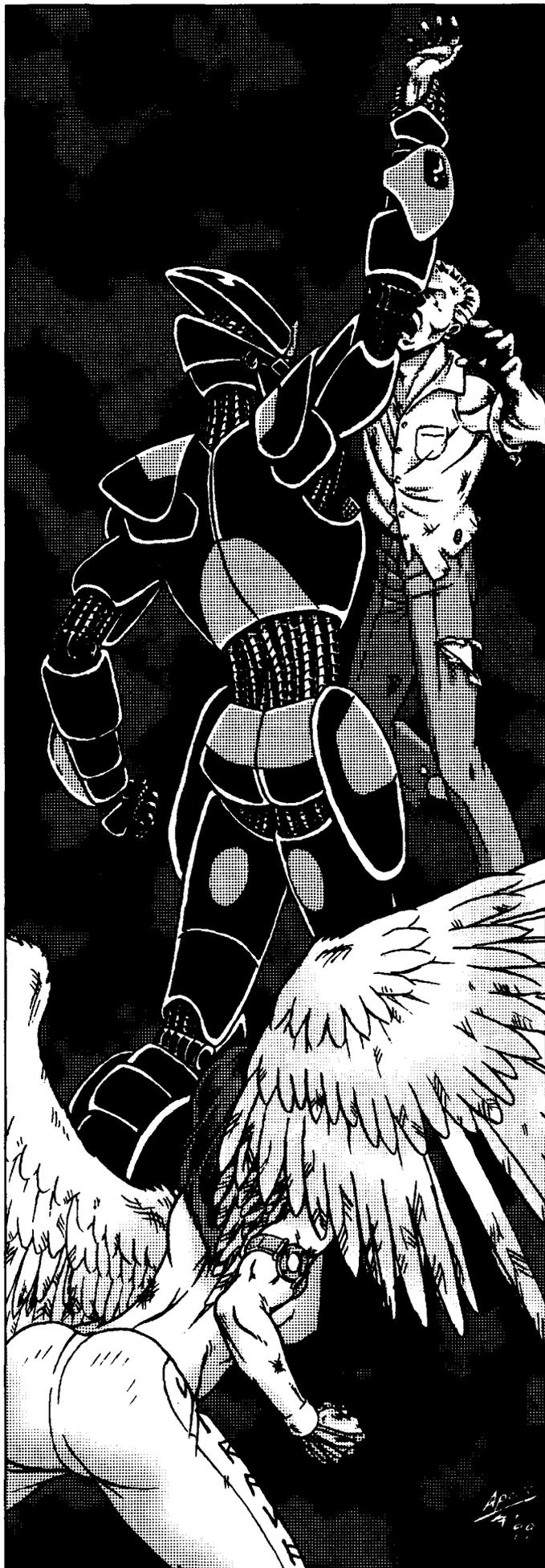
Chapter 35

"No!" cried Lucius Mallen, as the Naruni Repo-Bot seized him by the shirt collar and raised him into the air. Mallen raised his **TW** service pistol and began blasting away at the thing's chest, but the massive robot didn't seem to mind.

"LET HIM GO!" screamed Fransisco, opening fire with his own weapon. The blasts of force, capable of shredding a man's rib cage and vitals with just one shot, were bouncing off of the monstrosity.

The Repo-Bot hurled Mallen into a wall, with all of its might. The mystical force field built into the detective's armor activated at the last possible second, absorbing most but not all of the impact. The wall, a flimsy plaster partition, shattered open, and the Wolfen fell through. He found himself in a small, dark little room. Normally his nightvision would tell him what even these darkened surroundings held, but Lucius's eyes weren't working quite right. Time seemed strange, distorted. The Wolfen held one of his furry hands up to his forehead, and felt warm, wet blood pouring out. Mallen laughed weakly, and then the world went black.

Uzieth screamed with rage and charged forward. For a moment, she was glorious, a holy avenger shrouded in flames.



Then, the Repo-Bot raised its leg, and caught the Seraph right in the gut. She made a noise like a cross between coughing and wheezing as she doubled over. The Repo-Bot held its plasma ejector to her head, and fired. The angel did not scream as the impact of the searing energy threw her backwards.

