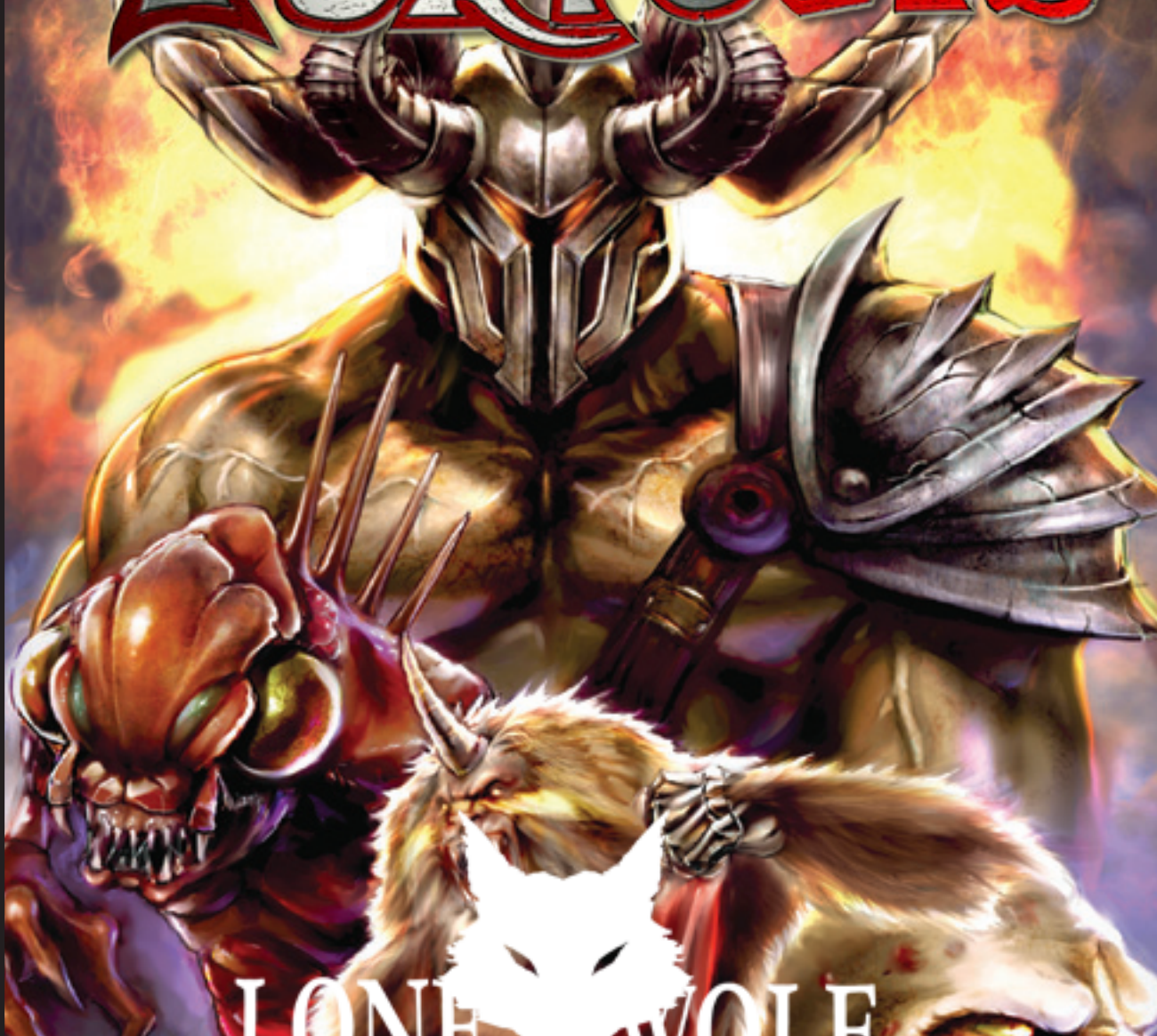


# Signs & Portents



**Also This Month:** Lone Wolf - Cener Druid of Ruel • Conan - The Baracha Isles • Traveller - Preview: Cthonian Stars

## LONE WOLF

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### MULTIPLAYER GAME BOOK

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TERROR OF THE DARKLORDS OUT THIS MONTH

# COMING THIS ISSUE

□ □ □	Mongoose News	4
□ □ □	Convention Diary	5
□ □ □	Featurettes	6
□ □ □	New Releases	8
□ □ □	Traveller Open Day	12
□ □ □	Cener Druid of Ruel	16
□ □ □	Project Hyperion	20
□ □ □	Planet Choxlatl	24
□ □ □	The Dagger	28
□ □ □	Murder at the Tourney	32
□ □ □	Baracha Isles	38
□ □ □	The Perfect Treasure	46
□ □ □	Cthonian Stars	48

- □ □ Mongoose
- □ □ Features
- □ □ Traveller
- □ □ Lone Wolf
- □ □ Conventions
- □ □ Conan
- □ □ RuneQuest
- □ □ Paranoia
- □ □ Flaming Cobra
- □ □ Information
- □ □ Miscellaneous

# Editorial



Welcome to another issue of S&P – June already... this year is flying by way too quickly!

I have been enjoying the sun this month... the advantage of working mostly from home is that you can work out in the garden. However, in my case, it does also involve an insane Jack Russell Terrier and a cat that thinks it's a dog jumping all over my keyboard occasionally!

We at Mongoose Towers have been busily gearing up for Games Expo in Birmingham this weekend. Any of you who are making the trip should be sure to pop by the Mongoose stand and say 'hi' to the gang. I will even be there myself for the whole weekend. Usually I am too busy editing in a dark cave to be allowed to go to conventions but this is the exception... just don't be surprised if you see me working away on my pretty pink laptop behind the stand!

On a personal note, after waiting six months for it to be built, I shall finally be moving into my brand spanking new apartment this month. Because of this I shall be taking a whole week off work... practically unheard of! So if any of you do not get responses to your submissions or queries for a week or so, please don't feel offended, I will answer as soon as I can.

Right, now that S&P is in the bag I shall get back to editing the new *Elric of Melniboné*...

Have a great month.

Charlie

## Credits

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### Contributors

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# Mongoose News

By Charlotte Law

## Dredd Ahead

You will all be thrilled to hear that the playtest version of the *Judge Dredd Miniatures Game* will be released, for free download, on our website this month, along with a selection of classic Dredd miniatures. Look out for a constant stream of updates and new miniatures in the weeks to follow. This will build up to the final release of the rules, again, given away absolutely free as a download on our site! Now aren't the Mongoose team good to you?!

## Ancients Begin

The first part of the legendary *Secrets of the Ancients* campaign for *Traveller* will be appearing on our website this month. Growing into a 10 part epic, this complete campaign will be given to you absolutely free – just keep your eyes peeled for the download when it appears!

## Mongoose Miniatures Overload

Serious development has begun on our second miniatures game. As time goes on we shall be regularly updating our website with news and previews, as well as actually revealing the setting, so watch this space with anticipation!

## Masses of Cults

I am pleased to say that editing has just been completed on *Cults of Glorantha*. This is going to be a real monster of a book, which took longer than anticipated to edit (believe me!) but will be well worth it. I found the Storm Tribe chapter at the end of the book to be a particularly interesting read, full of exciting snippets that I had never before realised about the history of Glorantha.

## Living Campaign Open Day - July 10th

Missing out on Continuum on the first week of July, one of the best conventions in UK and where we will be debuting our Living Glorantha and Traveller campaigns? Have no fear, as the next weekend (on the 10th) we are throwing open our doors and inviting all-comers to join in on a full day of gaming! Entry is completely free, as is registration for our Living Campaign events. Stay tuned to our web site for details on how to join in.

## Corporate News

As of the end of May this year, Mongoose Publishing has formally left the Rebellion Group. This is an entirely amicable split, and we will still be producing games based on Rebellion's 2000AD properties, including Judge Dredd and Strontium Dog. For Mongoose's part, this new situation will allow us to pursue some very exciting projects this year and into 2011, the first of which will be announced very soon. As always, stay tuned!



# Convention Diary

## UK Games Expo

The Clarendon Suites, Stirling Road (off Hagley Road),  
Edgbaston, Birmingham, UK  
Fri 7th - Sun 6th Jun 2010

<http://www.ukgamesexpo.co.uk>

.....

## Continuum

John Foster Hall, Leicester,  
United Kingdom  
Fri 2nd - Mon 5th July 2010

<http://www.continuum.uk.net>

More events will be added to this list on a monthly basis as they are confirmed

# The Awesometer

Generic events that get our hearts racing (or sometimes not) each and every month!

# AWESOME

## Kristal Wilson's TOP 5

### Massively Multiplayer Online Roleplaying Games

- City of Heroes / Villains. The ability to run around as a spandex-clad hero or nefarious villain wielding a vast array of powers; it can't be beaten. The character creator remains one of the all time greats, with incredible versatility to create your character's perfect look.
- Ragnarok Online. An oldie but a goodie, blending cute anime-style sprites with detailed 3D world maps. You'll never look at a strawberry jelly without wanting to smash it with a sword again.
- World of Warcraft. What can I say but - FOR THE HORDE!
- Final Fantasy Online. For everyone who loved the console games, and new players alike, this game offers a large, detailed world and plot. But let's be honest, everyone's in it for the multi-class system and the potential to summon dragons, or to run up to monsters AND EXPLODE.
- Saga of Ryzom. The ability to swim around the gorgeous alien world and dig up valuable crafting materials remain a compelling complement to the combat and mini-quests, and the character designs are always cute.

The start of summer. Summer holidays, summer sun! Just remember your sunscreen and enjoy.



Long Island Iced Tea. The perfect refreshing cocktail to cool off with on a hot summer day. Contains no tea!

Summer blockbuster movie releases. Plenty of explosions for everyone - and everyone likes explosions, right?



Wasps. The bee's vicious and down right malicious cousin. And they don't even make honey!



The humidity. I'd like my sunshine without the sweat!

Bad barbecue food. Burnt on the outside, raw on the inside - sort it out!



# GRUESOME

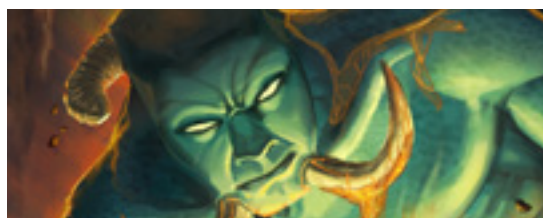
# The Timeline

A visual guide to get your tails wagging for future Mongoose releases

June: Mongoose takes a look at the Darrians



July: The Definitive Cults of Glorantha



August: Elric returns with



# Quote of the Month

Which phrases have been flying around the office more than the dogs ball?

## Moving House Blows Goats

**R**egular Mongoose artist Gillian Pearce made this statement when the editor was complaining about moving house... It is a darn funny quote... what more needs to be said?!

## The Time Chart

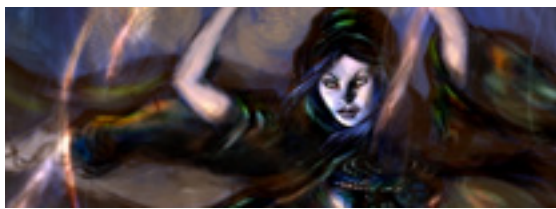
What have we been spending our time on at Mongoose this Month?



th a brand new Editon!

September: Cults of the Young Kingdoms goes forth!

October: Wrath of the Magnamund Bestiary



# June 10 Releases



## L'Arène des Monstres, Volume II

Ce livre contient des bêtes, des monstres et des créatures légendaires ; si vous l'utilisez de pair avec l'Arène des Monstres Volume I, vos joueurs trouveront toujours des adversaires à leur mesure!

L'Arène des Monstres Volume I propose également du matériel inédit non inclu dans la version anglaise !

L'Arène des Monstres Volume II utilise toutes les règles de RuneQuest II.

Arène des Monstres Volume II

Price: \$44.00

Format: Softback (120 pages)

Empires  
Price: \$29.99  
Format: Hardback (128 pages)

A huge resource by RuneQuest maestro Lawrence Whittaker, Empires is a complete guide on founding, growing and running your own empire. Whether you are a single knight responsible for a border keep and a village or part of a huge dynasty in command of a continent sprawling empire, Empires contains everything you need to know about taming the wilderness, building castles, governing populations, and trading or waging war with your neighbours. Leave your own mark on the game world by building an impregnable society.

Updating the original RuneQuest Empires supplement and adding a great deal of new information on running your own dynasty, Empires features everything you need to create and master your own dominion.

As with every other book in the core RuneQuest II range, Empires comes in an attractive leather binding.







The Little Black Books return! Harking back to the original release of Traveller in the 70's, the Little Black Books from Mongoose bring the latest version of Traveller to your gaming table in a handy and collectible size.

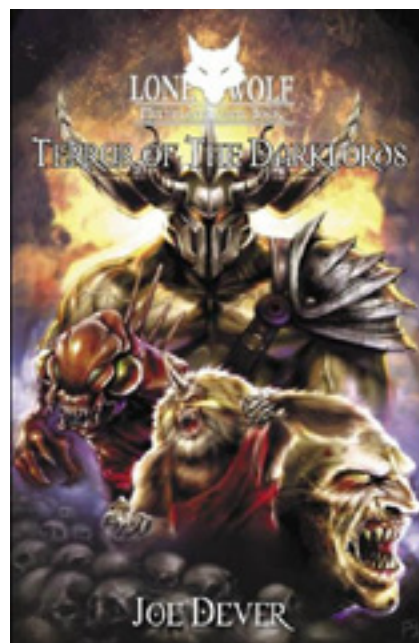
Command the stars themselves with the most powerful fleets ever assembled. Dedicated to Naval characters, whether actively serving on a frontline warship or semi-retired on a rusting tramp freighter, High Guard expands the possibilities of space combat.

With a new and highly evolved starship construction system and a wealth of choices for weapon emplacements and other additions, no captain will want to venture into space without this important manual at his side. Naval characters will also benefit from new career options and choices made during creation that will see them prepared for the worst the galaxy can throw at them.

LBB2: High Guard  
Price: \$19.99  
Format: Softback (154 pages)

Terror of the Darklords  
Price: \$19.99  
Format: Softback (128 pages)

The first major campaign for the Lone Wolf Multiplayer Gamebook, Terror of the Darklords is an epic adventure that will take the players from their quiet Kai monastery, through conspiracies spreading across Sommerlund, to the heart of the Darklords territory. Facing the greatest enemies the Darklords can array against them, the players will find themselves at the heart of great events, stalling a new invasion that threatens to sweep Sommerlund off the map and bring a new dark age to Magnamund.



# June 10 Releases



Mega City One Archives 3: Lawbreakers

Price: \$29.99

Format: Hardback (128 pages)

The streets of Mega-City One are a dark and violent place. In the 22nd Century the rules of society have broken down and a new order has arisen to take control. Enter the Judges – empowered to apprehend miscreants and sentence them on the spot. In a hard world, the Judges have to be harder still. It may be a brutal system but it is the only thing that works.

What you will hold in your hands is a collection of lore related to the Justice Department and the citizens it protects – often from themselves. These volumes will detail the world of the Judges as never before – if it drives, shoots, breathes, sprawls or hides in the shadows of Mega-City One, you will find it in this comprehensive collection.

### Volume 3: Lawbreakers

Every hero needs a villain, and Mega-City One has had more than its fair share. This tome details the baddest, meanest, and just plain nastiest perps ever to trouble the city, with a complete rendition of their crimes and atrocities. From the Angel Gang to P J Maybe, Lawbreakers features inside information and glossy artwork throughout.

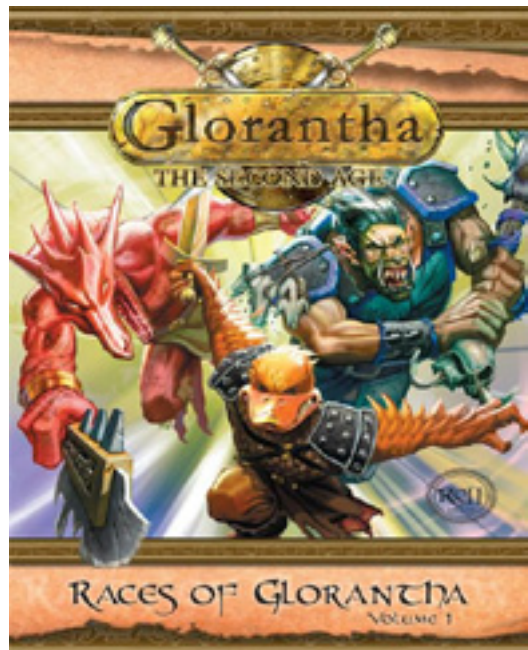
### Races of Glorantha Volume 1

Price: \$39.99

Format: Hardback (280 pages)

Together in one volume, the essential deep-dive into three of Glorantha's most fascinating and exotic Elder Races: the Dragonewts, Durulz and Uz. In these pages you will learn all you need to know about these elder races for your Gloranthan game. Each is detailed in terms of culture, history, religion, philosophies and biology, revised and updated for RuneQuest II.

With detailed cults, new spells and fascinating mythology, Races of Glorantha is an invaluable insight into roleplaying these unique species, bringing greater diversity and depth to campaigns.





**Glorantha**  
THE SECOND AGE

**MONGOOSE PUBLISHING**

[www.mongoosepublishing.com](http://www.mongoosepublishing.com)

# Traveller Open Day

By Katrina Hepburn

I always enjoy the *Traveller* open days at Mongoose Towers. Not only is *Traveller* my favourite pen and paper RPG but the atmosphere of days like these is plain brilliant. People come from all over the UK to pit their wills against the visiting Referees and have a hell of a fun time in the process. This year we had our friend Linda visiting us and so we grabbed the opportunity to drag her along with us for the day. Not realising the time we arrived late and had missed the opening of the first session of gaming. The day is split into two main gaming sessions, which allow people to play a variety of settings during the course of the day. All the characters available are pre-generated for the gaming so it's really just a case of picking your scenario and sitting down for the uber fun!

