



MONGOOSE PUBLISHING PRESENTS

Signs & Portents

WARGAMER

27

The Big Red One

Matthew Sprange's Mobile Infantry Army

Arms Buyers' Almanac: Sonic Weapons

More New Weapons for Gangs of Mega-City One

Fighting the Minbari

Tactical Guide For A Call to Arms

Plus... Skinnies concept preview, naming Earth Alliance Ships and lots, lots more!

S&P Wargamer 27

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What ho!

It has long been established that roleplayers can get very attached to their characters. I can recall being quite upset when one of my longest lasting PCs (Lucien Drax, a mage) met his end. He and his companions (the noble dwarf fighter/thief Ironbeard G'Thang and the halfling cleric Chester Merryfellow, plus a couple of NPCs I can't remember the names of) were involved in an epic struggle against the villainous forces of Baron Robegus and his forces of evil. It was towards the end of a long campaign, Robegus himself had been defeated and his forces scattered. The party had taken on the task of hunting down and eliminating the belligerent Baron's remaining henchmen, a pair of lycanthropic assassins called the Darkmoon brothers. The duo were eventually located (I can't remember exactly where it was – it may have been in a sewer, as the party seemed to end up in the sewers a lot, or it might have been in a ruined citadel in a forest). Badly wounded in the many battles to reach the final conflict and almost completely out of magic, Lucien met an ignoble end when he was shot in the back with a poisoned crossbow bolt. I mourned his death, while the other players commenced the traditional 'share out' – in other words, stripping their former comrade's corpse of everything valuable and nicking it.

Wargamers, on the other hand, don't usually become quite so attached to their forces. However, a recent game of *Gangs of Mega-City One* has brought an oddly familiar pang of loss for a character. GoMC1 is more of a skirmish game than a wargame, and players are encouraged to give each of their gang members a name, which has led me to come up with a whole load of unlikely Meg-City style names for my gang, the League of Extraordinary Violence, from Alan Moore Block. The gang have played through quite a few games and are becoming quite experienced, but there only a couple of the original line up left. One of these was the gang's Top Dog, chainsaw wielding nut job Allan Slaughtermain. In a recent game, Allan chanced upon a couple of newly recruited juves from his opponents gang. Spying that the pair were only equipped with handguns, he revved his chainsaw to life and charged towards the untested youths. Unfortunately for him, the dice were well and truly on the side of the opposition that day – each of his foes managed to not only score critical hits, they both inflicted maximum damage (that's a lot of sixes). Even more shockingly, the injury roll resulted in a score of twelve to the head – instant death. Naturally, rather than avenge the death of their beloved leader, the rest of the League took the opportunity to run away and I was left mourning the death of another character... Never mind, I still have my Robot Gang!

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Stop Press! Fantastic News For Military Personnel!

Here at Mongoose, Alex Fennell, (ex-Captain, British Army and Mongoose company director), has been telling anybody who will listen that we ought to do something special for those of you serving in the military (he remembers what it is like). So. . .

From today, we are giving a 25% cashback on all mail orders put through our web site that are destined for military addresses (AFPO, BFPO, addresses to military bases, etc). Simply place your order as normal and, within a couple of days, 25% will automatically be refunded to your credit card or PayPal account.

This offer is not limited by time or size of orders - the 25% cashback to military personnel is now a permanent policy of Mongoose Publishing!



That means great news for people like Karl Haas, pictured here on duty with the UN forces patrolling Kabul in 2003.

EYE ON MONGOOSE

New Releases This Month



Every good trooper knows the benefits of support from the fleet and these missiles can bring some heavy bug-killing action to any battle.

The Flamberge is a heavy ground attack missile fired from large gunships miles from the combat zone. The default warhead is the Scatter Bomb but more powerful Firestorm or Pee-Wee Atomic Munitions can be fitted instead, allowing you to rain death upon any bug hoard, no matter how hard it tries to evade the guns of your Troopers.