"Uzieth!" Francisco screamed, as the head of the supernatural detective began to melt. "You... you've killed her, you monster!" He threw down his gun, his useless gun, and began to chant softly and move his hands about, almost like he was weaving some delicate tapestry. The Repo-Bot was suddenly alarmed, as its sensors read rising amounts of electromagnetic and "unidentified" energy. Its programming taught it that a magical attack was forthcoming. The cyborg followed its combat pattern, raising its weapon to get a shot off before the spell could be finished. Unfortunately for Naruni Enterprises, its carefully wired and programmed reflexes were just a little bit too slow.

A wall of mystical flames shot into the metal monster, burning it badly and partially melting much of its armor plating. Internal wires began to pop and melt, as the cyborg's sensors screamed warnings about overheating and critical damage. The robot waded forward through the wall of flames, taking more and more damage, doing its best to ignore the danger warnings and follow its combat programming. It had to destroy the source of the magic to avoid another disastrous spell. It had to kill the mage.

"Die, die, demon!" Francisco screamed at his enemy, who was wading through the inferno. He tried to weave another spell, to trap the Repo-Bot where it stood, but was too late. The Repo-Bot emerged from the flames, its armor running down like wax. With one massive hand, it reached out and grabbed one of Francisco's arms. The Mystic screamed in pain and rage, as the super-heated metal hand began to sear his skin. Then, the monster pulled upwards, and Francisco's arm came neatly off. The detective fell to the ground, and figured that this was the end.

Suddenly, Uzieth was on the cyborg's back, trying to pull its head off. Features which had previously been beautiful were now scarred and deformed. Half of her head was totally gone. But by willpower, she had managed to stay alive, for the single purpose of bringing the Repo-Bot down. The cyborg's neck cables were snapping, one by one. But the Seraph had little time left, and the task was taking too long.

Suddenly, a beam of green-yellow light, only as wide as a pencil, shot through a wall and pierced the cyborg's guts. The beam then began to widen, widening the hole in the Repo-Bot. System failure warnings began to scream into the cyborg's artificial mind, and it was then that it knew it had failed. A pulse of white light then shot through the beam, traveling deep into the Repo-Bot's body. The metal monster exploded inside. It fell to its knees, and then collapsed entirely, looking far less impressive in death than it had in life.

Lucius Mallen stepped through the hole in the wall he had been thrown through, holding aloft a massive energy rifle. "Idiot tossed me into the armory," he growled. "Oh, no! Uzieth! Pete!"

"The human will survive," Uzieth said, gently leaning over the fallen detective. She began to caress his bleeding stump, and pure white light began to emanate from her slim fingers. The stump closed, stopping the flow of blood. "He will live to unravel further mysteries," the Seraph said. She smiled gently, and then fell over, stone dead.

* * *

Nicholas Thompson entered the tavern, his face clouded by rage. The cantina was full of thick smoke. The place stank of alcohol and grime and dead things. Humans and exotic looking D-Bees sat side by side at the bar, drowning their sorrows in cheap booze. Sure enough, Rick Freedom was sitting in a corner, all by himself, nursing a beer. The Crazy was wearing a big floppy hat to cover up his MOM implants, and a thick trench coat to conceal the combat armor that he wore. Thompson stormed over to Freedom, and grabbed him by his coat.

"It was you, wasn't it?" he snarled. "You were that psychopath on those tapes!"

Freedom looked up at Thompson, and for a moment, Thompson thought that he could see a tear welling up in the Crazy's eye. But then some circuit or microchip inside his head sparked or exploded, and the tear dried up. It was replaced by a look of cold, calculating insanity. "Yeah," Freedom said. "How did you know?"

"It wasn't hard, you murderer. I recognized your fighting style on the tapes. And I remembered that you had done it before. Or have you forgotten?"

"No, I haven't," said Freedom, taking another swig of his beer. "It was five years ago, but I remember it all perfectly. I must have killed a dozen people that day. I nearly killed you too when you walked in on it. And I remember that afterwards, I didn't have a single clue as to why I did it. It didn't jive with my ethical code, it didn't achieve anything, and it nearly got both of us killed."

Thompson opened his mouth to say something, but was cut off by Freedom.

"No, no, I can remember every bloodbath with perfect clarity. Every person I've killed, every battle I've fought, those are etched into my brain. It's the little things that I don't know about. I can't remember my childhood. Or my parents. Do you know what it's like to not know what your own mother looked like, because you were stupid enough to get a bunch of soda cans stuck in your skull? DO YOU?!"