But of course...We had arrived late...And so we decided to take the opportunity to look over the Mongoose stand, which was of course set up and run by our beloved Leader, Boss, Main man, General, King...or if you want to be really flamboyant, 'Master'. But of course we don't want to give his ego too much of a stroke. So we will just call him 'Matt' for now. The stand was selling all of the normal Mongoose Tomes but there was a bonus collection of Graphic Novels, which we delved into the moment we saw them. A lot of people we knew from the various conventions we attend also showed face, including Bob the dice man from *Reaper's Revenge* ([www.reapersrevenge.co.uk](http://www.reapersrevenge.co.uk)) and Angus, of *Cubicle Seven* ([www.cubicle-7.com](http://www.cubicle-7.com)). As Sand and Linda pummelled into the pile of graphic novels, I decided to take the moment to schmooze the room and give the people I knew some hugs.

It was not long before the second gaming session was about to begin and being courteous friends, we let Linda decide on the setting we should play. She ended up picking a scenario called



'The Three Faces of God' which was being run by Alex Jeffries. This scenario was being held in the corner of the office with the settees and epic comfy chairs so before we sat down there were a few Woo's and Yipee's. We pawed through the character sheets to see who we would like to be and were joined by the two other gamers. making it a decently sized five player session. The scenario overview was that we (The players) had to head out to a Moon where a small religious colony had set up (they had stopped all communications with the outside world) and where recently a large and sudden influx of ships had headed to. This gave the Government of the Main planet some concerns and so our team was sent out to the moon to investigate what was going on and to see if everyone out there was ok. Enter the players! Sandrine decided to take on the role of our technician because she's always been a little bit 'Techie' at heart, Linda took on the role of the Medic; it was only after she read the character sheet thoroughly that she realised her character was a chronic depressive, (Cue the Bristollian accent and hunched shoulders). Steve Ellis joined the group as the brave Investigator, Andrew Mussel (who some of you may know from the Conception conventions) took on the role of the Lawyer and of course I decided to take on the role of the Pilot, because of course the pilot is always the most important person!

Cue the insanity!

Launching our ship, known as 'Maiden of Penelope', a Pinnacle class vessel (Yes, after hearing the name of the ship class, jokes started flying about how I was handling the Pinnacle and how we were all riding the Pinnacle. These jokes which never get old had us occupied for a good half an hour before we managed to get on with the roleplay), a scene ensued, which was very reminiscent of when they launched the ship in the movie Galaxy Quest. My elite piloting skills had failed on me and



# Traveller Open Day

the ship scrapped a hell of a mark into the side of the space station we were leaving. Still. I didn't break the ship and we were underway!

As it turned out, the Church of the Hand of God were trying to bring about the apocalypse (not just of their world but of the entire universe; yup, they were thinking big) and so, being the heroes of the story, we decided to make it our duty to stop them. But not until Steve had asked the main question which had all been playing on our minds. 'Surely you must be at least tech level 16 before you can dissolve the universe?'

Madness ensued as we kept failing our skill checks which made for a uniquely hilarious scenario. Three of us shaved our heads in an effort to blend in with the monks of the church, Linda in her

chronic depressive state perked up a little when Sand broke her ankle. After shouting at the top of her lungs 'I got drugs!' which attracted the attention of most of the gamers in the office, she proceeded to dope up Sandrine into a state where she was drooling on the floor shouting 'Hallelujah' and believing she was one of the real monks because of her shaven head. When the party got split, not realising our communication devices only had a range of a few metres, we had Andrew wandering aimlessly around the halls of the church with his little beeping comm trying to find any of the other players and mumbling about how he would prefer it if we just blew up the installation and Steve who decided blowing things up might not be such a good idea. 'Investigator! It says it on the sheet! Surely I would want to see inside something before blowing it

up!' Needless to say the universe didn't go pop; however the roleplay ended with all the stars slowly blinking out one after the other. Did we save the universe? We like to think we did but in all honesty...we just don't know!

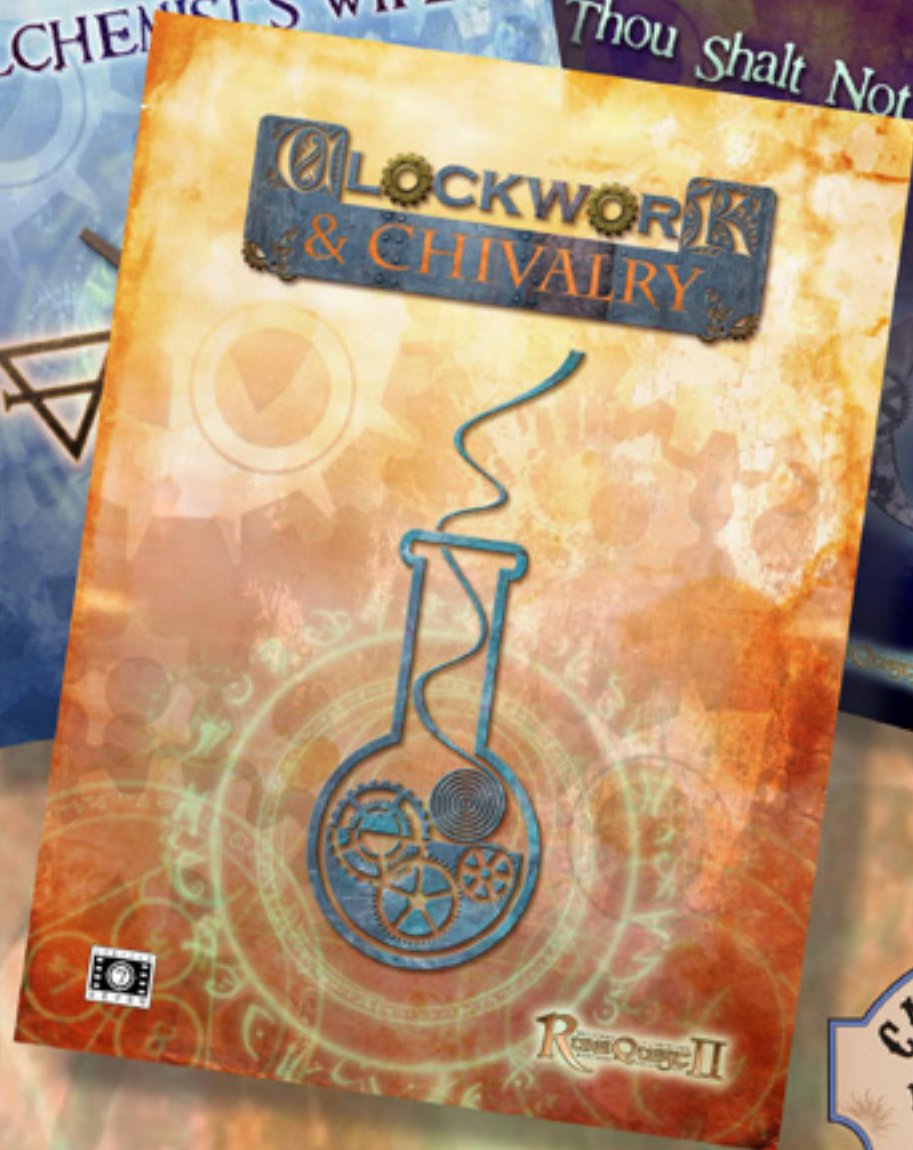
It was a brilliant scenario, a fantastic group and Alex Jeffries made a wonderful Referee by keeping us always guessing and on our toes.

This is the point of the article where I sum up the experience that is the Mongoose *Traveller* open day and I realise I can sum everything up in just a single word...

AWESOME!

See you all at the UK Games Expo!





Requires the  
*RuneQuest II*  
Core  
Rulebook,  
available  
from  
Mongoose  
Publishing.



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# Cener Druid of Ruel

## A new character class for Lone Wolf

The history of the Cenerese is one of tragedy, despair and serves as a lesson to all of how low the mighty and the noble can fall. The Cener Druids were once a benevolent order of Druids who lived throughout Magnamund. They lived in harmony with nature and their fellow man and were held in high regard.

Then one fateful day the Cener Druids betrayed all. In every Cener grove across the land the same dark ritual was enacted, sending forth a devastating plague to decimate the numbers of the Elder Magi of Dessi, the Cener Druids hated foe. The Cenerese would then go on to establishing a dark empire upon Magnamund, enslaving the free people's to their dark will. Every single grove participated in this black rite save one, which abstained and refused to go onto the dark path the Cenerese had taken. The Druids of this grove wielded a more natural form of druidry and would later go on to become the Herbwardens of Bautar and lead the free people of Magnamund to victory over Cener rule, until the Cener Druids were driven from the land and into the foul places of the world.

Today, the Cener Druids are concentrated in Ruel, where their stronghold of Mogaruih lies. That is the heart of their power and all attempts to draw them out or to destroy them there has failed. No one knows what black rites the Cenerese plot in Ruel but most are content to let them live there in ignominy. Apart from Ruel, isolated Cener groves can be found anywhere on Magnamund, from barren wastelands to lush forests.

### BEING A CENER DRUID

Most Cener Druids are plucked from their homes at birth and apprenticed to a senior Druid, who teaches the young one everything about the black art. They are then initiated into a cabal, where they take

part in requisite rites and rituals until they come of age. During this time the Druid has the opportunity to make friends with other like minded individuals, all of whom plot the downfall of all that is good upon Magnamund and the return of the Cener Empire of old.

Many opportunities present themselves for these Cener Druids to leave their groves and go out into the world. Some leave for other lands, in order to forge alliances with other evil beings in the world, such as the various Giak tribes, or the Drakkarim. Some Cener Druids go on to apprentice themselves under the Nadziranim, to broaden their understanding of evil magic and to possibly meld their Druid arts with right handed magic. Yet other Cener Druids venture out into the world beyond their groves to learn more about their enemies, the Herbwardens of Bautar and the Elder Magi of Dessi and to strike at them from the shadows when possible.

A Cener Druid who has completed his basic training is a force of evil to be reckoned with. Many already command battalions of the Vazhag, the disease ridden rat-creatures bred by the Druids beneath the warrens of Mogaruih and are eager to bring the fight to their enemies. And yet, elder Cener Druids counsel patience, saying it is a trait that will bring to them the ultimate victory. No one knows what evil the Cenerese plot but one day all of Magnamund shall surely feel its wrath.

### COMBAT SKILL & ENDURANCE

To find out what your Cener Druid's COMBAT SKILL is, go to page 112 at the back of the Lone Wolf Multiplayer Gamebook and pick a random number. Add 5 to this number and the result will be your COMBAT SKILL (so, COMBAT SKILL will always be numbered between 5 and 14).

For ENDURANCE, you do exactly the same thing, except that you add 16 to the random number you select (so, your starting ENDURANCE is always numbered between 16 and 25).

For WILLPOWER, you do exactly the same thing, except that you add 20 to the random number you select (so, your starting WILLPOWER is always numbered between 20 and 29).

Once you have determined what your COMBAT SKILL, ENDURANCE and WILLPOWER scores are, enter them on your Action Chart.

### CENER DRUID DISCIPLINES

You begin the game as a Malison. While you have a long way to go before you can consider yourself to be an Archdruid, you are not an absolute beginner either, as your five Druid Disciplines show. The ranks of the Cener Druid and the titles they are granted at each level of their progress are as follows:

Rank / Number of Druid Disciplines	Druid Title
1	Initiate
2	Acolyte
3	Adept
4	Instigator
5	Malison (you begin at this level)
6	Corruptor
7	Enshrouder
8	Mortician
9	Malignant
10	Druid

Pick your Disciplines from the following list.

### WAND OF POWER

The wands of power of the Cenerese are rare and powerful items, reeking of black



sorcery. Forged of black iron these wands serve as more than a simple tool for battle, they serve as a focusing point for the dark arts of the Cenerese. Whenever the Cener Druid engages in close combat with this weapon he may expend any number of WILLPOWER points of his own choosing. Each time he does this, the damage he deals on his next attack is increased by the number of WILLPOWER points he has chosen to expend. He may do this in any Combat Round, so long as he has WILLPOWER enough to do so.

If you choose this skill, write 'Wand of Power' on your Action Chart.

## BLAST OF POWER

The Cener Druid can expend 3 WILLPOWER points to issue forth a terrific blast of baleful power from his wand that smashes into his foes. This is a ranged attack that deals double damage. This Discipline cannot be used against a foe engaged in close combat with the Cener Druid.

If you choose this skill, write 'Blast of Power' on your Action Chart.

## ROTTING GAZE

The evil eye of a Cener Druid is a thing to be feared. This Discipline allows the Cener Druid to simply gaze at a person, within a short distance, who incurs his wrath and inflict upon him a vile ailment. That unlucky individual must make a Test, using his current ENDURANCE as a bonus, against a Difficulty equal to the Cener Druid's COMBAT SKILL plus his rank. If the Test fails, the Druid can inflict a disease of his choice upon him. The disease can either cause ENDURANCE damage, leave the target bedridden, cover him with weeping sores, or anything the Cener can imagine. Use of this Discipline costs 4 WILLPOWER points.

If you choose this skill, write 'Rotting Gaze' on your Action Chart.

## SOUL OF THE PLAGUE

The Cener Druid goes through a strict regimen during his training in the black arts, inflicting upon himself every natural disease and poison known on the face of Magnamund. Upon selecting this Discipline his body finally develops a resistance to all known natural diseases and poisons, effectively making the Druid immune to their effects. This takes a heavy toll on the Cener Druid's body and face however, pock marking it with sores, boils and lacerations that never fully heal. Cener Druid's tend to start covering their bodies with robes at this point and their faces with elaborate masks. Despite these precautions, the Druid still takes a -3 penalty to all Tests involving Diplomacy as a rank odour always seems to permeate him.

If you choose this skill, write 'Soul of the Plague' on your Action Chart.

## CORPSE CALL

By means of a dark ritual, which is learned when the Druid selects this Discipline, the Druid can raise a freshly made corpse as an undead servitor that follows the Druid everywhere and obeys his every command. The Cener Druid can only have one such undead servitor active at any time.

Undead Servitor:

COMBAT SKILL 17-20 ENDURANCE 22-25

If you choose this skill, write 'Corpse Call' on your Action Chart.

## STRANGLE ROOT

Even though Cener Druid's have long since turned away from the path of true druidry, they still retain some knowledge of commanding the natural forces of the world, albeit with a vile twist. With this Discipline the Druid can call upon this knowledge and summon from the earth thick, entangling roots and vines that tear

through the ground to grasp a foe. This works as if you are attacking an enemy within a short distance. It costs 3 point of WILLPOWER to bring into effect. If the Combat Results Table indicates that you would have caused more damage to the enemy than he would have caused to you, then he will become ensnared in the roots and automatically forego his next three attacks. Furthermore the roots consistently keep trying to crush whomever they have in their grasp, inflicting half the Druid's rank as damage every round (rounded down).

If you choose this skill, write 'Strangle Root' on your Action Chart.

## BLINDING SPITTLE

As he advances in power, the Druid learns to use his very bodily secretions as weapons. With this Discipline he can produce poisonous bile in his mouth and project it at an enemy. This is a ranged attack that blinds the target for a number of rounds equal to half the Druid's rank (rounded down). This results in the target taking a penalty of -2 to his COMBAT SKILL for as long as the blindness lasts.

If you choose this skill, write 'Blinding Spittle' on your Action Chart.

## CROW'S EYES

Cener have a dark connection to animals that feed on carrion. This Discipline calls upon that connection and focuses it on a carrion eating bird such as a crow, or a vulture within sight. The Druid can see and hear through this bird's senses, even directing it to fly where he wishes. The Druid must remain stationary while doing so and is effectively blind and deaf with regards to his own body.

If you choose this skill write 'Crow's Eyes' on your Action Chart.

# Cener Druid of Ruel

## SURVIVOR

This Discipline allows the Druid to survive in any blasted landscape, such as a barren wasteland, fetid swamps and even the Darklands themselves. He can always find food to eat (does not have to cross off a meal when instructed to eat) and can find shelter easily.

If you choose this skill, write 'Survivor' on your Action Chart.

## BLACK SPEECH

Cener Druids have long enjoyed an alliance with the Drakkarim, Giak's and the Vazhag. This Discipline allows the Druid to speak and understand their tongues. It does not allow the Cener Druid to

automatically command them however, only to communicate with them.

If you choose this skill, write 'Black Speech' on your Action Chart.

## STARTING EQUIPMENT

The Cener Druid starts with the following equipment.

Your basic possessions comprise of the red coloured robes of the Cener Druids. You also have a backpack, a belt and a leather pouch in which you keep your money (Gold Crowns). To find out how much money you start with, pick a number from the Random Number Table and add 10. The number you choose equals the number of Gold Crowns you possess (Note this number in the Belt Pouch section of your Action Chart).

If you have 'Wand of Power', you will also start with a black iron wand among your possessions.

You may also choose two items from the following list:

- Short Sword (Weapon)
- Meal (Backpack Item)
- Potion of Laumspur (Backpack Item, one dose, restores 4 ENDURANCE points to your total)
- Rope (Backpack Item)
- Ritual Dagger (Weapon)
- Vial of Antitoxin (Special Item)
- Vial of Poison (Special Item)
- Emerald Mask (Special Item)

Note: The Cener Druid of Ruel may never wear any type of conventional armour, nor may they use a regular shield.



### Volume I: The Justice Department

This volume takes you on a guided tour of the only power great enough to keep the peace in a world gone mad. Within these pages, the training of new Judges is described, luminaries and notable members are discussed and the procedures that maintain effectiveness and discipline are revealed. This book covers the Justice Department from Sector Houses to sequestered archives, from the mechanical miracles of Tek-Div to the world-shaping decisions of the Council of Five and the Chief Judge. Here are the halls of power. Here is where rules are made.

The Justice Department is the start of an exciting new 12 volume series that examines the world of Judge Dredd as never before. Each volume contains a proof of purchase logo that, when all 12 are collected, can be exchanged for a special 13th volume, covering Judge Death and his allies, absolutely free!



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# Project Hyperion

By Matthew Sprange

Here at Mongoose, we have reams and reams of files. A lot of them make it to print but many do not. They may lie, languishing, for months or even years, until someone hits upon them again.