If the Flamberge is not enough for you, try the Sarissa Space Combat Missile. Launched from ships in orbit to deliver pin point strikes on Arachnid swarms, it is capable of defeating even the heaviest of Plasma Bug anti-aircraft fire. As well as the warhead options of the Flamberge, the Sarissa is the only support missile currently available that can carry the awesome Ajax Atomic Munition, the heaviest tactical nuclear weapon available to the Mobile Infantry.

If you are having trouble bringing your guns to bear on fast moving Arachnids, these two missiles may well be the answer to your prayers!





The Earth Alliance is surrounded by enemies and potential enemies, from small but devious Raiders to the larger governments of the galaxy - and there is always the fear of another war with the Minbari.

This box set gives Earth Alliance Admirals some much needed reinforcements, featuring some of the latest vessels from EarthForce R&D. If your

Omegas have been on the losing end recently, these supporting vessels should give your fleet the edge it needs!

This box set contains:

- 1 Avenger
- 2 Oracles
- 18 Thunderbolts
- 2 Hermes
- 2 Olympus



Given only to the most experienced Admirals to command, the Poseidon is the heart of any fleet and often acts as the flagship. Its sheer size grants a massive presence whenever it jumps in-system and though only a few have been built, they have already made themselves felt. A total of 16 Starfury flights are carried on board and the highly efficient launching bays can disgorge half of these in a single wave. The Poseidon, while weakly armoured, can withstand many hits before being crippled and is equipped with the most sophisticated Interceptor system within the Earth Alliance.

The experiences of Captain Matthew Gideon of the Victory-Class Excalibur indicated that the Shadow hunter was a new type of test vessel that melded human and Shadow technology but it is just as likely that Earthforce agents involved in the secret project were reactivating existing Shadow craft that they had recovered. Constructed from the same biotechnology as other Shadow craft, a Shadow hunter cuts through space with considerable speed and possesses ferocious, if short-ranged, attack capabilities. Hunters seem to actually take pleasure from a chase and will pursue lone spacecraft half way across the galaxy just for the joy of the kill.



Often considered to be traders rather than warriors, the Vree Trading Guilds are nonetheless very prepared to defend their centres of profit with force if required. IN order to accomplish this, they have managed to develop or buy some of the best technology in the galaxy and have the most agile ships found in any fleet - even the largest can literally turn on a dime!

Their preference for antimatter based weaponry can also prove telling in any engagement and even the major militaries of the galaxy can expect a real pounding when facing a well organised Vree fleet.

This box set contains:

- 2 Xills
- 5 Vaarls
- 4 Xorrs
- 6 Xaars
- 36 Tyzzm Fighters

One of the most technologically advanced scouting ships in the entire galaxy, the Earth Alliance has once again proven its ability to stay ahead of alien governments in the arms race. Though lightly armed, the Delphi has tremendous stealth capabilities (bordering on that used by the Minbari) and has an extensive range of sensory and scanning equipment that enables it to support its fleet like no other vessel can.



This pack offers three useful new specialists for Gangs of Mega-City One - underworld crime types in the shape of a Cleaner and a Gutter Lawyer, plus a Vid Vulture, lowest of the low, worst of the hangers-on that surround underworld figures.

Cleaners are specialists in removing incriminating evidence left behind by their employers or carelessly discarded in an over-zealous endeavour.

Should such evidence escape the Cleaners and find its way into the hands of the Lawyer, street gangs can always call upon Gutter Lawyers - legal 'professionals' willing to bend the law just to keep the punks out of jail and the laundered cash flowing.

Invariably hot on the trail of such illicit activities are Vid Vultures, wandering Tri-D reporters looking for the next big scoop to sell to the pirate broadcasters. So hungry for the story are the Vid Vultures that many will follow underworld figures around, quite happily allowing them to continue their illegal doings just so long as they can get it on camera.



Robot Blister #1

A common place sight in Mega-City One, it is a sad fact that robots sometimes malfunction. Sometimes faulty robots turn to crime.

Renegade robot street gangs are uncommon but can be vicious with a callous attitude to weak and puny humans. This set contains the beginnings of a robot gang for Gangs of Mega-City One.