"Jeeze man, you said that you'd get therapy."

"Oh, I did, I did! I went to every single underworld quack I could get my hands on. And they all gave me all of the drugs that I could afford, to keep all of the junk bottled up in my head. It's just that a little while ago, the garbage overflowed. I'm still on the drugs, though. Do you see?" The Crazy rolled up one of his sleeves, and opened up the armor plating underneath, to reveal a series of track marks on his heavily muscled arm. "I take the drugs until the stuff overflows, and then I take more drugs to try to well it back up." The Crazy laughed nervously, then grabbed up a small vial of pills that had been on the bar nearby. He gulped down a handful in one swallow, and washed them down with his beer. He giggled again.

Thompson rubbed his forehead, and reached into one of his pockets. His fingers closed around the pistol inside. It felt heavier and colder than it had when he put it in there.

"No," said Freedom. "Not yet. Once this corrupt city of vice has crumbled away, then you can kill me. But I can't die until I've finished this thing that I've begun. And I won't let you kill me just yet."

"All right," agreed Thompson apprehensively. "But you do your best to keep yourself under control. I mean it! If I find you

killing any more civilians, you're a dead man." He turned away, and began to walk out of the cantina.

"What's the big deal?" cried Freedom, the implants in his head moving around frantically. "They're all going to die anyway, once Tolkeen falls!"

* * *

The massive transport jet screeched to a halt on the decaying concrete runway. The pilot, Hans Reiser, cursed. The runway had obviously taken hits from artillery a while before, and he was pretty sure that the landing gear had been damaged by a pothole. Looking around, he could see the remains of a rural town. Small houses with thatched roofs were all laid out in neat little rows. Most of them seemed to have been taken out by shelling. The fields of wheat outside the town had been burned. A barbed wire fence and several watch towers had been destroyed and now lay in shambles. The shattered bodies of Skelebots and Golems lay about in the tall grass, often side by side with slowly decaying skeletons.

"Where am I?" asked Reiser into his radio.

"You're in **Angelville**," the radio replied. "Used to be a nice little farming town. Even had its own little airfield in order to export its grain. But then the Tolkeen military came by, and they got it all shot up."

"Okay. What do I do now?"

"You sit back and prepare for company. The Tolkeen air force has got to have been keeping you in their sights, and their troops are doubtless on the way."

"I can't hold off more troops! My missiles are gone, and my ship's all shot up!"

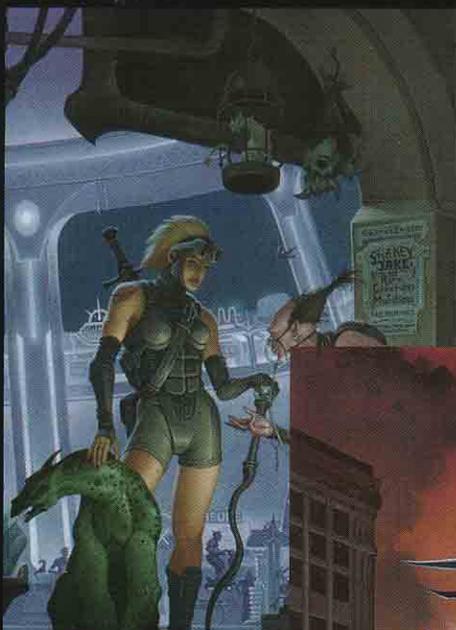
"That's why you should consider yourself lucky that Angelville's also linked up to Grand **Alamar** by way of a sizeable sewer."

There was suddenly a loud explosion from the center of the town. Reiser looked over, to see a large suit of glistening black power armor climbing out of a smoking crater. Crusty brown goo was dried onto the **midsection** and legs of the armor. About half a dozen humans in environmental body armor climbed up following him, stained up to about their necks.

"**Yuck**," said the pilot, his voice amplified somewhat by the suit. "I can sure think of more stylish ways to travel."

Reiser suddenly looked down at the radar screen, and realized that he was in a lot of trouble. These Tolkeen scum sure didn't take any chances. He **holstered** his pistol, and then walked into the back compartment. Maybe he could be some good in this fight after all.

"Looks like company's coming," said the power armor pilot, drawing two massive revolvers which had been holstered at his sides. As if to illustrate his point, a wing of fighter jets arrived on the horizon, guarding a boxlike, flying transport ship. "Anyone here like Beck?"



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