This is something I found when going through some old files, an RPG that never was. At the time, we had the *Babylon 5* licence, so a lot of references to that setting are made here but we also discussed Star Trek, Honor Harrington, a brand new setting, among others.

Anyway, here is a Mongoose Design Brief, the kind of document a company circulates within its inner circle – now revealed to you for the first time!

## Project Hyperion Design Brief

Outline of a spaceship-based RPG, with players taking the role of senior command crew

### Suggested Titles

*EarthForce Command*

*Battle Stations: EarthForce*

## Character Creation

Characters should have as few statistics as possible, as the intention of the game is to get players to actually figure out solutions to problems, using the resources at their disposal, rather than simply rolling a dice for success. Measuring their skills in the roles they take is not necessary, as it is assumed that if they are put in that role, they have sufficient knowledge and experience. What will make the difference is the player's choices and resource management. Potentially, characters could have traits or skills describing their abilities outside of their roles but this is likely not necessary, other than a note in their backgrounds. Under no circumstances should social skills be quantified – these are entirely dependant on the players in question.

Aside from a character's personality (which could well be that of the player

– how would you do if you were part of the command crew of a spaceship?), the main bulk of character creation could rest in generating its background. The model to use here is an expanded version of the background generation in the *EarthForce Campaign Book*.

By the time players have finished creating their character's background, they will have a list of contacts within *EarthForce* and other areas, a good or bad reputation, a measure of their career progression so far and so on. They will also know precisely where they have served other tours of duty and on which ships/stations – thus giving them a complete history from a grizzled captain who remembers the *Earth-Minbari War*, to a new Lieutenant who has had just a few minor missions.

## Positions/Roles

This game cannot assume that every gaming group has six players but nor need it assume that only a single player and GM will play. Thus, three roles will be deemed essential;

Captain (who can handle the helm if the Navigation Officer is not present)  
Chief Engineer (might actually be a lot more fun than it sounds – see later)  
Weapons Officer (or Tactical Officer, if we include control of fighter squadrons and security).

To this, we can add, probably in the following order;

Navigation Officer (also responsible for helm control, or basically flying the ship...)  
Executive Officer  
Fighter Controller (could well be a lot of fun – especially when the crew are transferred to a *Poseidon*)  
Science Officer (a bit *Star Trek* but purely)  
Medical Officers might be limited – however, in terms of GM info dumps, this role could work very well as an NPC

If players go down the route of playing themselves in space (no roleplaying

snobbery here, please!), then we can have little sections for each, describing what type of person might be suited for each role.

## Presentation

A lot of the success of this game will come down to presentation and how information is accessed. The basic game will consist of two books – the Player's Guide and the GM's Guide.

The former will include a short introduction outlining what the game is all about and outlining the different roles available. The bulk of the book will then consist of very easy to read chapters, each outlining the creation, duties, abilities and resources of each role, all of which must be easily summarised in a one page handout. The remainder of the book will cover the ship systems themselves – only one ship will be featured in this book, the *Hyperion-class*. Perhaps also have a chapter on the organisation of *EarthForce*, history and so forth.

The GM's book will contain ship combat mechanics, how *EarthForce* really works, lots of enemy ships, handling promotions, a brief galaxy guide (perhaps limited to just a few sectors near the *Earth Alliance*) and so forth. At the end, there will be one training mission/shake down cruise that, upon completion, will have each of the players comfortable with their role on the ship and ready for something deeper (you see, this is why figuring out the presentation of this game and making it easy to get to grips with is going to take a lot of thought...).

## Hyperion-class Heavy Cruiser

This is a quick look at the various systems and components of the *Hyperion* cruiser and how they might be related to this game.

### Main Systems

Fusion Reactor

Main Engines (and not-main engines, I presume...)

Jump Engine

Sensors (including targeting systems)  
 ECM (and ECCM)  
*Main Computer*  
 Life Support  
 Shuttle/Fighters  
 Interceptors  
 Weapons  
 Communications  
 Damage Control  
 Medical

Players should have direct control of all of these, via their roles. However, it is not enough for one of them to say 'boost power to engines' and simply offline weapons, say. There might be very good reasons for not powering down a heavy laser (it takes a week to get it going again, or a trip to space port?), or there may be implications for relying or using emergency power systems. This game should all be about choice and how to use their ship effectively should be central to most non-character related situations (no need to figure out how to utilise power systems when negotiating a treaty. . .).

## Structure

The Hyperion Ship Plans booklet can serve very well in laying out the ship and locating where various systems are (such as cargo, control systems, armour, crew, engines, hangars and weapons).

## Craft

The basic Hyperion has 2 light shuttles and 6 Starfuries.

## Weapons

A heavy laser, a plasma cannon, 8 pulse cannon turrets and a multitude of particle beams and interceptors for close ranged work.

Now, I have drawn up a proper fire arc diagram for the various weapons on a Hyperion and it is not an easy concept! We need some way of relating this complexity

in the game (thus rewarding tactically-minded players) without it seeming overwhelming. This raises the question of whether we use miniatures/counters to track the ship in relation to other space objects.

Actually having miniatures rules, with tape measures and all the rest, is probably not the way to go. We can have something more conceptual, with perhaps range bands (Far Sensor, Extreme, Long, Medium, Short, Close/Point Blank) and space objects placed on a chart with the Hyperion in the middle, so fire arcs can be worked out (perhaps the chart has the fire arcs already drawn upon it?). Set against this is that I really wanted to avoid this being a box set. However, the physical representation may be a big plus point. And you can always stick miniatures on the chart rather than simply rely on counters.

## Power Systems

Very early days here but this is a brief attempt to work out power management of the Hyperion (been done before for spaceships but fiddling around with power requirements always seems to be a factor in popular science fiction). This will primarily be the province of the Chief Engineer but every player will want a piece of what he can give – kind of like a Cleric in D&D, in a way.

Let us assume the reactor outputs 100 'Power Units' under ordinary conditions. Damage can reduce this. Overpowering the reactor can give more but there will be unpleasant side effects, such as blowing out other systems and permanently reducing the effectiveness of the reactor (go too far and perhaps it really will be permanent, with not even space dock able to fix it, requiring a complete refit and a reprimand for the Chief Engineer, unless it was done for a Borg-like situation).

The following is what various systems normally require for operation.

Engines – 30 (requires more for flank speed, less for just pottering about)  
 Jump Engines – 0 (call it 40 for creating a jump point, forcing other systems to go offline)  
 Life Support – 10 (can be reduced or shut down, with obvious consequences)  
 Interceptors – 5 (more can intensify the web)  
 Pulse Cannon – 1 point each  
 Heavy Laser – 25 (can be boosted for range and power)  
 Plasma Cannon – 10 (seems fun to be able to boost this too)  
 Particle Beams – 3 (for anti-fighter work)  
 Main Computer – 5 (you do NOT want this shutting down. Ever. Cannot be overclocked)  
 Sensors – 5 (can boost for increased range/penetration)

These are just the basic system – we need many more. A lot of these systems will have redundancy or emergency back ups. This is all stuff the Chief Engineer needs to know.

The possibility of 'console cards' for various positions has been raised, to keep track of various systems under a player's control and the Chief Engineer is a good candidate for this. In a sense, this might be more of a character sheet than the one the player uses to note down details of his character.

## Time Based Turns

Gareth suggested using a chess clock/stopwatch to monitor player actions and we had similar discussions in the office. This has certainly been used to good effect in games such as Space Hulk and part of me likes the idea of the GM calling 'time' as the players debate what to do – whatever is set on their consoles (if we go with the console card idea) is what is happening.

Set against this, I am not sure the urgency is required all the time and, of course, we are in the business of making books, not stopwatches. . .

# Project Hyperion

## Future Books

We need to ensure there is life after the first two core books and this is an example of how the line should pan out.

## 'Class' Books

Each of these will super detail the options available to each role the players can take. For example, while the core book will allow a Navigation Officer to fly his ship around and get from A to B, with a few neat tricks up his sleeve, the Navigation Officer's Manual will describe how to utilise the gravitational fields of a planet, how to not get lost in hyperspace when going off-beacon, battle manoeuvres and so forth. Each book starts really easy and gets progressively more anal – each player can decide when to stop reading before playing (and go back later when he has got the hang of it). Could also add new roles, such as splitting fighter control away from the Tactical Officer (perhaps necessary on larger ships).

## Mission/Campaign Books

Either a group of one-shot missions, linked thematically, or a campaign that would form the equivalent of an entire season. We may find that, due to the nature of play, each mission will take less space than the average scenario for a regular RPG. Campaigns could cover investigations, exploration (Rim!) and wars.

## Ship Books

I would like these to be a Big Deal. Players will have been messing around with a Hyperion for many missions – then the Omega Destroyer Manual comes out. All of a sudden (upon gaining a transfer), the players will have access to bigger guns, bigger engines and bigger responsibilities.

The Omega should come first. Then we can introduce the Poseidon...

## The Admiral's Guide

Kind of an advanced book for Captains. Gives details on running not just a ship

but a small fleet. In game terms, individual ships would be statted like those under the GM's control (very simply, with no power allocation and so forth). His own ship would always be the most important thing. However, it would give the group new options, as sections of the fleet could be split off (send a frigate to investigate a strange signal while the rest of the fleet maintains a blockade) or aid in larger battles (your ass is mine now, Neroon).

## Race Books

Don't really want to go here too much or too often but the chance to play the command crew of a Sharlin could be another Big Thing. As could Narn (with their angst/wars) and Centauri (with their politics – could make the game something like Paranoia in a way). Featuring Drazi crews is probably going too far.

Featuring Rangers is probably best served by the current RPG, given how much off-ship action they are likely to have.

## Tournaments

*This is a complete aside and need have no bearing on the design of the game. However, it might be quite a cool option if we could take the basic game and turn it into a tournament system. Teams of players take the relevant roles in controlling a single ship. They then 'do battle' with other teams, each controlling their own ships. Perhaps a GM is needed for each round, perhaps not. Could be cool if it took place in a nebula and teams had to find one another first...*

## To Do List

We can keep the presentation of this game in mind at all times (this is what will make or break it – it is *not* a normal RPG) but that can generally be decided at a later date. The character creation details, missions, galaxy guide are all relatively standard things that we already have developed and will just need re-writing, or are well within our current capabilities.

The outstanding problem is in the detailing of the ship systems and how they relate to players and their characters. It must not be overly complex (Star Fleet Battles is the closest thing to what we are trying to achieve here but a stunning example of how *not* to go about the game we are aiming for) but it must provide players with a multitude of options in completing any set task. Most of the game time should be spent with players discussing how to achieve objectives (or presenting plans to their Captain).

GM workload should be minimal – in a sense, we could turn a lot of the workload over to the players. For example, this would be wrong;

*GM: 'The Sharlin's neutron laser has knocked out your plasma cannon, auxiliary power relays and hangar doors 3 through 6'*

*Players: 'Aww, man...'*

Instead, it could work like this...

*GM: 'The Sharlin's neutron laser delivers a Solid Hit Amidships.'*

*Tactical Officer: (after rolling dice, consulting charts, or whatever system we have) 'Captain, reading massive damage to auxiliary power relays, hangars 3 through 6 compromised and output to the plasma cannon is erratic'*

What has happened here, of course, is that damage allocation has been passed onto the players, relieving the GM of the work and engaging them further into the game.

More importantly, the Tactical Officer (and the Captain, hopefully) will know exactly what is meant by massive damage to the auxiliary power relays. We can get players talking in techno babble without them really realising it, thus putting them right in the 'moment'. The trick is being able to do this fairly easily (it will get better with practice) without requiring a Masters in

Starship Operation – the training mission/shake down cruise in the GM's Guide will be of central import here, as will summaries of each player's responsibilities/resources, and layout of the core books.

Gareth came up with another example;

*GM: 'Right, you're escorting the colony ship Medusa to its destination. You've just jumped to realspace in an uninhabited sector to get your bearings before the next jump. As you emerge from hyperspace, standard sensors pick up an unidentified alien ship. It's at Extreme Range, but closing fast. What do you do?'*

*Captain: 'Did the colony ship jump through with us, too?'*

*GM: 'Yep.'*

*Captain: 'Ok – Navigation, put us between the colony ship and the alien ship. Tactical, find out who they are and get a soft lock on them just in case they're hostile.'*

*Engineering: 'Captain, we're still short on power 'cos of the jump. Helm, you've got 40 points. I've another 10 points to split between other systems.'*

*Tactical: 'Heat up weapons, Captain?'*

*Captain: 'Can you give me Interceptors?'*

*Tactical: 'Sure. I'll need two points for that. Also need 10 for an active sensor sweep.'*

*Helm: 'I don't need 50 points if I make a good Manoeuvre roll. Just give me 40.'*

*Engineering: 'OK, 30/10/10 between those stations.'*

*GM: 'Time's up! Hands away from those consoles!'*

*Tactical: 'Interceptors are hot!'*

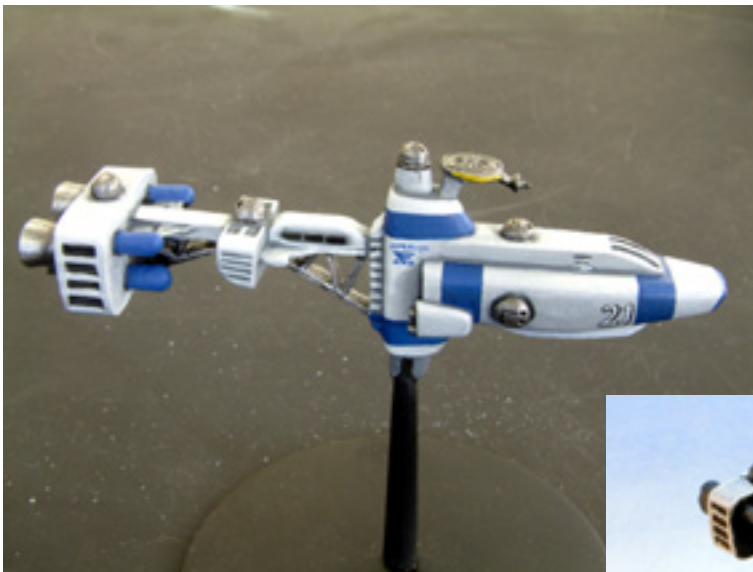
*Helm: \*rolls\* 'Putting us between the colony ship and the bogey now...and I didn't crash into the colony ship. Yay me!'*

*Tactical: \*rolls\* 'Unless they've got a really great stealth, I've got a basic scan of them. GM?'*

*GM: 'It's not a known design. You're looking at a First Contact here, it seems.'*

*Captain: 'Eep!'*

It would be cool if the players do not talk in terms of power points, perhaps with only the Chief Engineer knowing exactly what is available and what things cost. However, players being what they are, this may not be possible and the power points shorthand might get the game moving smoothly, even if it loses a little verisimilitude by dropping the technical terms.



# Planet Choxlatl

By Harry C. Kruger III

A new world for the Reign of Discordia setting

**Choxlatl D566260-9**

**Planet Type:** Terrestrial

**Climate:** Cold

**Terrain:** Oceans, glaciers, chitin-fungus megagrowths

**Atmosphere:** Standard

**Gravity:** 62.5% of Earth Normal

**Circumference:** 26,574 km

**Diameter:** 8463 km

**Length of Day:** 16 hours, 24 minutes

**Sentient Species:** Choxlans

**Languages:** Many Choxlan dialects

**Population:** approximately 600

**Species Mix:** 100% Sangor (the native Choxlans number in the hundreds of thousands but are not factored into the population determination.)

**Government:** Captive: the various Sangor facilities are owned by separate companies and are not self-governing.

**Major Exports:** Ice-grown Qizl, but only as harvested for the companies maintaining the facilities. It is not available for general sale on the Choxlatl.

**Major Imports:** Facility supplies. These imports are handled strictly by the parent companies and there is virtually no market for saleable goods on Choxlatl.

**Moons:** Horeo, Bis

## Description

Located deep in Sangor space, Choxlatl is a cold world that is currently locked in an ice age. Almost the entirety of the land mass not covered by ice sheets and glaciers is instead covered by Quizl, the dominant life form of the planet. It is a chitinous fungal growth that manifests itself as a dazzling variety of shapes and colours in an almost geometric precision and also creates a very hard, shell-like crust over the actual planetary surface. The Quizl ranges from the seashores to the tops of the low mountains scattered across

the three continents. It has become the habitat for the rest of the planets land-borne ecology, providing both food and shelter to many other creatures.

The land life of Choxlatl has all come from the same basi, and consists of hard-shelled creatures, bilaterally symmetrical with 10 limbs, five per side. They range in size from that of a terrestrial mouse to larger than an elephant. Due to the low gravity, many are also capable of flight, even when their size would lead one to believe it impossible. Every species tends to follow a path of caste-specialisation. Depending on their role in the ecology, creatures are divided into subgroups of hunters, nesters, builders, herders, or other roles as are needed to maintain their groups. No solitary animals have been found on Choxlatl.

Of the many animals living their lives throughout the chromatic landscape of the Quizl, one stands out from the rest. Called the Choxlans, they are a sentient species that live at a pre-technological level as nomadic hunters. They stand upright on their six rear limbs and use their front four limbs for manipulating their environment. Each of those four limbs has a four-fingered hand, with each digit being mutually opposable. They can perceive their environment visually and aurally; they do not seem to have developed much in the way of olfactory or savoury senses. As hard-shelled creatures, they have a limited sense of touch. They are genetically divided into Builders, Nesters and Stalkers.

The Builders are stocky and their lower set of front limbs have evolved for heavy lifting and carrying, while the upper set are smaller and show great dexterity. They function to create the temporary shelters their group uses while following their prey and also to

build the tools needed by the Nesters and Stalkers. Before the reversion to savagery, the Builders were responsible for the manufacturing segment of their economy.

The Nesters are slight and all four of their upper limbs are similar, being intermediate between the size of the Builders' upper and lower front limbs. They are the administrators of their society, filling such roles as leaders and teachers, parents and servants. During their civilised period, the Nesters filled those same roles and more, being the entirety of their service industry.