If you are looking for more mechanical perps to add to your robot street gang, check out our range of Paranoia robots!



Robot Blister #2

Tremors

A SCENARIO FOR THE STARSHIP TROOPERS MINIATURES GAME



A small force of Mobile Infantry has taken refuge in an area of rocky terrain. All around them is loose soil and crumbling sand, perfect for the bugs to tunnel through. The Mobile Infantry must cross this shifting terrain in order to reach some solid ground where they will be safer.

For this scenario, it is recommended that the points value of each army is around 500.

CARL WALMSLEY

MOBILE INFANTRY BRIEFING

The ground here is perfect for a bug ambush. Your priority is to cross the terrain quickly and get as many of your troops to safety as you can. You may only exit the battlefield via the Escape Area marked on the Mission Map.

- You may not choose any Fleet Assets
- You may not choose any Emplacement Assets
- You may choose whether or not to take the first turn

ARACHNID BRIEFING

This terrain is ideal for your warriors, as it is perfect for tunnelling. Dozens of MI units have already been ambushed and eliminated, and now you are aiming to deal with these stragglers as well.

- At least half the points value of your force must be spent on Arachnid Warriors.
- Only standard Tunnel Entrances may be used. These do not cost any points to use.

SPECIAL RULES

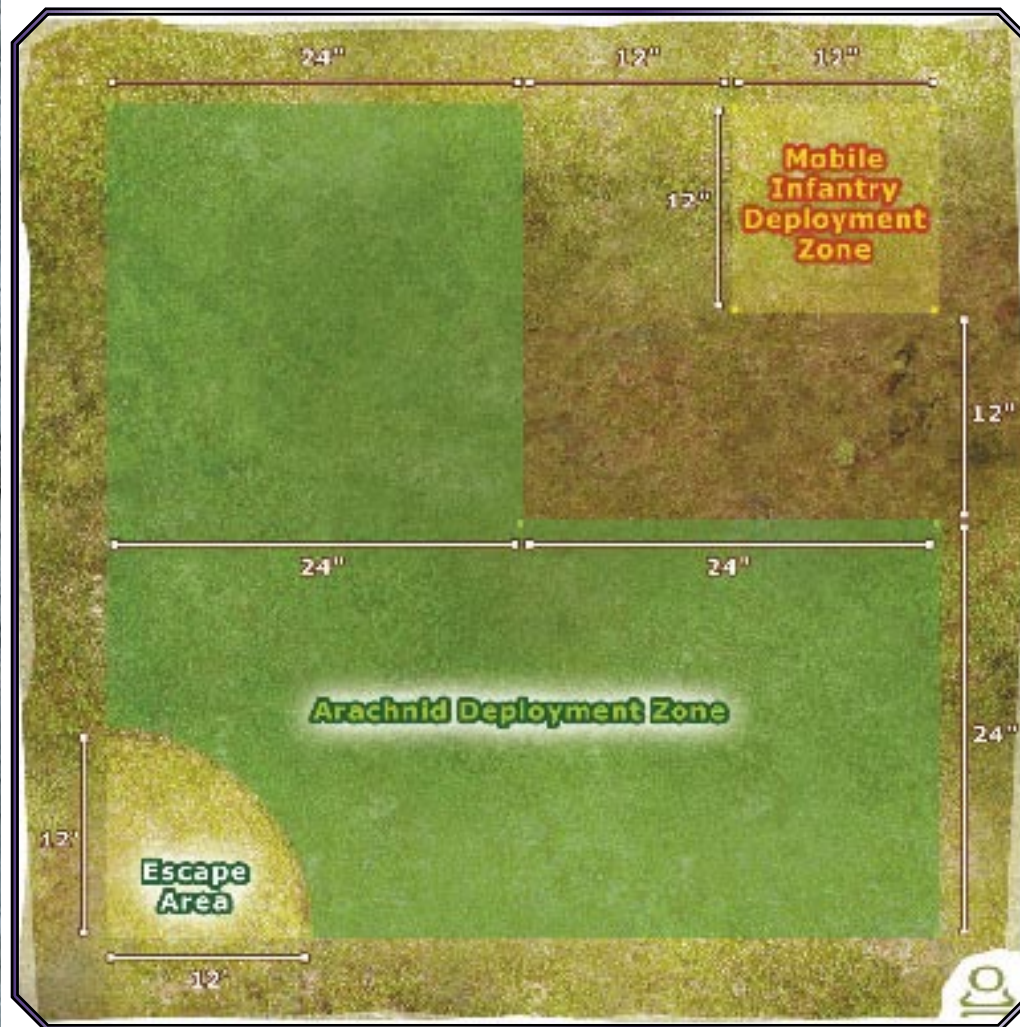
The loose soil on this planet makes tunnelling much easier than normal. However, the ground is so unstable that Tunnel Entrances collapse almost as soon as they are created.