The Stalkers' front limbs are all for hunting, with elongated digits that are shaped to stab and rend flesh. Their bodies are built for speed and strength, being more graceful than either the Builders or Nesters. They hunt to feed their community and when they are threatened, also form the warrior class. It was the Stalkers who became the raiders of one city to the next when the social order collapsed, raiding not just for food but also other portable resources such as weapons and tools.

The Choxlan society has become nomadic with the onset of the ice sheets and glaciers. They mostly follow the wandering herds of Supupt, huge creatures that themselves feed from the strange growths of Quizl. They are scattered far and wide across the two sub-equatorial continents of Choxlatl but no longer have any great presence on the northern continent, as it is wholly covered in ice now. Those few who live there eke out a meagre existence compared to their southerly cousins, subsisting instead on the small snow creatures that burrow into the ice to feed upon the special Quizl growing beneath. Their abandoned cities are considered forbidden places, usually bringing only death and ruin from a variety of toxins, diseases and



automated defences. But yet still, daring Stalkers will enter a city to try and find some forgotten relic of technology. While they often do not return, those who are successful become heroes to their communities.

The Choxlans have never been cooperative between different communities. During the rise of their civilisation, they created city-states that warred constantly with each other. Progress was slow not only because of the traditional nature of their society but also because the possibility of sharing information between cities was almost impossible. If technology was to be imported, it was by way of captured goods that could possibly be reverse engineered. Even now, with almost no population pressure or need to fight, when two Choxlan communities meet there can be only conflict.

Choxlatl is within the Sangor sphere of influence. While the Sangor were thralls of the Lamogos, the planet was given a brief survey by the Stellar Imperium and showed no easily exploitable resources or intelligent beings. It became a footnote to the exploratory academics. Later, as the Sangor began exploring on their own, the ancient ruined cities of the Choxlans were found. Even then, the Choxlans themselves eluded detection for many more years. Indeed, they probably would never have been contacted by the Sangor if a unique property of the Quizl had not been discovered: when it grew under the ice sheets, it became a very efficient heat sink, with enormous potential to form the basis of a super-efficient cooling system technology for industrial and starship grade electronics. The Sangor have many small facilities located on the northern, ice-bound continent dedicated to extracting the Quizl from beneath the glaciers. They rarely come

into contact with the Choxlans and given the aggressive tendencies of the latter, this is probably in the best interests of both species. The Sangor treat the Choxlans as they would a non-sentient predator, content to leave them to their lifestyle and maintaining as little contact as possible with them.

## History

The Sangor are still trying to piece together the history of the Choxlans. It is not a high priority to them but their curiosity drives them on nevertheless. It has become apparent that civilisation on Choxlatl had a good run of about 10,000 years and then began to unravel quickly with the onset of the glaciers 4,000 years ago.

The early history of the Choxlans remains unknown but their later history is recorded in stone and metal artefacts built upon ground cleared of the all-encompassing Quizl. As they emerged from nomadic hunters to sedentary community builders, they began to have more variations in their caste-specialisation. This in turn led to the ability to create more complex communities, eventually allowing the clearing of Quizl and the building of permanent dwellings upon the bare ground of the planet; ground that had never been seen before by the Choxlans. Their cities are silent testaments to their former glories, rising skyward hundreds of metres and showing great variations and differences from one group of cities to the next. It has been deduced that these clusters of cities were organised as city-states and that very little friendly contact was made between them. The architectural solutions to a given problem are very different from one cluster to the next and in many cases whole different technologies had been developed and used to address similar challenges. Even writing systems seem

to be wholly different, although once decoded all seem to be variations of a given language.

From the cities themselves and what little bit of written history has been deciphered, the later history of the Choxlans is reasonably understood. As the city-states expanded and their standards of living improved, they increasingly began competing for the same resources. As their caste-specialisation became increasingly diversified, some city-states developed castes in one direction, while others developed in wholly different paths. So when they met, they often did not recognise other communities as even the same kind of being. Warfare was the inevitable result.

Like so many other intelligent species within known space, warfare accelerated technological development. Some of the greatest achievements of the Choxlans were born of their efforts to annihilate their neighbours. The building of rocket-delivered warheads gave way to a space program in some city-states and though records have been found of the establishment of functional space stations with their solar system, so far no Choxlan artefacts or equipment have been found off-planet. There is no indication within any of their written records nor by way of any of their artefacts that the Choxlans had ever developed an anti-gravity module nor a Jump drive. It appears that they were restricted to their own star system and indeed showed no interest in expanding beyond those confines.

## People

The native Choxlatl keep to themselves. They are insular within their communities. Outsiders who have observed them have likened them to hive minds but this is actually far from the truth. Each caste-

specialisation has evolved to fill certain roles within their community groups and they fill those roles without question; a Nester will never attempt to replace a Builder or a Stalker. But that does not deny them individuality. Each Choxlan has their own interests in recreation, their own tastes in food and their own ideas about personal decoration.

Choxlan societies revolve around the Nesters. Nesters are the only Choxlan caste-specialisation that produce the eggs from which their next generation hatches. Nesters fill the role of both parents and teachers to the hatchlings and only when the physical manifestation of their caste-specialisation begins to manifest towards maturity are they sent to live with the adults of their own kind. The Builders and Stalkers revere the Nesters and will always defer to a decision made by a Nester within their own community. Nesters also fill other valuable social roles, as they are the historians and entertainers of their groups, recalling their history through stories told when the whole community is gathered. The burden of responsibility is upon them as well, for the Nesters make all of the important decisions for the community and are the unquestioned leaders of their culture.

The Builders are tasked by the Nesters to create the shelters and tools their community requires. During their civilised period, the Builders created the great steel cities and stone monuments the Sangor are so fond of visiting now. But in the current culture of barbarism, the Builders are makers of weapons for the Stalkers to hunt with and erect the temporary shelters of Quizl-sheet that their group will use as habitation while the Stalkers roam the surrounding wild lands looking for prey. Innovations are rare these days but it was the builders and some caste-specialisations that grew out of them that were the intellectual foundations

of the great technological marvels the Choxlans created at their peak.

The Stalkers are built for hunting. Their lean, waspish bodies and long claws serve no other purpose than to bring down prey to feed their group. As their civilisation grew, it was incumbent upon the Stalkers to become the warriors in their clashes with other city-states. Now that the world order has collapsed, they have reverted to their traditional roles as the providers of the communities, using the spears and casters created for them by the Builders. Of all the Choxlans, the Stalkers show the most independence, as they must spend days or weeks at a time away from the Nesters to find the food they are seeking.

The culture of the Choxlans is essentially similar from one group to the next, although each has its unique peculiarities. Their preferred form of entertainment is epic poetry and story recital. Each Nester has its own particular set and they are always honoured when they choose to share it. Song and dance are unknown among them, as is any sort of theatrical production. The Builders create works of art, murals painted on walls of Quizl or sculptures carved from chunks of the same. Those few pieces of such art that have fallen into the hands of the Sangor have been sold to private collectors for great sums of money, as they are very different from anything seen or created by the interstellar races. Even rarer are audio copies of their epic poems, as the task of even being able to record them is hazardous.

## Locations

### Choxlatl Down Starport

Choxlatl Down is a joint venture between three private Sangor companies. It is a sprawling menagerie of concrete pads and prefabricated

buildings established directly on top of the ice in the northern continent. Only unrefined fuel is available for the company ships that land, extracted from the ice and kept in great pressurised tanks. Other ships visiting Choxlatl are welcome to land but the fuel is not made available to them. Any ship needing minor repairs will be fixed, at a rate less than normal. Choxlatl is not a world for visitors to be stranded on and the Sangor believe the sooner they are on their way, the better it is for all involved parties.

There are no lodging facilities at Choxlatl Down, there is no 'startown' sprawling away from the starport, nor any commercial transportation. Visitors will need to use their own ship as their place to stay, maintain their own nutritional supplies and drive their own vehicles to get around. Visitors setting out for any destination aside from any of the company Quizl-mining facilities are warned that the Choxlans are aggressive and dangerous.

### Spire City

Spire City is one of the few Choxlan city ruins still surviving on the northern continent. Built atop a great rock edifice that itself was overlooking a deep valley, the city has so far survived the onslaught of the glaciers simply by being higher up than the ice has risen. The Sangor have established a small research base there and are in the process of trying to piece together more knowledge of the Choxlan civilisation. Of greater interest to the companies funding the research is the intact technology to be found. The Sangor are very clever at reverse-engineering unknown items and a few of those found have already made their way into the manufacture of consumer goods.

### Orenko Mining Base

The Orenko Corporation maintains the largest Quizl-extraction facility

on the planet. The heart of the base is an enormous mobile building called the Platform, moving on dozens of caterpillar treads. It is the heart of a small fleet of mobile vehicle tools, from fusion power plants to convert the upper layers of ice to steam, to the ice-drills that go deeper into the holes and the passenger cabs that take the workers down into the holes to work through the final layers of the glacier with hand tools, so as not to harm the precious Quizl growing underneath. The Platform moves from one location to the next on a sporadic basis. Once an area has been worked to its ecologically-sustainable limit, it moves on to the next area. When it has filled its giant cargo hold, the Quizl is loaded into a grav-freighter and taken back to Choxlatl Down for shipping to the Orenko factories.

## Adventure Seeds

### Dr. Livingston, I Presume?

Contact has been lost with the Sangor archaeological research team exploring one of the city ruins on the southern continent. Their last communication indicated that they had discovered something 'interesting,' but no details were given. Shortly thereafter, it seems all of their equipment stopped working. The adventurers are in the right place at the right time to be hired by the Orenko Corporation to affect a rescue

mission, as they do not have sufficient manpower to affect it themselves. Will it simply be a case of an electromagnetic pulse that fried the research groups' electronics? Or did they stumble across a nest of one of the many predators lurking in the ruins? Or, possibly, they ran afoul of a Choxlan expedition investigating the ruins themselves...

### The Great Train Robbery

Quizl is one of the few Sangor industrial secrets. There are many corporate or governmental entities that would like to know exactly what it is and what the Sangor are up to with it. The adventurers could be hired by any of these groups to go to Choxlatl and find out what the Quizl is, how the Sangor get it and why it is so important to them. Obviously, it would be easier for Sangor characters to do this but would be an interesting challenge for others...

### New Species: Choxlans

The Choxlans are smaller than humans, standing upright on six legs and having four arms. Their arms are different from one caste-specialisation to the next. They average about 50 kilograms each, slightly more for Builders and slightly less for Stalkers. They are covered with a hard exoskeletal layer and this can range the entire visible spectrum of colours but the colours are usually consistent within a group. Their sense organs are at the top of the body,

with the eyes on independent stalks affording 180-degree vision.

The Choxlans are the barbaric remnants of their previous civilisation, which collapsed under the pressure of their new ice age. As resources became scarcer, conflict increased and in the end the cities could no longer sustain themselves. Their technology has been lost and they are now living as pre-technological nomads. They are hostile in the extreme to anything that is not a member of their immediate community.

Some Choxlans have been taken offworld, for a variety of purposes. Stalkers are occasionally scooped up by the few worlds and outposts that raise money through legalised gladiatorial combat. Recently, small tribes have been removed from the planet for the purpose of converting them into slave labour. The Sangor do not approve of these practices and they make every effort to prevent unauthorised landings on the planet but they are not always successful, resulting in the hostile removal of Choxlans. In some rare cases, Choxlans have broken free from their captors, or been rescued and have been forced to integrate into stellar society. They tend to be familiar enough with Sangor that individuals from the two species can peacefully mix. They also have a similar enough mindset to the Tallinites that individual Choxlans can integrate into their organisations with little trouble. Due to their unrestrained individualism, partnerships between Choxlans and humans or Lamagos are unheard of.

**Choxlans have no Social Standing. Instead, they have Caste: 1 for Builders, 2 for Stalkers, 3 for Nesters. All Choxlans are Armoured, Feral and Small. Choxlan Builders have Notable Strength (+2.) Choxlan Nesters have Notable Intelligence (+1.) Choxlan Stalkers have Natural Weapons (claws).**



# The Dagger - Every Thief's Best Ally

By Bryan Steele

Eight to twelve inches in length, hard steel or hammered bronze, smooth edged or serrated; the dagger is likely the most important tool any thief can ever carry on his person. It can be used as an impromptu lock pick, a pry bar, or even an eating utensil when at rest. For every thief that chooses to set aside the dagger as his favoured weapon or tool, there are 100 that swear by it.

So long has the dagger been the chief implement of the thief that nearly every corner of the world has seen different evolutions of the weapon. This section is devoted to this, the closest of allies to a Hyborian age thief and all of the variants and accessories of the dagger.

a man's palm. It is utilitarian, simple and found throughout the world. In *Conan the Roleplaying Game: Second Edition* it is given very basic statistics to cover the average version of the all-purpose weapon. This section reveals several slightly different versions of the basic dagger as they occur in the many nations and cultures of the Hyborian age, how they differ and the game mechanics behind some of these local marvels.

**Aphaki Dagger:** The tribal weapon-tool of the Aphaki, also called a *rapak*, is a wide-bladed dagger that is somewhat chisel-like at its end and good for separating armour. Both men and women carry and use this

the Profession skill for dockworkers, sailors and shipwrights.

**Barachan Dagger:** Shortening the blade of a common dagger in order to give it a stouter point and a wider hilt, the pirates and seamen of the Barachans often wrap strips of tarred canvas around their hilts to avoid dropping it in the wet spray of ocean life. This makes the weapon far less aerodynamic but adds a +2 bonus to resist Disarm attempts.

**Cimmerian Dirk (Dagger):** A simple dagger with a slightly more rounded blade to make it utilitarian in the hard life of a Cimmerian clansman, the dirk has a

## Daggers of the Hyborian Age

Type of Dagger <sup>F</sup>	Cost	Damage	Critical	Armour Piercing	Range Increment	Hardness	Hilt Points	Weight	Type
Basic	3 sp	1d4	19-20/x2	1**	10 ft.	10	1	1 lb.	Piercing
Aphaki	4 sp	1d4	x2	2**	10 ft.	10	1	1 lb.	Piercing
Argossean	3 sp	1d4	19-20/x2	1**	10 ft.	10	2	1 lb.	Piercing or Slashing
Barachan	3 sp	1d3+1	19-20/x2	1**	5 ft.	10	1	2 lb.	Piercing
Cimmerian Dirk	5 sp	1d6	19-20/x2	2	-	10	2	2 lb.	Piercing
Hyperborean	4 sp	1d4	19-20/x2	2**	5 ft.	12	2	2 lb.	Piercing
Hyrkanian	3 sp	1d4	18-20/x2	0**	10 ft.	8	1	1 lb.	Slashing
Khitan Tarant	20 sp	1d6	19-20/x2	1	-	12	2	1 lb.	Slashing
Kothic	3 sp	1d4	x3	3	-	10	1	1 lb.	Piercing
Pictish Copper	1 sp	1d3	19-20/x2	0**	10 ft.	6	1	½ lb.	Piercing or Slashing
Shemite	4 sp	1d4+1	x2	1	-	10	1	1 lb.	Slashing
Stygian Charioteer	6 sp	1d4	18-20/x2	1**	5 ft.	10	1	2 lb.	Piercing
Vendhyan	5 sp	1d4	19-20/x2	1**	10 ft.	10	2	2 lb.	Piercing
Zamorian, Lower	4 sp	1d3	x3	1**	10 ft.	8	1	½ lb.	Piercing
Zamorian, Noble	5 sp	1d4+1	19-20/x2	1**	10 ft.	10	1	1	Piercing or Slashing
Zingaran Boatman	3 sp	1d4	x2	0**	15 ft.	8	1	1 lb.	Piercing

\*\*The Armour Piercing score for all ranged weapons is reduced by one for each range increment beyond the first.

<sup>F</sup> All Daggers are considered Finesse weapons.

## Daggers of the World

The basic 'dagger' is a length of double-edged metal roughly eight inches in length attached to a hilt that is as large as

weapon, as it is also good for shelling nuts, ripping rinds and splitting animal hide.

**Argossean Dagger:** Taking the common dagger and thickening its blade to give it a better cutting edge, the Argossean dockworkers often keep this weapon in their belt. It is perfect for cutting thick rope, rigging and sail cloth. Owning this dagger grants a +1 equipment bonus to checks of

thick wooden or antler hilt that often has a wider pommel to be used as a palm pressing point when cutting dense meat, peat or sheepskin. It is considered a great point of pride to kill any game animal with your father's dirk in Cimmeria.

**Hyperborean Dagger:** Heavy and thickly forged, the dagger of the Hyperboreans with metal smithing capabilities is

designed to withstand the cold winters of the northern region. Lighter blades have been known to become brittle and snap under pressure, even if this variety is too heavy to throw at anything but extremely short distances.

**Hyrkanian Dagger:** Thin bladed and wickedly sharp, the traditional belt knife of the Hyrkanian horsemen is sometimes called an *eqo* (pronounced *ee-koh*). It is not normally used in combat unless under dire circumstances, as its primary use is actually to slit the throat of any lame mount while on the road and then summarily butcher it for its meat. The Hyrkanian people understand wilderness hardship, which is how this weapon took shape over the generations.

**Khitan Tarant (Dagger):** An almost rectangular blade with a diamond-shaped tip, the tarant is an expertly forged dagger that is meant to be plunged into lightly armoured targets and dragged like a sword-blow. This weapon is not weighted for throwing at all, making it an expensive secondary weapon for most thieves.

**Kothic Dagger:** A long, thin blade that drives deeply into a target, the Kothic dagger evolved from the common version due to the adherence to scale armour with mercenaries in the area. The blade is wedge-shaped and set at a slight angle, allowing the wielder to dig its edge deep under the scales of an armoured foe. This shape makes the weapon difficult to aim at ranges but it can inflict terrible wounds up close.

**Pictish Copper Dagger:** Made by the few civilised tribes of Picts along the Westermarck, these symbolic daggers are simple copper blades beaten flat and made sharp against stones and set in a wooden or bone hilt. Carrying a copper dagger in Pictish society heralds the wielder as a member of a tribe noble bloodline – even if they are not.