In game terms, this means that models with the Tunnel/X” trait do not need to take a Ready action before they create a Tunnel Entrance – they may do so *and* then make a tunnelling

special move in a single action. This applies whether models are tunnelling up or down.

Tunnelling Markers are always treated as though they are heading towards a Tunnel Entrance Point, allowing them to take normal move actions.

At the end of each of the Arachnid player’s turns, all Tunnel Entrances are removed.



No Tunnel Entrances may ever be placed in the Mobile Infantry deployment zone.

The MI player may place a single hill or similar piece of terrain anywhere in the Arachnid Deployment Zone. This may be no larger than 12” x 12”. This terrain is considered impenetrable rock, and no Tunnel Entrances may be placed on it at any point during the battle.

MISSION LENGTH

The battle will continue for six turns or until the Mobile Infantry manages to move half their force off the board or it becomes impossible for them to do so.

VICTORY CONDITIONS

If the Mobile Infantry can get at least half the Points Value of their force off the board before the end of turn six, they are victorious. Otherwise, the Arachnids win.



Fighting the Minbari

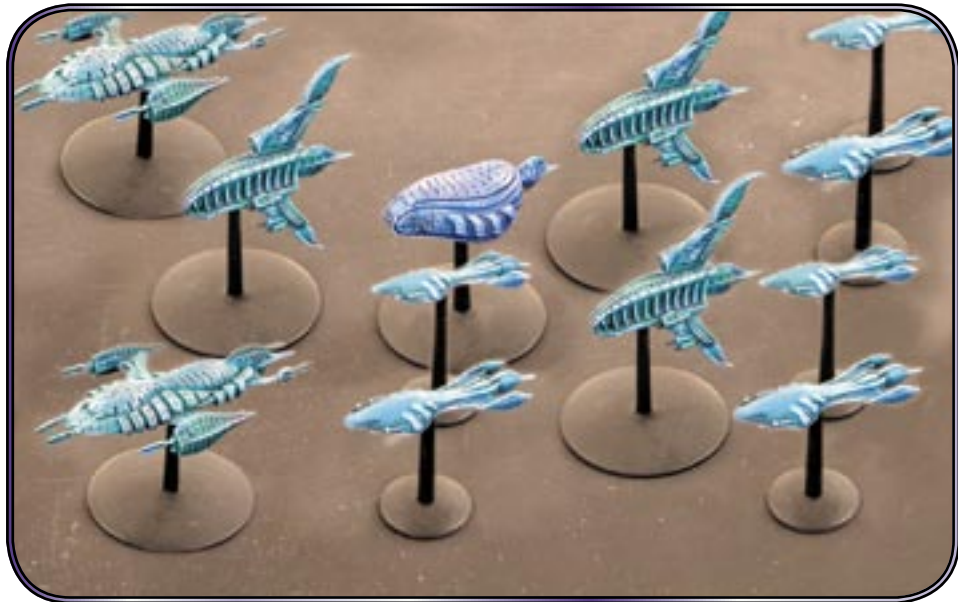
LOOKING FOR AN ADVANTAGE AGAINST THE MINBARI IN A CALL TO ARMS?