**Shemite Dagger:** Like a tiny scimitar, the dagger of the nomadic Shemites was

created by too many raiding warriors losing their standard daggers in the flesh of their foes as they rode by in their hit and run attacks. The blade became swept back and wielded blade-down by riding raiders, who learned to sweep their attacks upward as they rode down their foes.

**Stygian Charioteer Dagger:** A heavy-hilted weapon used by the javelineer of Stygian war chariots when dismounted, the Stygian version of the common dagger is not terribly good as a thrown weapon. It is designed to look similar to the head of a spear and drive similarly into flesh. Some Stygian scholars claim it makes a good sacrificial blade as well but it is far more common on the belt of charioteers.

**Vendhyan Dagger:** A simple foot-long dagger with a solid construction, the Vendhyan dagger is called the *khyat baut* (pronounced *kee-ott bawt*). It is often seen as a sign of the caste of professional soldiers in Vendhya, telling of their service to the royal castes. It is not much different from a normal dagger, only larger and heavier.

**Lower Zamorian Dagger:** The dagger of the streets in Zamora, this blade is deeply grooved to spare its weight and increase its agility but gives up some of its heft. This style of dagger has an extremely sharp tip for use with precise attacks, rarely being confused with a tool for anything but bloodshed.

**Noble Zamorian Dagger:** Evolved from the daggers at the hips of Zamorian priests of their spider goddess, the *yezudi* (pronounced *yee-zoo-dee*) dagger has a cleft tip, making the edge of the blade actually have two stabbing points. It is designed to hold a very sharp edge but is extremely good at holding poison between its twin edges, making for larger-than-normal doses when it hits. This adds a +1 to the Injury DC of any poison applied to the blade of this type of dagger.

**Zingaran Boatman Dagger:** A thin, spike-like dagger that is carried by the river ferrymen of Zingara as well as rowboat

riders heading out to ships in port, the boatman dagger is best for quick stabs against lightly armoured targets but is also very aerodynamic due to its shape.

## Dagger Accessories

The following are items designed solely for the use of daggers, no matter the variety. They could be made differently for other larger weaponry but it would be a rare occasion to ever find one in a market or bazaar.

### Dagger Accessories

Item	Cost	Weight
Canestock Sheath	15 sp	5 lb.
Climber's Strap	2 sp	1 lb.
Hollowed Hilt	+5 sp	—
Knuckled Hilt	+10 sp	+1 lb.
Poison Sheath	5 sp	1 lb.
Stealth Sheath	10 sp	1 lb.
Throwing Bandolier	10 sp	3 lb.

**Canestock Sheath:** A length of thick wood that has been hollowed out at the top to fit a single dagger, allowing the hilt to become the 'handhold' of the cane. This form of hidden sheath grants the user a +2 bonus to Bluff skill checks to avoid the dagger being seen and bestows a +2 bonus to Initiative when unsheathed against an unsuspecting target.

**Climber's Strap:** When scaling a wall or rope, especially in a hurry, a thief cannot always hope to hold his prized dagger at all times. The climber's strap is a simple armband with an attached cord of leather that is tied around the hilt of a dagger. Should the dagger need to be dropped to better climb it will not be lost, it will simply dangle one foot beneath the wearer's elbow. This item also grants a +5 bonus against Disarming attempts but makes the dagger unable to be thrown.

**Hollowed Hilt:** An augmentation to an existing dagger, the hollowed hilt is exactly as it sounds. An area about as large as 10 coins or a single vial is created inside the hilt of the dagger; this area is accessible

# The Dagger - Every Thief's Best Ally

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through a secret cork or screw at the pommel. It takes a standard action to open or close the hollowed hilt.

**Knuckled Hilt:** Another augmentation to a dagger's hilt, this adds a fitted plate of bronze or iron that has been sized to the user's closed fist. Although it makes the weapon heavier and doubles all ranged penalties for throwing it, the dagger grants a +1 bonus to Parry Defence and can be used to inflict +1 damage with an Unarmed attack.

**Poison Sheath:** A velour coating inside of a dagger's sheath can be soaked with any type of Injury-based poison, automatically and safely poisoning the blade of any dagger placed in the sheath for longer

than 30 seconds. The sheath can only use one type of poison and would need to be replaced if toxins are to be changed. This is why many skilled poisoners have several daggers in several poison sheaths, just for that reason.

**Stealth Sheath:** A black suede leather sheath that is lined in the softest of chinchilla furs, any dagger drawn from the sheath makes absolutely no noise – not even the chance ring of the tip leaving the rivets at the mouth. When using the Hide skill and placed in a position to draw a dagger from a stealth sheath, there is *nearly no* chance that any mundane sense of hearing will detect this action, granting a +5 bonus to any checks required of them.

**Throwing Bandolier:** Worn by dagger throwing specialists; this chest-crossing set of three canvas straps contains integrated sheaths for six normal-sized daggers in easy reach. The bandolier is designed to let someone draw and throw a dagger from its straps in one simple motion. Wearing the throwing bandolier grants the user the Quick Draw feat for the purposes of drawing and throwing a dagger sheathed upon it. If the character already has the Quick Draw feat, he gains a +1 bonus to hit instead.



TRAVELLER

# THE THIRD IMPERIUM



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# Murder at the Tourney

By Jawad Naeem

## PLOT OVERVIEW:

The pc's have gathered together at an annual tourney held in Feravan, capital of the nation of Illion. While they have completed the tasks assigned to them, for which they came to Illion in the first place, they have been ordered by Lord Maric Mabelode, leader of the Council of Elder Knights, to partake in the festivities and enjoy the tourney. If there are any Sommlending Knights, Knights of the White Mountain or Knights of the Sword in the party they may wish to enter the tourney themselves and test their skills.

The tourney starts on a positive note, with the crowd, both highborn and noble alike in high spirits. Most members of the Council of Elder Knights are present, save for a few who have pressing business elsewhere. Lord Maric Mabelode, leader of the council is present with his 12 year old son, Gerold Mabelode and his wife, Lady Margetta Mabelode. There are knights from all over Illion present who represent their House and their liege lord proudly. Many lances are broken in the first few passes and the pc's are starting to enjoy themselves. Then suddenly, disaster strikes!

A crossbow bolt fired from the shadows of the stands makes its way towards young Gerold Mabelode. Depending on the pc's actions the bolt may or may not find its mark. If it does, the wound is fatal though the royal family does not know of it yet. While the guards are summoned along with the royal physician, the pc's, which were standing nearby have a chance to act and catch the assassin.

After a thrilling chase through the crowds and canny usage of their disciplines, the pc's discover that the assassin is a page serving the nobility. He is about

to make good his escape on a horse tethered nearby when the pc's catch up to him and can attempt to engage him in combat or capture him without raising a hand in violence, through crafty employment of their disciplines. Regardless the page will beg for mercy after he has taken enough wounds. If the pc's hold true to the ideals of honour they will spare the page his life and thus be able to question him for a moment before the guards, who are right on their heels, arrive to take him away. In gratitude for their sparing his life, the page will give the pc's vital information about the assassination attempt, telling them, among other things, that he was to meet someone at an inn after the work was done.

On the other hand if the pc's were bloodthirsty and ruthless, unwilling to spare a beaten foe then they will find a falsely planted letter upon the page's body that will implicate neighbouring Talestria in the attempt on the boy's life. This will lead to heightened tensions between Illion and Talestria, just as the Darklords of Helgedad wish, dooming both nations to years of border clashes and weaking both their armies. The pc's mission will have failed and they will return to their homes, heads heavy with shame at all the grief that came due to their negligence.

If the pc's spared the page and received the clues he gave them, they will have an opportunity to act on this themselves. Before they can do so however, the guards will appear and take the wounded page into custody. They pc's will also discover that Lord Maric wishes to have an audience with them.

After a brief interval during which the pc's have an opportunity to rest and recover, they will be summoned before

Lord Maric. If they managed to prevent the crossbow bolt reaching Gerold, they will have Lord Maric's eternal gratitude and the pc responsible for the quick thinking will be rewarded. They will also be thanked for capturing the page alive and the party member responsible for that will be well rewarded also. In any case, matters will then turn to the words that the page spoke to the party before being taken away by the guards.

Lord Maric will muse that sending a force of Knights of the Sword to investigate the inn will rouse suspicion and that their prey might flee. He will suggest that the pc's investigate and, if possible, arrest the person responsible for ordering the attempt.

The pc's will be sent off immediately, before the trail gets cold.

The inn is only half a day's riding distance from Feravan. The pc's will be provided with mounts in order to speed their investigation. Once they reach the inn they will find it to be nearly empty, with a few mercenaries, who are actually Drakkarim, sitting at the largest table. There is also a young child sitting with the mercenaries, who is actually a Helghast in disguise.

One of the mercenaries' facial features match the page's description and the pc's will immediately start a confrontation. A fight is sure to ensue, which the pc's will hopefully win. If they do they will have tied up another loose end but the matter of who was behind all of this remains, as does what to do with the child, who will claim to have been kidnapped by the mercenaries to be sold into slavery.

Through canny usage of their disciplines and good roleplaying the pc's can force the Helghast to show its true self and



another battle will ensue. If victorious the pc's will now know that it was the Darklords of Helgedad who were behind the assassination attempt and can report this news back to Lord Maric. The adventure will then be a success and the pc's will all increase by one rank. If they fail at uncovering the Helghast then the bodies of the Drakkar will have documents pertaining to Telestria about their persons. This will result in higher tensions between Illion and Talestria and the adventure will have failed.

## ACT 1: THE TOURNEY.

*It is mid morning in Feravan, the capital city of the kingdom of Illion. A large crowd has gathered under the shadow of castle Whiterock to watch the annual tourney of Illion taking place. This day, all work is forgotten as peasantry and nobility gather together to watch some of the finest knights of Illion display their skills of riding, jousting and melee. Everything is in place and the tourney will begin any minute. The crowd, full of commoners and nobility alike, tenses with anticipation.*

*Lord Maric sits on a raised platform, whilst his son, Gerold, sits to his right hand side. Lady Margetta Mabelode sits on Lord Maric's left, fanning herself with an exquisitely crafted fan imported from Chai. Seated behind them is Steward Mayen Poole with his family and the nobility of Illion are gathered all around them.*

*Standing close to the royal platform, however, are strangers from distant lands. Clad in simple, yet durable, clothing these strangers arrived in Illion only last night, on errands of their own. Some had wished to leave for home right away but Lord Maric had commanded them to stay and enjoy the tourney.*

*'So young ones, this is how we have fun in Illion. Are you not happy to have stayed? Surely your superiors will not*

*begrudge you a bit of revelry. Abstaining from fun is not good for us.'* King Maric bellows to you in a booming voice.

If there are any Kai Lords in the party then Lord Maric's son will speak:

*'Papa, you should have commanded the Kai to take part so we could see how such a renowned warrior of Sommerlund would face up to a knight of fair Illion.'* Little Lord Gerold piped up with an arrogant sniff, indicating the Sommlending would not fare very well in such a match.

*'Now now dear, Sommlendings are nice valorous folk. A little simple perhaps and a little boorish but human all the same,'* Lady Margetta chides Gerold while fanning herself vigorously.

Reasons for the PC's to be in Illion:

**Kai Lords:** The grandmasters of the Order often stay in communicate with the leaders of all the nations of Magnamund, keeping them updated as to the movements of the Giaks, Drakkarim and fouler things beyond the borders of the Darklands. A Kai Lord may have been sent to Illion to inform the Council that all is quiet upon the black border...for now.

**Brother of the Crystal Star:** Upon attaining the rank of Journeyman a Brother of the Crystal Star is often called upon to journey to other nations and introduce himself to foreign courts, in order to build a lasting relationship.

**Herbwarden of Batar:** A Herbwarden may have come to the tourney to sell some potions or to offer his services in curing any diseases.

**Magician of Dessi:** A magician of Dessi may have come to Illion bearing an important message from the Magi Regnanti for the Council of Elder Knights.

**Dwarven Gunner of Bor:** A dwarven Gunner may be in Illion to gauge the mood of the market and whether it holds good prospects for the dwarves to come here and sell their wares.

**Buccaneer of Shadaki:** A Buccaneer of Shadaki might be in between sea voyages and decide to see the tourney to pass the time.

**Vakeros Warrior Mage:** A Vakeros may be in Illion as a bodyguard to a Magician of Dessi. Alternatively, he may be carrying an important message from the Magi Regnanti for the Council of Elder Knights.

**Border Ranger of the North:** Tourneys are renowned not just for the jousting that takes place but also for their archery competitions. These may be just the thing to draw a Border Ranger of the North to come to Illion and take part.

**Ice Barbarian of Kalte:** Many trade caravans make Illion their destination as it is a rich land with prosperous folk who are willing to spend coin to purchase all sorts of goods. An Ice Barbarian might be a guard on just such a caravan that has made its way to Illion from Kalte.

**Kloon Sage of Chaman:** A Kloon Sage of Chaman might be in Illion to offer their services as advisors to the court or building bonds for future employment opportunities.

**Telchos Warrior:** A Telchos Warrior might be in Illion while wandering the world in search of adventure and knowledge of the lands beyond their borders.

**Jousting Rules:** Players of knight characters may wish to take part in the tourney themselves. In fact, it will be expected of them. Jousting is resolved by taking the Combat Ratio of the two knights facing each other in the lists and rolling on the combat results table; whoever deals greater than 6 points

# Murder at the Tourney

of damage manages to unhorse his opponent and win the tilt. If both knights are unable to do more than 6 points of damage then they break their lances on each other harmlessly and must try again with new lances. If both deal more than 6 points of damage to each other then both are unhorsed.

Soon the trumpets blare and the tourney starts.

*As if on cue a parade of knights enters the lists. They are garbed in gleaming plate and the colours of their house and armed with long lances of ashen wood. Five waist high barricades have been erected in the centre of the field and the knights enter from both ends until all five barricades have two knights apiece.*

*With a simultaneous salute to the crowd, all knights charge at each other as one and the crowd roars with approval. The ground seems to shake under the hooves of their mounts and then suddenly 10 lances strike 10 shields... and every one of them breaks with a loud snapping sound. The peasants roar again, as does Lord Maric and all of the nobility around him, many standing up and shouting their approval. For all lances to break at the start of a tourney without a single rider being unhorsed is an excellent omen and heralds a great day of entertainment and glory to come.*

*The knights charge to the ends of the field where their squires each hand them a new lance, then whip their mounts around and charge again...*

The day passes swiftly and it is soon midday. Pages begin to come out into the stands offering refreshments to the nobles seated there. Lord Maric is in high spirits as the knights of House Mabelode have outperformed all the others, leaving him beaming with pride. Soon the jousting is over and it is time for the grand melee to begin.

The knights all ride into the field for one last salute to the crowd, when suddenly disaster strikes!

## ACT 2: MURDER!

*From the corner of your eye you catch a fleeting glimpse of a page with a loaded crossbow in his hands. He squeezes the trigger, sending a bolt speeding its way towards little Gerold Mabelode!*

If there is either a Brother of the Crystal Star or a Magician of Dessi in the party they have a chance to avert disaster by acting swiftly. The Brother of the Crystal Star can cast Levitation at the bolt, thus rendering it harmless. The Magician of Dessi can use Elementalism to summon a strong gust of wind to knock the crossbow bolt out of the sky. The Vakeors Warrior Mage, if he is standing next to Gerold Mabelode can use the Discipline of Puuros to swap places with Gerold thus taking the crossbow bolt meant for him (roll on the -7 chart for damage). Alternatively the Vaekros can use the Discipline of Valos to teleport himself in front of the bolt (roll on the -7 chart for damage). If either of these methods is used, the bolt misses its mark and the life of Gerold Mabelode is saved. Otherwise the bolt strikes true and leaves a mortal wound. In either case Lord Maric immediately calls for the guards. The crowd surges forward to see what the commotion is all about and the assassin uses all the confusion to drop his crossbow and make his escape. The pc's are the only ones in a position to give chase as the guards are too busy keeping the crowd from turning into a mob and trying to make sense of the whole situation to even know that there is an assassin.

The page makes his way towards the far north-eastern ends of the stands where one of the exits from the stands lies. By the time the pc's manage to make their way from out of the press of the crowd,

which is surging forward for a look at Gerold, the assassin has managed to exit the stands. The pc's must make a Test with a difficulty of 6, with those with the Tracking or Mark of the Trail Disciplines gaining the requisite bonus. Success leads to them discovering the discarded crossbow nearby, as well a few bolts lying scattered a few paces to the north east, indicating the page went towards the exit. They may take the crossbow if they wish, though they will waste precious moments if they do so.

The pc's will exit the stands into a large field and they will spot the page running towards a horse tethered to a tree some distance away. They can use a bow if they wish to bring him down lethally; a Brother of the Crystal Star can use the Net spell to capture the page alive, a Magician of Dessi can use Elementalism to turn the ground under him to sticky mud, slowing him down so that the party can catch up to him, or a Dwarven Gunner of Bor can use Thunder Shot to stun him. If the party lacks these Disciplines or does not make use of them, they can attempt to catch up to the page by making a Difficulty 7 Test. If anyone in the party has the Hunting Discipline they gain a requisite bonus.

When they catch up to him he turns to face them, brandishing a dirk and hissing, 'Ye'll never take me alive!'

Page:

COMBAT SKILL 11 ENDURANCE 18

When the party reduces the page to less than 9 ENDURANCE points he drops the dirk and begs for mercy. If the party is ruthless and kills him, go straight to **Act 4**. If the party is merciful and leaves him he surrenders.

*The sound of running feet heralds the arrival of the guards. They immediately take the page into custody. He offers*

no resistance. *'The cowled man said he would pay me my weight in gold if I did it...I was to meet him at the Rowdy Rooster Inn after it was done. They said I would suffer a fate worse than death if I didn't do it!' He says, offering information in gratitude for you being merciful, even as the guards drag him away.*

*'Lord Maric will want to have a word with you,' one of the guardsman says to you before walking away with the others.*

The pc's now have the choice of either making their way straight to the Rowdy Rooster Inn or seeing Lord Maric first. If they decide to go straight to the Inn turn to **Act 3**. Otherwise they have little choice but to follow the guards back to Castle Whiterock. Once inside the courtyard a page appears and escorts them to the guest quarters within the castle. If the party asks him what became of Gerold they will learn that he is grievously wounded and being treated by the court physicians. If the party was able to prevent the crossbow bolt from reaching Gerold, they will learn he is a little shaken but otherwise alright.

They are told Lord Maric will request their presence soon and left within a sparsely decorated room that serves as the guest quarters. Here the party has a chance to recover and restore any ENDURANCE or WILLPOWER points lost thus far.

Their reprieve is soon interrupted by another page, which enters with a knock and tells them that they are summoned by Lord Maric. If they saved the boy from the crossbow bolt earlier they will be informed that he is in good health. If not, then the boy will have perished from his wound.

*You walk down the marble covered corridor and go down a long flight of stairs to the main entryway of the castle. From there you walk forward until you enter the throne room, with a herald announcing your arrival.*

*Lord Maric sits on one of the thrones, his head held in his hands as if the weariness of many years weighs down upon him. He looks up as you approach.*

If the pc's managed to save Gerold Mabelode's life then read the following:

*A smile of pure gratitude lights up the face of Lord Maric as he gazes upon you, the saviours of his son's life. Stepping down from the dais he speaks, 'Brave heroes, I and all Illion are in your eternal gratitude for saving one of the blood royals from a cowardly assassin. Furthermore, you brought the perpetrator to justice. For all of this you will be amply rewarded.'*

Lord Maric claps his hands and courtiers bring forth two items arrayed on red cushions. The first is a Firerod, which is given to the Brother of the Crystal Star, the Magician of Dessi or the Vakeros Warrior Mage who saved Gerold's life. The Firerod is a SPECIAL ITEM that can be used to fire a scorching ray of pure fire at an opponent in battle. This is done in the same way as firing a bow. The opponent must roll on the -6 section for damage. The Firerod can be used once a day and only in sunlight. The second item is a jewelled sword, which was to be given to the winner of the tourney. It will now be given to whoever forced the assassin to surrender and spared his life. The sword is magical and adds +2 to the COMBAT SKILL of whoever uses it.

If the pc's did not manage to save the life of Gerold Mabelode then read the following:

*Lord Maric's face is lined with worry and grief as he steps down from the dais. From behind the throne room the sounds of quiet sobbing can be heard; the voice has a feminine tinge; undoubtedly Lady Margetta grieving for her son. Maric*

*speaks slowly, anger and grief straining his voice, 'You have my gratitude for bringing to justice my son's assassin. Would that his life could also have been saved but that was not to be. We are still questioning the assassin, for I fear he is but a pawn. We will have him singing about his real employers soon enough. Until then, here is a gift I have for you. It was to be presented to the winner of today's tourney but it is only fitting that you receive it for your quick thinking and valorous actions.'*

King Maric claps his hand and a courtier appears bearing an exquisite jewelled sword on a red cushion. It is presented to the player who forced the page to surrender and spared his life. The sword is magical and adds +2 to the COMBAT SKILL of its user.

Now is the time for the party to tell Lord Maric of what the page told them, about the cowled man and the rendezvous at the Rowdy Rooster Inn. If they do not automatically say this, gently nudge them by having Lord Maric ask them if there is any important information they may have to impart.

When the party mentions this, read the following:

*Lord Maric steeples his fingers in front of his face and says, 'Intriguing. It appears we may yet have a chance of catching the true culprit behind all of this. We must move quickly if we are to catch good his escape. I could send an entire host of Knights but he would see them coming and slip away. No...better to send someone more discreet, someone who can get to him before he knows you are there. Someone like you!'*

If the pc's agree then preparations are made immediately. They are instructed to capture the cowled figure without killing him if possible and are granted fresh mounts to make their journey swiftly, as

# Murder at the Tourney

well as directions to the Rowdy Rooster Inn which is only a short distance away from Feravan.

## ACT 3: THE ROWDY

### ROOSTER INN

*You travel swiftly through the rolling countryside of Illion. Large open fields and pastures greet you as you travel upon the kingsroad. You have little time to enjoy the scenery however, as your mind is on more important things.*

If the party met Lord Maric before going to the Rowdy Rooster they will have mounts, making their journey faster and will arrive by late afternoon. Otherwise they will arrive by late evening.

The Rowdy Rooster Inn stands near a crossroads, where the Kingsroad splits into three parts, one leading to Feravan, the others leading to other major cities. There are only a few horses stabled outside. There is one exit from the inn, which is via the main door leading inside.

If the pc's enter they find that the inn stands mostly empty. The largest table of the inn is taken over by a large company of what appear to be mercenaries with hard faces and drab clothing. One of their number is cowled and hooded. There also appears to be a small child seated with them, looking rather out of place in such company.

Apart from the mercenaries there are a couple of farmers and merchants seated close by and all turn around to glance at the newcomers warily. An aura of menace hangs in the air, the source being the mercenaries at the table.

If questioned the mercenaries remain silent. Further attempts will draw only curses.

If any in the party broach the subject of the attempted assassination one of the mercenaries jumps up, draws his sword and yells, 'They're onto us. Kill them all.'

All the mercenaries, including the cowled man leap up, cold steel in their hands, and attack the party.

#### Drakkarm X 6

COMBAT SKILL: 15    ENDURANCE: 23

The Drakkarm fight to the death refusing any offers to surrender, though the party can attempt to knock them unconscious with non-lethal damage.

A quick search of the drakkarm reveals only basic arms and armour. However, on the body of the cowled man is a letter sealed with the crest of Telestria which reads:

*Kormack,*

*Make sure that the page is killed so that he cannot be captured and questioned. You and your band will get the remainder of your money when this task is completed.*

The letter is unsigned. Canny players might wonder why the letter has been sealed with the crest of Talestria, as that is damning evidence in itself. They may even guess that it is a forgery, meant to falsely implicate Talestria.

After the fight the matter of the child remains. He sits, seemingly unperturbed by all the violence and bloodshed. If asked who he is and what he is doing here he will impart the following information:

-He was kidnapped from a nearby village by the 'mercenaries' to be sold into slavery.

-He has been sitting here at the tavern all day as the mercenaries waited for someone to come meet them.

-He has no other information about the mercenaries and only wishes to go back home.

The child is actually a Helghast in disguise and the true leader of the band of Drakkarm. It was sent here by the Darklords to weaken Illion and Talestria by setting them upon one another and was the one who concocted the assassination plot, as well as connived to put the blame onto Talestria by planting false letters on both the page and the cowled Drakkarm. There are a few ways the pc's can detect the child's true identity:

-A Brother of the Crystal Star can use the Sense Evil discipline to detect that the child is wholly evil and has evil intentions towards the party.

-A Kailord can use the Sixth Sense to make a Test with a difficulty of 7 to detect that there is something very wrong with the boy. The Test, if successful will also detect hostile intent towards the party.

-A Border Ranger of the North can make use of Mark of Instinct to make a Test with a difficulty of 7 to detect that there is something very wrong with the boy. The Test, if successful, will also detect hostile intent from the part of the boy towards the party.

-A sinister aura appears to pervade the boy, suffusing the interior of the inn. All in the party can feel it. The boy also seems coldly indifferent to all the blood that has been spilled around him.

-If asked specifics about where he was kidnapped from the boy will only give vague, uncertain answers. If the party

offers to return him to his home the boy will become defensive and refuse to move from his seat, claiming that he will go back by himself.

-If the innkeeper is questioned he will say that earlier during the day the 'mercenaries' appeared to be deferring to the boy and that he seemed to be giving them orders. Questioning the terrified innkeeper is a diplomacy Test vs a difficulty of 5, with a +2 bonus for good roleplaying.

-Canny players may decide to prick the boy with a weapon, to see if he is truly what he seems to be. If they decide to do this the boy realises that the game is up and reveals his true identity, attacking the players.

By this time the party will have realised there is something very wrong with the boy and that he is not what he seems. Directly confronting the boy will result in the Helghast revealing its true identity as it realises the game is up. It also knows the party is weakened from the fight against the Drakkarim and will attempt to finish them off, kill the other witnesses in the inn and then flee. It transforms into its true form, summons its bluefire spear and immediately attacks a party member with a magical weapon or a magic using party member, both of which it knows can harm it.

#### **Helghast:**

COMBAT SKILL 22    ENDURANCE  
30

One of the greatest assets available to the Darklords, the Helghasts ability to shape-change allows them to destabilise governments from within and bring about the defeat of an enemy without lifting a single black blade. The natural form of a Helghast is of a rotting, skeletal human with blazing sockets instead of eyes.

They are able to summon a Bluefire Spear from Helgedad, no matter where they are in Magnamund, a five foot shaft of black iron topped with a

carved stone head. Using this, they can launch a malevolent blast of blue fire at their enemies, inflicting double the ENDURANCE loss of anyone it fights both in hand-to-hand and ranged combat. They also possess the Mindblast discipline and are immune to non-magical weapons

### ACT 4: FALSE IMPLICATIONS

On the pages body the pc's discover 50 Lune and an envelope addressed to the page, with a broken seal. Any pc can make a Heraldry Test at Difficulty 5 to learn that the seal is of the nation of Talestria. Any knights in the party gain a +2 bonus to the Test result. A Knight of the Sword with the Speech of the Herald discipline does not need to make a Test and can automatically identify Talestria's seal. The letter reads:

*Jek,*

*Kill the boy as we agreed and you will be rewarded handsomely. Make good your escape and return to Talestria, where we await your arrival with great impatience.*

The letter is unsigned. It is also a forgery, having been written by the Helghast who forced the page to carry it on his person or suffer a fate worse than death. When presented to Lord Maric the letter will implicate Talestria

in the assassination of his son, resulting in higher tensions between the two nations.

The pc's will be left with a sour taste in their mouth as they unwittingly played into the hands of Helgedad and leave Illion with a bad feeling that they made a grievous error.

No increases in rank should be awarded to the pc's in case of this outcome.

### ACT 5: A FEAST FOR HEROES

With the Helghast revealed and defeated the pc's will now realise that the assassination plot was orchestrated in the Helgedad and not in Talestria. They can communicate this information back to Lord Maric. They are hailed as heroes, and a great feast is held to celebrate their uncovering of the plot. If they saved the life of Gerold Mabelode they are doubly honoured, and granted the titles of honorary Knights of the Sword. If they were unable to save Gerold then the celebrations are tinged with sorrow and cups are raised to the young lord's memory.

Regardless, all pc's gain a new rank and a new discipline; the pc's also gain a strong ally in Illion and will always be welcome here.

The End.

# Barachan Isles

## By Vincent Darlage

The Barachan Isles are the home of the Barachan pirates, also known as the Red Brotherhood. Just off the shore of Zingara, the Barachans are a group of 13 major islands (and a large number of minor islands) settled by Argossean rogues determined to live a pirate's life – or perhaps just to live off the pirates themselves. The Barachan pirates are some of the most successful pirates of the Hyborian age, seeking to find money and profit without having to share it with a feudal overlord or tax collector. Also on the islands are indigenous peoples, the Barach and the Arahawk, natives who descend from Picts and the ancient Zing people and have lived on the islands long before the Zingarans and Argosseans discovered them.

### Geography and Climate

Both geography and climate vary from one island to the next. Three of the major islands are fairly flat without volcanoes or evidence of volcanic activity. They are part of an ancient mountain range that was dunked underwater during the various cataclysms. The other 10 major islands have towering crags and mountain ranges, as well as a few volcanoes. Volcanoes are also active beneath the waves. The islands have many small coves sprinkled throughout them, safe havens for pirates and smugglers.

The climate is tropical but the flatter islands are fairly arid because of cool currents. The remainder of the islands have rainforests and semi-desert regions because of the interaction of the trade winds (warm and moist) with the mountains (which create rain shadows). Sandy white beaches and lush colourful jungles typify these islands. About 60% of the available land is covered in verdant forests. Winters are also warm but drier than the summers. Hurricanes routinely batter the islands, usually striking from a southerly direction and moving north or northeast (into Zingara).

### Geographical Features

**Major Islands:** The best known geographical features of the Barachan Isles are the islands themselves. The 13 major islands are: Ayiti, Bohio, Cahaya, Caizcimu, Ciguayos, Guacayarina, Guanabo, Hanigagia, Magua, Marien, Quisqueya, Xaragua and Yaquino. The three flat islands are Magua, Quisqueya and Xaragua; the other 10 are mountainous, as described in the previous section. The larger islands have rivers and fairly large native settlements. Many have Zingaran settlements and plantations located on them, which are occasionally sacked by the Barachan pirates.

**Minor Islands:** In addition to the largest islands, many smaller islands exist, such as the islands of Bainoa, Cayabo, Higuey, Huhabo, Maguana, Tortage and Yaguana.

**Tortage:** Tortage is one of the minor islands of the archipelago, in the sense that minor means small. Tortage is actually one of the most important islands in the whole island chain. The island has one harbour, Cachalot Cove. Palm trees grow all over the island, including the tops of the cliffs around the inland lake above the harbour. The cliffs around Tortage form a horseshoe around the harbour. The harbour itself is dangerous because of sunken ships and coral reefs just below the surface. Only navigators and pilots trained in the safe path can easily take their ship into the harbour without getting snagged or damaged.

- **Cachalot Cove:** Cachalot Cove is the name of the single natural harbour on the island. The cove is surrounded by the town of Tortage.
- **High Lake:** On one of the small islands, the island of Tortage, a large lake sits above the city, feeding fresh water to the city in a series of cascading falls.
- **Tortage:** Tortage has one town, also called Tortage. The town is detailed on page 36.

**Trallibes:** Near the coast of Zingara, to the north-west of the Barachan Islands are a group of related islands called the Trallibes. These islands are an archipelago of Zingara for the most part, although some of the outer islands are made of coral. The sides facing Zingara tend to have beautiful white sandy beaches but the sides facing the open ocean have a much more battered appearance and are little used by pirates or indigenous peoples. The Trallibes may have a small island chain linking them to the Barachan Isles. The larger Trallibes have small settlements of indigenous peoples on them similar to those living on the Barachans. A few smuggler and pirate settlements may also be found sprinkled throughout the tiny islands.

### Barachan Pirates

The people of the Barachan Islands are mostly Argossean. Some estimates claim as much as three-quarters of the population is Argossean. The remainder of the people are diverse, coming from outlaws and adventurers from many lands, as well as a few descendants of indigenous tribes.

The Barachan pirates arm themselves with cutlasses and daggers. Some wield pikes, battleaxes and spears. Unlike their Argossean brethren, the freebooters eschew robes and tebanna in favour of silk breeks, loose-fitting shirts and fancy coats. Belts are common accessories, as is jewellery. Many wear armour, including burgonets. Women either dress as the men, wear a long tunic with the sides slit up along the legs, or they may wear a more abbreviated outfit, such as a halter top and a bottom which is little more than a string-belt holding up two strips of cloth (one in front, one in back).

### Indigenous Peoples

There are indigenous people on these islands, natives who have lived there long before the Argosseans and Zingarans arrived. There are two basic tribes: the Barach and the Arahawks. They may be related to the

Picts or to the Zingg people who inhabited Zingara before the Hyborians arrived. More likely, they are a mixture of Pict and Zingg. Their skin is bronze- or olive-coloured and their hair is dark, coarse and flowing. Their foreheads are quite flat because their mothers strap a padded board across their foreheads when they were babies, which flattened the soft skull. They find flat foreheads attractive. Their dark eyes are large and slightly oblique. They are average in height for a human but they look tall because of their slender builds. The Barachs are a little taller and a bit more muscular than the Arahawks.

Hair is often worn with bangs in front and long in the back. They are clean-shaven and their bodies are pretty much hairless (body hair and beards are considered shameful, so they are plucked out). Men usually go about naked or they may wear a loin cloth. Older Arahawk men wear a short skirt. Single women also walk around naked but married women wear an apron of cotton or palm fibres over their genitalia. The length and width of the apron varies depending on rank, with the longer length belonging to higher ranked women. Men and women wear shells, jewellery and/or body paint. The favoured colour for body paint is red. Often additional body paint is used to create intricate patterns or designs with other colours. Their eyes are often circled in black. The paint, made from various vegetables and oils, protects them from insect bites. Cotton arm and leg ties indicate rank. Most jewellery is made from seashells, feathers, animal teeth, semi-precious or precious stones and bones, sometimes layered with gold.

Among the Arahawk, tattoos and piercings are considered sacred; the higher a tattoo or piercing is on the body, the closer to one's god or spiritual guide one is. Men usually get tattoos while women prefer piercings.

## Cultural Traits

### Barachan Pirates

The 'civilised' people of the Barachan Isles are pirates, thieves, smugglers and cut-throats. They are the monsters of the sea.

They are known to oppose and violate every law known to man and god alike. Some have said that death lurks in their very smiles. Although technically outlaws (and ostensibly hunted by the Argossean navy), the Barachan pirates, devils incarnate by those unfortunates who have dealt with them on the sea, are generally considered heroes in Argos, especially by the commoners. They are despised and considered little more than sea-roving demons by the Zingarans, the usual prey of the Red Brotherhood.

Like the Argosseans, the Barachan pirates and their associates are mercantile and political. They are a little more tradition-bound than their old compatriots but survival on the sea often depends on the tried and true. That said the Barachan pirates are still up for something unfamiliar if the risk seems acceptable. Just like the Argosseans, being talked about is a wonderful thing, for it offers self-worth. The pirate's code, known to the Barachans as the Articles of Agreement, is important to the pirates and not only do the pirates believe in their articles, they feel they must be seen by all as supporting those articles. A pirate in private often behaves far differently than one in public, because poor behaviour does not count if it is not witnessed – or if no one survives the act of being witness to a behaviour best left unseen.

Although outcasts and outlaws who behave in ways seen to be maniacal and horrible, many Barachan pirates still feel they have honour in their murderous, predatory actions. Of course, honour and honesty are two different things; one should expect a Barachan pirate to keep to his code but one should not expect him to be particularly honest to anyone other than a fellow shipmate. Truth comes from other sources than the self but honour is deeply personal. Thus pirates are always watching out for threats to their sense of honour and any discovered threats are dealt with violently. Allegiance is an important issue among the pirates, for without an oath of allegiance, one cannot serve a captain. An oath of allegiance is considered more binding than a written contract, save perhaps the Articles of Agreement.