Matthew Sprange

The Minbari fleet can be a tough proposition for any budding Admiral. The most technologically advanced of the Young Races, the Minbari sport devastating weaponry, awesome fighters and, of course, the dreaded Stealth trait. This article takes a look at some ways of defeating the Minbari.

All Power to Engines!

Minbari are at their best when fighting at long range. Their Neutron Lasers are among the most powerful Beam weapons in the game and are capable of literally cutting even large warships in half. Added to that, at distances of over 10", they gain a bonus to their Stealth scores, making them almost impossible to get a lock on.



The easy answer to this is to close range as quickly as possible – don't be afraid of using the All Power to Engines! Special Action on all your ships in the first turn to get as close as possible. During the first turn, the Minbari will be nearly invisible anyway (unless they are using a lot of older hulls, such as the Tinashi) because of their Stealth bonus, so you will not be losing much. You will, of course, suffer horribly against their first round of fire without mounting an effective response but take it on the nose. You will get your revenge in later turns.

Lesson One: Leave your slow ships at home and use All Power to Engines!

Knife Fights

In general, the Minbari fleet may be pretty to look at but they are no faster or more agile than most other fleets. This is something you can use to your advantage. Once you start to close range with the enemy fleet, keep going. As the Major said in Babylon 5, ram your ships right down their throats! The fearsome Neutron Lasers only fire to the fore and aft arcs (with the exception of the Sharoos but that has less Attack Dice) and as the heavier Minbari vessels only have a 1/45° Turn score, they are going to be no more agile than your own

ships – this is sauce for the goose, as you are beginning to even the odds. Once in close, there is no reason why a Minbari fleet should be able to consistently out-manoeuvre you.

The second benefit of engaging in a short-ranged knife fight is that Minbari fleets tend to clump close together (and if they do not, you have a chance to zip across the board and take his ships on piecemeal). When your ships are within 10", you should be able to manoeuvre them so that you have multiple Minbari targets in multiple arcs. This is an important point to remember: the more targets you have, the more Stealth rolls will have to be made – and the more will be failed. Try to move your ships so that you not only have Minbari in more than one arc, try to move your ships so that you have more than one Minbari in each arc (or as many as possible). If you can do this, you will find that splitting fire is your friend. Though you will be getting less Attack Dice against each target, you will be making more Stealth rolls with an increased chance of being able to lock on to the elusive Minbari.

Lesson Two: Move in as close as possible and split your fire.

Bypassing Stealth

Many fleets have various options to ignore or reduce the effects of Stealth altogether. For example, the Narn have Energy Mines that completely bypass Stealth. Though you will not cause a great deal of damage this way, you will be able to score some damage early on in the game and begin whittling your opponent's ships down – this will also cause the Minbari player to begin doubting the 'invincibility' of his ships.



Every fleet will be able to use Scout ships, Auxiliary Craft on Full Scanners orders or both to reduce the Stealth of the Minbari. Remember, these bonuses stack, so with clever tactics you will be able to reduce most Minbari ships to just a 2+ Stealth roll and even a Sharlin can be reduced to 3+. If you can concentrate your fire while doing this, you will find any Minbari vessel will fold quite quickly. Move your scouts and fighters into position, then plug away with missiles, Beam weapons and anything that multiplies damage.

Last, do not forget that the favourite Minbari of jumping into the middle of an enemy fleet to cause damage by jump points works both ways. A great deal of damage can be done to one or more Minbari ships early on in the battle by doing this, plus you have the added bonus of placing ships right in the middle of his fleet – just where you want them! So long as the

remainder of your fleet is pounding towards you at full speed, you will not separate your ships for long and allow him to destroy first one half, then the other with ease.

Lesson Three: Do everything you can to avoid or reduce Stealth – plan your tactics for this before the game begins (and stick with the plan!)

Flood Him With Fighters

Given at how downright nasty Nials and Tishats can be, this can seem like odd advice but, generally, you will have a good chance of outnumbering the Minbari in the fighter stakes. Gang up on his fighters to bring the odds in your favour during dogfights and then manoeuvre your surviving craft to line up on his capital ships. There are some Minbari ships (such as the Torotha) that are completely vulnerable to fighter attack, as they have no weapons to the port or starboard, allowing you to either make strafing runs or *Lock on Full Scanners* without suffering in return.