These murderous scoundrels are not lazy people at all, preferring to keep busy. Lazy pirates are put to work by the other crewmen. Most mariners cannot swim, so going overboard is usually a death-sentence, as ships moving reasonably quickly cannot turn around fast enough to save a person who cannot swim. Unless a line or some floatable object is quickly given to the overboard man, he is usually just presumed lost.

Some buccaneers do live in lifelong male partnerships, however, through the institution of *matelotage*. The partners are called *matelots* and they share their property, food and loot with each other. Whether these partnerships are sexual or not is academic. Most of these agreements are to maximise their wealth and minimise their losses. Essentially, if one partner dies, all of his shares go to the surviving partner (although some agreements stipulate that some portion goes to shore-bound wives or girlfriends), much like a will.

## Indigenous Peoples

Of the indigenous peoples, the Barach are aggressive, while the Arahawks are peaceful. The Barach are patriarchal, while the Arahawks are matrilineal. Still, women are respected in both cultures. Among the Barach, the women may do most of the domestic duties and farming while the husbands fish and hunt but their culture was socially equal in terms of giving women a voice in politics and society. Among the Arahawks, if a male heir was not present at a death, the inheritance or succession goes to the eldest child of either sex of the dead person's sister.

The Arahawk also have sexual divisions of labour, just as the Barach, wherein the men handle the hunting and fishing, while the women handle the farming and domestic working. The Arahawk people permit polygamy and both men and women may have two or three spouses. Some chiefs have up to 30 wives. However, among the Arahawk, the women have less say in governmental and societal issues than among the Barach. However, the Barach fear appearing effeminate to the point

# Barachan Isles

they actually have separate languages for men and women.

The indigenous people are skilled at hunting, sailing, fishing, canoe making and navigation. Indeed, their dugout canoes are a source of pride among them. They are an agrarian people for the most part, planting small gardens of manioc and sweet potatoes. Hunting is slim, as there are few actual game animals on the islands but they do capture iguanas, turtles and collect shellfish.

The Barach tribes have several rite-of-passage ceremonies to mark various times in a person's life. When a male is born, the father accepts a cut by a tooth from a large rodent; he must take this cut without flinching lest he curse his son to be a coward and/or a weakling. The child is then rubbed down with the fat from a slaughtered Arahawk so he absorbs strength and courage. As the boy grows he is taught how to make and use weapons and he is taught methods to improve his strength for the strenuous rite-of-passage at age 12 wherein he ceases to be a boy and becomes a warrior. The initiation into warriorhood is brutal and at no point during the initiation can the boy show even an inkling of pain. The boy sits on a ceremonial stool in front of all the warriors as his father explains his future duties. A large, live bird is taken and beaten against the boy's body until the bird dies. The father takes the tooth of a large island rodent and cuts the boy in several places, again, the boy is not permitted to flinch lest he remain a boy for another year. As he is being cut, the other warriors are dipping the dead bird into pepper oil. The peppered bird is then rubbed all over the boy's body. The boy is then given the heart of the bird to eat. After this treatment, the boy is sent to his hammock to fast. When the fasting is over, the new warrior is given a new name, taught the male language of the people and is thereafter a warrior in full-standing.

While the Arahawk are fairly peaceful, especially internally, the Barach are brutal even toward each other. Internal conflict and strife are common. Feuds spring up and the Barach raid each other almost as

often as they raid the Arahawks or the small pirate settlements they find. The Barach are also cannibals and eat portions of their fallen foes in rituals designed to transfer bravery to themselves. The Barach often cut off the limbs of their foes and bring them back to their villages as trophies.

Both tribes grow a certain amount of tobacco (indeed, the Zingarans discovered it on these islands before the Argosseans established a strong presence here). The tribesmen smoke the tobacco either as tightly rolled leaves (much like a cigar) or in pipes. Pipes are the preferred method. A native pipe has a Y-shaped stem, though, so it can be inhaled directly through the nose. This can cause unconsciousness fairly quickly but is still an enjoyable pastime among the natives.

## History

The early history of the islands is unknown. The people may be remnants of the Zingg or they could be coastal Picts. They could even be a mixture of the two. The Barach seem the most Pict-like of the two major peoples. Some scholars believe the Barach are mostly Pictish, while the Arahawk are mostly Zingg. However, the two tribes have interbred so much that from outward appearance there is no difference. The Barach people were slowly becoming the dominant race, although they were (and still are) numerically inferior and were in the process of eliminating or absorbing the Arahawks when the Argosseans stumbled into the picture and changed the status quo.

The Barachan Isles got their start long ago as an Argossean pirate base when Zingaran ships captured Argossean merchant ships and marooned the crews on the islands. The crews would hunt down some animal and, with much smoke and odour, cook it on the beaches and lure a ship in close, then capture it themselves. Thus, careers of piracy began. The new pirates preyed upon the Zingarans, who marooned them in the first place and eventually gained the underhanded approval of Argos. Over 100 years ago the pirate haven of Tortage was founded.

## Social Structure

### Barachan Pirates

Pirates, believe it or not, have a social structure. They need one if they are to survive. The murderous rogues may be uniformly self-interested but if they want to succeed, they must learn to cooperate with others. A pirate ship with but one selfish pirate on board is not much of a threat to anyone. Even these hardened bands of criminals have working social groups cooperating for the greater good of their ship.

The Barachan Pirates have a military structure, with the officers at the top and the able-bodied crew beneath them; however, unlike the military, the Barachan pirates have a more democratic system of choosing their leaders. They uniformly reject the usual social structure found throughout the Hyborian age nations where an aristocratic class is automatically chosen to lead without regard to ability but because of birth. The pirates prefer ability over random chance, so they elect their top officers, who then appoint from the crew any secondary leadership positions – again, giving preference to ability over heritage.

### OFFICERS

Those seeking power on a pirate ship usually go for the officer's positions, usually by becoming a mate and moving up through the ranks from there. Most officers have one or two mates to handle their duties when off-shift. The captain and quartermaster are voted into power by the crew and they appoint the rest of the officers. Crewmen wanting to become an officer or officers wishing to move up in rank are only allowed to challenge their target when the ship makes landfall. Challenges are fights to the death.

### Captain

The captain is responsible for the ship and its arbitrator, master and commander. The captain of a Barachan ship is also trained as a helmsman and is perfectly capable of steering the ship. Only a full brother is allowed to challenge the captain. Untried members who attempt this are attacked



by the entire crew. Captains are voted in by the crew and his power is only absolute when his ship is engaging other ships or ports; otherwise, his commands can be countermanded by the quartermaster. Captains are usually highly regarded fighters and/or strategists whom the crew trusts to lead them to victory and plunder. Crews vote in their captains because they resist giving in to old social orders where leaders are chosen from supposedly elite aristocrats based on birth and social rank instead of on skill and trustworthiness.

Having served on naval vessels from Argos or other maritime nations prior to becoming a pirate, many sailors hated the arbitrary and tyrannical rule these naval masters preferred, so they usually take a different tack once they escape those ships and join a Barachan pirate crew. Further, autocratic captains, while they make economic sense for a merchant ship (because they have to deal with owners whose interests are not the same as the crew), do not make sense for pirate ships, since they do not have to deal with a ship owner as the ships the pirates sail on are stolen. Instead, pirate captains are elected to their position for leadership and navigation skills. They are expected to be level-headed and decisive in battle but to be a father-figure to the crew the rest of the time, using only enough discipline to keep the ship functioning safely. The captain can be voted out of office for being too brutal or for going against the crew's wishes. This is acceptable to the pirate captain who learned to hate the abusive (and often incompetent) leadership of aristocratic captains on military ships. Also, just from a basic economic viewpoint, captain predation keeps sailors from effectively cooperating for the profit of all – so pirate ships simply do not allow captain predation. The autocratic captain works fine for the merchant ship, because the owners are the ones making the profit (the sailors make their wage regardless) but not so much on a pirate ship because the sailors are the owners. Basically, the pirate captain is penalised for abusing the crew, whereas merchant captains are rewarded by the ship owners for abusing the crew (to keep costs low).

When not engaged in battle, the captain is basically just a voting member of the crew and the quartermaster commands the ship; but, as soon as prey is targeted, the captain rises to the fore, leading his men to victory and glory and plunder. The captain earns three shares of any plunder.

## CAPTAIN STROM OF THE BARACHAN ISLES

An example of a Barachan captain from Robert E. Howard's stories is Strom, the captain of the carrack *Red Hand*. Appearing in Robert E. Howard's *The Black Stranger*, Strom is a lusty, powerful, tawny-haired man with a devil-may-care attitude. Not as dishonourable as many pirates, he is still a freebooter of some notoriety, perfectly willing to betray an ally if the circumstances warrant the betrayal. His men fight with pikes, war spears, battleaxes, cutlasses and longbows. Most of his pirates wear armour, such as mail shirts and brigandines, and wear burgonet helmets. Strom personally forgoes the helmet because he prefers his vision and hearing to be unimpaired. He does wear a breastplate, however, a fact which saved his life when he was shot with an arrow on the Pictish shore.

## Quartermaster

The quartermaster is the second highest ranking officer on a Barachan pirate ship although in many ways his power exceeds that of the captain. Because pirates fear dictatorial control (as well as the economic failure an autocratic captain creates in a pirate ship), the quartermaster has the power to veto a captain's decision, unless the ship is pursuing a quarry or engaged in a fight. Indeed, the quartermaster is usually the real power on a ship when it is not actively engaged in piracy.

The quartermaster is responsible for discipline on the ship and ensuring the ship follows the Articles of Agreement. He assesses punishments for crewmen who violate the articles. Only the quartermaster is allowed to decree a punishment and only then with either the agreement of the captain or with the positive vote of the rest of the crew. He cannot act on his own

to discipline a crewman. If two crewmen come to a duel, the quartermaster makes sure the duel is fair. He acts as judge if a criminal case is brought to trial on the ship. The quartermaster is expected to lead the boarding party whenever the pirates go aboard another ship and he decides if a ship is worth capturing, sinking or freeing. The quartermaster is voted in by the crew and often becomes the next captain if the captain is deposed, gravely wounded or killed. If a ship is captured, the quartermaster usually commands the second ship.

## First Mate

The first mate, also called the Captain's Mate, is in command of the ship when the captain has other duties or concerns. His job is to enforce the captain's will, functioning as a liaison between the captain and the crew. Most pirate ships in the Barachans do not use the First Mate position as it comes into too much conflict with the quartermaster. However, if the quartermaster takes command of a second ship, a first mate is often temporarily appointed to help the captain on the original ship and a second mate is appointed for the quartermaster.

## Bos'n

The Bos'n is the crew's foreman. He ensures the rigging and sails are ship-shape. The Bos'n is also in charge of ship maintenance. He is in charge of all the ship's carpenters. If the ship is large enough, he has one or two Bos'n's Mates to aid him.

## Navigator

The navigator is trained to read charts and maps and maintains the ship's charts. The navigator's job is to set the ship's course. He reports directly to the captain and is also trained to steer the ship, functioning as the helmsman when the captain's duties take him elsewhere. Navigators from captured ships are usually pressed into service.

## CREWMEN

A pirate ship goes nowhere without a crew. Crewmen are either full members of the brotherhood or are provisional members. Most Barachan crewmen are Argossean but a smattering of other races can be found

# Barachan Isles

among them. Conan the Cimmerian was once a Barachan pirate, for example. Profit is the sole motive of the crew, so racial bigotry rarely entered into the picture. Crewmen can move up in rank by challenging someone of higher rank. A challenge is usually a fight to the death. Crewmen can only challenge an officer for his position when the ship has made landfall. Almost all crewmen are volunteers. Only rarely does a pirate ship press people unwillingly into service and usually only for certain hard-to-fill positions, such as ship's surgeon, carpenters, armourers and musicians.

## Full Members

The bulk of a pirate horde is mostly made up of those with a full membership in the crew. These pirates have signed the Articles of Agreement, sworn an oath of allegiance and participated in at least three raids. There are typically anywhere from 80 to 300 men on a pirate ship (keep in mind that most merchant ships only have around 10 to 20 crewmen; pirates need to vastly outnumber their prey to stay successful).

Crewmen hold the following positions on a naval ship: cabin boy; carpenter; cook; coxswain; fireman; grapher; lookout; mate; rigger; seaman; and swabbie. Once a crewman is assigned a position, he remains in that position until situations among the crew change. This means every engagement is a chance for a promotion to a new position. The cabin boy is the captain's personal servant, usually a young boy or even a slave, but a sailor can be assigned the role if necessary. Carpenters are responsible for repairing the ship and answer to the Bos'n (carpenters from captured ships are almost always pressed into permanent service). Cooks are usually crewmen who are unable to perform other functions because of wounds; they are in charge of providing meals out of the dried, salted and mouldy provisions available for the crew. The coxswain is responsible for the captain's launch. The fireman is responsible for monitoring all fires on board ship. They also take charge in dowsing fires which are out of control. A cooper makes barrels on the ship and

ensures rodents stay out of the food stores. A grapher paints the ship, makes any signs and draws any maps. The lookouts watch the horizon and announce incoming ships, weather patterns and land. Mates are foremen in charge of various groups of seamen or assistants to the officers. Riggers are responsible for the ship's lines, sails and rigging. Able-bodied seamen handle the rest of the general shipboard duties. Swabbies are responsible for cleaning the ship, including the deck, the hold and the outer hull. The swabbie position is typically a punishment and crewmen on this duty usually wait for a day when they return to having a real assignment; among the pirates, the swabbies look for opportunities to 'remove' other crewmen so they can move up to being a real crewman again.

As mentioned, carpenters are responsible for maintaining the ship. This duty cannot be understated. A pirate crew lives and dies by the seaworthiness of their ship. Carpenters and their assistants repair battle damage, of course, but they also use wooden plugs and oakum fibres to make sure the ship's seams are not too leaky. Carpenters are highly valued, naturally, so any captured carpenters are quickly pressed into service and forced to sign the Articles of Agreement if they refuse to do it voluntarily.

Some crews carry a surgeon or healer of some kind to treat colds, fevers and/or sexual diseases. Surgeons also perform amputations in hopes of saving the wounded after particularly savage battles. If a surgeon is not available, then the ship's carpenter is usually called upon to do the chore; after all, he has cutting tools and the skills to use them. Cooks are also sometimes pressed into concocting something in their pots to help heal certain illnesses. If a captured crew has a surgeon, the surgeon is almost always pressed into service but usually is not forced to sign the Articles of Agreement. The surgeon is usually placed in quarters in the bow of the ship, below the waterline. The room is unlit and cramped with almost no ventilation. The sick and dying are piled into this little

room, which quickly fills with the odours of disease, infections, bodily fluids, vomit and other wounds.

## Provisional Members

Provisional members have signed the Articles of Agreement and sworn their oath of allegiance but have not proven themselves by participating in three raids. Many provisional members, unless they have skills such as carpentry or navigation, start out as swabbies on a pirate ship. Until they prove themselves, many provisional members may find themselves subjected to various hazing rituals. Conscripts (persons pressed into service) never become full members of the crew unless they prove themselves to be loyal later and voluntarily ascribe their name or mark on the Articles of Agreement.

## SLAVES

Contrary to some myths about the Hyborian age, the Barachan pirates are part of a slaving culture, especially the ones living on the island settlements. The pirates usually do not free captured slaves (unless the slave is particularly skilled at navigation or carpentry) but keep them as part of the plunder. Sometimes wounded pirates receive slaves as recompense when they are landed at Tortage or another settlement. Lose an arm? Have a slave to carry things. Lose a leg? Here is a slave to help with movement. Most of the Barachans in Tortage and other settlements have decided the indigenous people are not suitable for slavery, so there are few native slaves. Most of the slaves used by the Barachan pirates are from Kush and the Black Coast and the second largest allotment of slaves are Shemite – and most of them serve on the island plantations. The pirates keep few (if any) slaves on the ships. If a pirate ship captures a cargo of slaves, they treat the slaves like cargo, take them to the nearest slaving port and sell them so they can divide up the value among the whole crew. Slaves on board ship are as risky as conscripts, as they may work against the crew or sabotage the ship. Again, pirates prefer volunteers.

However, a slave fleeing from his master and requesting to join a Barathan pirate crew is welcomed aboard as a provisional member just like an Argossean might be. After three conquests, the former slave is then a full member of the crew and is given equal pay and an equal vote. A pirate ship's attitude toward slaves depends on whether they are viewing the slaves as potentially valuable cargo, or as potentially valuable crewmen.

## Indigenous People

The people indigenous to the isles divide their society into four classes: chiefs; shamans; nobles; and commoners.

### CHIEFS

Chiefs are chosen from among the nobles via a form of democracy. Each settlement has its chief and the relative rank of each chief is determined by the size of their settlement, not their military strength. Like the pirates, the native tribes of the isles do not accept an aristocracy based on lineage, insisting instead their leaders should be chosen from those who have distinguished

themselves. Even women can become chiefs. Chiefs are expected to represent the village when dealing with other villages, tribes and peoples. In addition, the chiefs settle family disputes and organise village defence. Chiefs receive tribute from the village (or villages) controlled in times of war. The chiefs are in charge of the collection and distribution of food. They also organise all community festivals. The chiefs decide when to go to war. Along with the shamans, the chief is a spiritual leader as well, capable of contacting supernatural forces through hallucinogenic trances. In this manner, the chief ensures the well-being of the village. As spiritual leader, the chief owns the most powerful religious paraphernalia of the village.

The chief wears a golden pendant on his headdress of red and blue macaw feathers to show their status. In addition, only chiefs and shamans are allowed to wear a round cotton cloak with a hole in the centre for the head, covering the shoulders, chest and back. Chiefs carry beautifully carved sceptres and polished stone daggers as

additional symbols of office. The chiefs also are allowed to live in a square hut of gigantic size instead of the round huts the rest of the villagers live in. Chiefs sit on special wooden stools when receiving visitors. Chiefs are carried on litters by the noblemen. Chiefs are expected to take as many wives as possible, forming political alliances with other villages and chiefs by marrying their women. When a chief dies, he is allowed to be buried with his favourite wife or wives; the women are buried alive but they take a drug which puts them to sleep first.

The biggest difference between Arahawk and Barach chiefs is the length of service. Among the Barach tribes, chiefs are elected before a battle and his reigns last just as long as that battle or war. Barach chiefs are expected to lead the people into battle for resources, including wives. They are expected to conquer other villages. The women of the Arahawks are a favourite target for Barach raids, although a few pirate settlements have been raided for their women as well. Chiefs are accorded the same privileges as the Arahawk chiefs but for a shorter period of time. Among the Arahawk, the position is for life, or until proven incompetent. The Arahawk, however, do elect temporary war chiefs, just as the Barach do.

### SHAMANS

The shamans function as priests, healers and advisors, especially to the chiefs. They are assisted by their own personal spirit guides called *maboya*. These spirit guides assist the shaman, teaching him sorcery, healing skills and herbal remedies. There are few of these, often only one or two, per village. An older priest chooses a boy to apprentice. As the boy apprentices under the old shaman, he fasts often and abstains from eating meat. The boy undergoes an initiation like that of a warrior and if he passes this without flinching or showing signs of pain, he is taken to the shaman's sacred hut where food is sacrificed to the shaman's spirit guide, the *maboya*. When the spirit shows up, the shaman asks the *maboya* for a spirit guide for the apprentice.



# Barachan Isles

# CONAN

If the *maboya* agrees, the apprentice becomes a full shaman in his own right.

Shamans wear headdresses of colourful parrot and toucan feathers to show their status. Like the chiefs, shamans are allowed to wear the special round cotton cloak with a hole in the centre for the head. This cloak covers the shoulders, chest and back. They carry vomiting sticks, specially carved wands used to purge and purify the body before communing with the spirit world. Shamans paint ritual designs on their bodies and often blacken their faces with charcoal. He is also a teacher, and teaches the children of the chief and the nobles social protocol, duties, myths and history.

Using a mixture of tobacco and ground cohoba seeds (a hallucinogen) allow the shaman to communicate with the spirit world and with gods.

## NOBLES

The nobles are basically sub-chiefs in charge of various village functions, including hunters, warriors, craftsmen and artisans. Those shown to have skill at hunting (although there is little game to hunt) or war or art or craftsmanship become nobles and are supported by the agriculture of the commoners in exchange for their work. The elderly also become nobles by virtue of their accumulated wisdom; also, the elderly have a difficult time working as

the commoners are expected to. Nobles are expected to know where the borders of their territories are and are expected to remember agreements with other peoples (as they do not have a written language).

## COMMONERS

Commoners work farms under the control of the chiefs. While definitely not slaves, the chiefs could trade commoners with other chiefs, or just give them as gifts. Male commoners hunt and fish for meat, hunt and gather for fruit and nuts and clear land for the women to work. Women work the gardens, handle the harvest, and take care of all the domestic chores.



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# Personal Treasure

By James Thomas

Whether picking a pocket or picking through the remains of fallen enemies, coming up with tangible and realistic personal treasure is a key element toward capturing verisimilitude in any RPG. Real people have distinctive possessions – ones that reflect who they are and define them.

Gold piece awards are based on the average party level and the campaign speed. Once you have adjusted for these and have a total, you are ready to choose personal treasure. The following is a suggested distribution scheme divided between common items and valuable items.

Table: Personal Treasure Distribution

Encounter	Common Items	Valuable Items
Commoner	0–3 common items	None
Expert/Craftsman	2–5 common items	1 valuable item
Aristocrat	0–2 common items	1–4 valuable items
Beggar	0–2 common items	None
Guardsmen/Soldier	1–3 common items	0–1 valuable items
Merchant	2–5 common items	1–3 valuable items
Adventurer, Low-level	1–4 common items	0–2 valuable items
Adventurer, Med.-Level	1–4 common items	1–4 valuable items
Adventurer, High-Level	1–4 common items	2–5 valuable items
Prostitute	0–3 common items	0–2 valuable items
Entertainer	0–3 common items	1–3 valuable items

## Common Personal Items:

1. Shopping list
2. Receipt for armour repair
3. Love note
4. Dice [1 sp]
5. Letter of introduction
6. Comb, wooden [1 sp]
7. Whetstone [2 cp]
8. Touch stone [1 gp]
9. Handkerchief [1 sp]
10. Loaf of bread [2 cp]
11. Piece of fruit [1 cp]
12. Hunk of cheese [1 sp]
13. Hunk of meat [3 sp]
14. Pie [1-4 cp]
15. Nail clippers [1 sp]
16. Compact with mirror [10 gp]
17. Holy/Unholy symbol [wood 1 gp, silver 25 gp]
18. Good luck charm (animal foot, shrine token, strip of cloth, almost anything) [1 sp]
19. Tankard [leather/wooden/ceramic/tin 1 sp]
20. Tools [5 gp, masterwork 50 gp]

21. Gloves, work [1 gp]
22. Medal [examples: religious, military, license (mining, fishing, grave-digger) [1-20 gp]
23. Occupation item [examples: dead rabbit (hunter), half-finished vest (tailor), bloody rag (barber or adventurer), unsigned treaty (aristocrat), "personal" rag (beggar), wanted poster (guardsman), license (prostitute), instrument string (entertainer)]
24. Tindertwig or Flint & Steel [1 gp]
25. Bell [1 gp]
26. Candle [1 cp ea.]
27. Torch [1 cp ea.]
28. Backpack, empty [1 gp]
29. Belt Pouch [1 gp]
30. Sealing Wax [1 gp]
31. Water/Wine Skin [1 gp]
32. Sunrod [2 gp]
33. Magnifying glass [100 gp]
34. Knife, utility [1 gp]
35. Mirror, small steel [10 gp]
36. Musical instrument, masterwork [100 gp]
37. Thieves' tools, masterwork [50

- gp]
38. Lantern, bullseye [12 gp]
39. Everburning torch [100 gp]
40. Pipe, wooden [5 gp]
41. Tobacco, 1 lb. [5 sp]

## Personal Jewelry And Other Valuables:

1. Snuff box, silver [50 gp]
2. Comb, valuable [ivory 10 gp, silver 50 gp]
3. Pipe, valuable [ivory 25 gp, silver 50 gp]
4. Signet ring, ordinary [5 gp]
5. Perfume [50 gp per vial]
6. Clothes, expensive [30 gp]
7. Holy text [20 gp]
8. Gloves, expensive [cloth 10 gp, leather 20 gp, embroidered 30 gp, gilded 80 gp]
9. Hairpin [cheap 1-8 gp, valuable 25 gp, costly 1000 gp, expensive 2500 gp]\*
10. Braid clip [cheap 1-8 gp, valuable 25 gp, costly 1000 gp, expensive 2500 gp]\*

- |   |  |   |
|---|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>11. Charm bracelet [10-50 gp]</li> <li>12. Tooth pick, quality [wooden 1 sp, ivory 1 gp, silver 3 gp]</li> <li>13. Perfume bottle (crystal) [2 gp]</li> <li>14. Stiletto, gilded with gems [150 gp]**</li> <li>15. Ring [cheap 1-10 gp, valuable 50 gp, costly 1000 gp, expensive 3000 gp]*</li> <li>16. Double ring [as Ring x 2]*</li> <li>17. Small silver drinking cup [20 gp]</li> <li>18. Dagger, jeweled [100 gp]**</li> <li>19. Locket with picture [30 gp]</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>20. Chain, necklace [copper 20 gp, silver 100 gp, gold 300 gp]</li> <li>21. Gilded scabbard [80 gp]</li> <li>22. Pen [ivory/ebony 25 gp]</li> <li>23. Statuette, tiny [wood 25 gp, stone 50 gp, silver 100 gp, gold 500 gp]</li> <li>24. Fur [pelt 2-5 gp, trimming 70 gp, cape or jacket 1000 gp, coat or robe 2000 gp]*</li> <li>25. Spectacles [10-50 gp]</li> <li>26. Cloak pin [cheap 1-8 gp, valuable 25 gp, costly 1000 gp, expensive 2500 gp]*</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>27. Belt buckle [cheap 1-12 gp, valuable 50 gp, costly 1000 gp, expensive 3000 gp]*</li> <li>28. Silver buttons [2 sp ea.]</li> <li>29. Gold buttons [2 gp ea.]</li> <li>30. Spyglass [1,000 gp]</li> </ul> <p>*Prices are average per subcategory.<br/>**If masterwork quality is added to a weapon add an additional 300gp to its value.</p> |
|---|--|---|



# Chthonian Stars



the Cthulhu Saga  
a Traveller setting

1. Chtho•ni•an [thoh-nee-uhn] – adjective:
2. concerning, belong to, or inhabiting the underworld.

of or pertaining to the deities, spirits, and other beings dwelling under the earth.

It is a good time to be alive. The nations of the world still exist, but they have become more civilized. Countries resolve their disputes through the forum of the Unified World Council. Colonies of mutual cooperation exist throughout the solar system. We have stretched to the edge of our known world.

But, alas, it is not to be our time.

Something approaches, a thing on an orbit from far away. Seemingly a large shard of dark matter, this object is known in obscure prophecy as the Chthonian Star. It is a thing that has been traveling through the universe on its oblique trajectory for millions, if not billions, of years. It is a part of the natural cycle of things, on its eon-long orbit. Now, again, it is awakening things long thought lost or dead, things that have slumbered awaiting its return.

It begins slowly. Colonists begin to notice unusual things throughout the solar system. Then people begin to disappear. Then entire settlements. Ships go missing. However, it isn't long before the unspeakable horrors that have awakened can no longer contain themselves. Moons thought dead such as Callisto come to life,

producing alien ecosystems never before seen by man. Things stir in the distant Kuiper Belt. It is something that cannot be denied and people change their lives knowing that there are dangerous and terrifying things in the dark.

Such phenomena naturally become something of intense interest to the powers that be. Mighty corporations marshal their resources to send teams to figure out how such things might be harnessed for profit. The Unified World Council sends out special teams of sanctioned Wardens, whose job it is to ascertain the new threats to human life, to learn everything they can about them, and fight them wherever they are found.

There are also those who believe the murmurs of madmen, who have listened to the occultists who point to forbidden books and forgotten prophecy. They are the ones who believe that humanity is a young race and there are much older and darker things in the universe, so-called deities and their minions who care nothing for the children of men. They confront the horror that is looming, looking to the past, trying desperately to make the world understand in the present.

It is true. These are the end times. The Old Ones are waking up and what we thought was our solar system is making itself home for its returning masters. The monstrous races that serve them are coming back out to help prepare the way. Humanity is as many always thought – temporary stewards of this part of the galaxy at best, parasites at worst.

All this from the influence of a body that is still millions of miles away. As the Chthonian Star marches ever onward, things are only going to get worse. Who knows what will happen when it is finally here?

## What is Chthonian Stars?

**Chthonian Stars is a new original setting for Traveller from WildFire, the creative team that brought you the award-winning CthulhuTech. More than just one book, Chthonian Stars is a new roleplaying line for Traveller, a proprietary universe in which the Lovecraftian horrors are returning to the solar system with a vengeance.**

**The Core Setting is slated to be released in October 2010, though previews of the product will be available at both Origins and Gen Con 2010.**

## Influences

*Chthonian Stars*, like any setting, has been influenced by several popular media offerings. It captures a feel portrayed in movies like *Alien*, *Event Horizon*, and *Pandorum*, as well as *Outland* to a lesser extent. The video game *Dead Space* can also be cited as an influence.

## Scope of Setting

The scope of *Chthonian Stars* is contained to a fantastical purview that is still familiar to us – our solar system, from Mercury out to the frontier of the Kuiper Belt. Earth is still the center of the universe, home to all mankind, but millions of people dwell in colonies and space stations spread throughout the solar system. Spaceships travel between the worlds, using



technology that propels them from world to world in a matter of months, instead of the years once required.

Despite the fact that the nations of the solar system are united in a way never before thought possible, the vast distances that separate the colonies of humanity create a sense of isolation. The journeys through the black are long and lonely. There are many who find this isolation difficult to deal with, especially given the things that now roam in dark.

*Chthonian Stars* presents several different options from which players can choose, all of which are designed to allow characters to travel throughout the solar system – instead of being stuck in only one or two colonies. This way, they are given the opportunity to experience the different kinds of flavor present in each different area of the solar system.

## Technology

*Chthonian Stars* is set a couple hundred years into the future. In terms of its influences, the setting is approximately equivalent to the technology presented in such movies as *Aliens* or *Event Horizon*.

Space travel is perhaps the single most important technological advancement in the setting. Transit drives can propel ships across the void at speeds formerly not possible. Travel from Earth to Neptune takes only several months instead of twelve years. Passengers must seal themselves in suspended animation inside specially designed gravity-mitigating chambers to survive acceleration and deceleration – which means they unfortunately lose time every time they travel, unaware of what might occur in the vacuum in the interim.

Computers have continued to become smaller and more powerful. People travel with small portable body-computers that are capable of feats that seem like magic. Augmented reality is commonplace, and in fact necessary for many aspects of society. Robotics and nanotechnology have taken

over manufacturing, as well as many menial jobs, forcing people to become educated to take on more skilled professions.

Medical technology has advanced to a point where nearly all hereditary disease has been cured. There are few illnesses that plague humanity. Even limbs and organs can be replaced through limited cloning technology. People live longer and are healthier than ever before.

Weapons are still predominantly chemically- or magnetically-propelled, though computerized advancements make them more accurate, powerful, and capable than ever before. Despite the detente that exists in most places in the universe, it is still not a period of peace. Therefore, the powers that be still spend exorbitant sums of money on weapons research, so the technology of “defense” continues forward.

On the home front, Earth suffers no more from the threat of ecological disaster. The damage done during the 19th, 20th, and 21st centuries was halted and in some cases reversed. However, the Earth has been damaged and a person from the 21st century would find the world to be quite different. Air quality has recovered, but climates have changed permanently in many parts of the world. There are places where it is not safe to travel outside without special suits, where the thinning or non-existent ozone no longer protect life from dangerous solar radiation. Many species are permanently extinct.



On the other hand, pushing people out to live on other worlds has helped ease the threat of overpopulation. People still have not learned, however, and there are no population controls in place. It will only be a matter of time before overpopulation becomes a problem again – or at least it would were not things awakening in the galaxy that are helping to thin the herd.

## Characters

*Chthonian Stars* supports playing pretty much any kind of character, but steers players towards playing as Wardens, agents of the Unified World Council special commission. That way, their characters already have reason to travel around the solar system and the resources that allow them to do so.

*Chthonian Stars* will provide several setting-appropriate modifications to the existing *Traveller* careers, such as occult scholar as a specialization within the Scholar career or

# Chthonian Stars



Warden specializations to the Agent career. It will provide full options so that players can randomly roll their characters, but will promote the optional character building rules, building on what is presented in the *Traveller Core Rulebook*.

There are two notable exceptions to baseline *Traveller* when it comes to character options. First, all characters in *Chthonian Stars* are human, with some variation based on world or colony of birth. The only aliens that are a part of the setting are those coming back into the universe as the Chthonian Star approaches, and they are hardly suitable for play. Second, there is no psionic ability. Cosmic power of that sort is only wielded by the otherworldly – or those who have given themselves over to the dark gods that are reawakening.

This setting will introduce a new system of advantages and disadvantages which account for interesting character details that cannot be accounted for using characteristics and skills, and which is

built into the by-term method of character generation. Thus characters can have acute senses or a sense of danger, or conversely be tormented by nightmares from beyond.

Another set of optional rules introduced in *Chthonian Stars* gives players the option to have younger and more varied starting characters, through the concept of half-terms. This allows players to generate characters in two-year terms, instead of four. Characters gain benefit equal to a little less than half a full term, making four year terms more desirable for maximum benefit.

*Traveller* uses a realistic method of character advancement, in that characters choose skills to acquire training in and then advance. *Chthonian Stars* introduces an optional set of rules for a point advancement system, similar to those used in most contemporary roleplaying games. Characters instead earn points that can be spent in different ratios to increase different aspects of their statistics.

## New Rules

There are several kinds of new rules that will be required to support the *Chthonian Stars* setting, further expanding the *Traveller* optional rules base.

The first set of rules will detail psychology – fear and madness. The otherworldly things that are a part of the *Chthonian Stars* setting will scare the pants off of characters, and the unspeakable things they witness will slowly drive them mad. These are themes central to all Lovecraftian horror.

The second set of rules will detail a more survivable brand of combat, where characters can be shot or hit by the terrible claws of a monster and live to tell about it. The combat system of *Traveller* is lethal and characters can do little about being hurt, other than hope there is cover nearby.

## Themes

- *Chthonian Stars* will explore many of the themes common to Lovecraftian stories and games. Some of these themes include:

- Creeping Dread – there is always a feeling that something isn't quite right, and it only gets worse the more a person discovers what is really going on.
- Fear & Insanity – the reality of the universe is usually too much for people to face. As they do, they lose themselves to the fight-or-flight instinct, and eventually lose touch with reality altogether.
- Futility – fighting against the awakening horrors of the universe

is, in the end, pointless. The things humanity now faces are simply too powerful. There is no way they can win.

- Isolation – the solar system is a big place with lots of nothing in between settlements. It can take weeks or even months for help to arrive. People are on their own.
- Tragedy – things do not often turn out well for those who face cosmic horror. Many things are sacrificed, including minds and lives. Some such sacrifices are difficult choices to make.

The Unknown – what humanity collectively thinks it knows about the universe is a very small slice. They have chosen not to look further for fear of what they might find. Now, the unknown has come looking for them. Much of what people face is a complete enigma.

### **Chthonian Stars Core Setting**

Release: October 2010

Specs: 220 pages, Full Color, \$44.95

Overview: This is the core setting book, with everything a new players needs (other than the *Traveller Core Rulebook*).



# Contributing to S&P

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