Larger ships with ranks of Fusion Cannon are a bit more daunting in prospect but if you can time your runs to coincide with a concerted attack against a single enemy ship, your



fighters will have a good chance of reducing the Stealth roll before they are destroyed – and that would be a worthwhile sacrifice. Also, consider this – you will be giving him the choice of using the Fusion Cannon on your fighters or on your own ships. Which would you rather lose?

Concentrate on taking ships that have several fighter flights, rather than dedicated carriers. You will need all the frontline ships you can get your hand on and most carriers will find themselves at a disadvantage against Minbari, for various reasons.

Lesson Four: If possible, make sure you have more fighters than he does, though not at the cost of your entire fleet.

Even Armour Can Work

Neutron Lasers can rack up an incredible amount of damage very quickly. Try a test fire against a Space Liner sometime, and watch how even a large ship can be torn apart! However, armour is your friend and it can protect against even Neutron Lasers. Mathematically, this is because you are forcing him to roll higher numbers for his multiple Beam strikes early on in the process, instead of starting by looking for 2 on each dice, then 3, and so on...

If possible, consider only taking ships with a Hull score of 6. Go down to 5 if you must but do not consider ships with a Hull score of 4 or less when fighting Minbari unless it is a very low Priority Level game.

You will also find they greatly reduce the effectiveness of his Fusion Cannon.

Lesson Five: Hull 6 ships are the best defence against Minbari weaponry.

Campaign Games

There are several fleets in the game that enjoy high Priority Level battles, such as the Shadows, Vorlons and ISA. The Minbari very much belong in this group. By opting for lower Priority Level battles, you will be reducing the effectiveness of the Minbari fleet and forcing it to field its weaker ships that tend to have low armour and low Stealth scores.

Not every battle has to be taken at War level!

Lesson Six: Go as low down on the Priority Level as you can for scenarios.

Specific Enemies

The lessons above will suit you against most Minbari fleets but there are a few individual ships that are worth a look at.

Leshath: Agile and fast, the Leshath can be a tough nut to hunt down. However, it has a weak weapons array for a Raid level ship, meaning it cannot go toe-to-toe with the equivalent vessels in other fleets. Surround and destroy.

Morshin: If you can make it through the clouds of Nials (and they are not that nasty against capital ships, though they can chew up Starfuries), this is one big, fat, Battle level clay pigeon. Any Minbari player worth his salt will make sure you have to fight through a Sharlin or two to get to this ship and will try to run away if you threaten him. Low armour and a not particularly high Damage score leave this ship wide open for some serious abuse!

Sharlin: Ah, now if there is one ship that epitomises players' fears of the Minbari, it is this one. When it comes to favourite ships in the game, for me, it would be a toss up between this and the Victory (I loves me Victory, I really does). The only



real downside this ship is its Hull of 5 (most War level ships can enjoy Hull 6) and less separate weapon systems than other ships of its class. You can be thankful, however, that you will rarely face more than one, due to its expense, and the Minbari player will often have to forego it altogether. If you do find yourselves pitted against a Sharlin, employ all the tactics outlined in this article to bring it down – destroy this ship and the rest of his fleet will fold quickly. It will also be worth a fat load of Victory Points in most games.

Torotha: The Minbari love this ship as it is their only Skirmish choice and it will pop up often in smaller games. With 4+ Stealth and a Hull of 4, together with no starboard or port weapons, most fleets should dominate this ship with ease. Just respect its agility (as good as a White Star!) and beware of that forward facing Molecular Disruptor. It is short-ranged but will really ruin your day if a squadron of these vessels get into position to fire.



Them's the Breaks

Sometimes, no matter how hard you try, you will always roll 1's for your Stealth checks. Them's the breaks, as they say. We have all played games where our gunners get cross-eyed or it seems as if our ships are firing blanks. Stealth is just another complication you will have to deal with.


If you have one of these bad luck games, curse the Minbari soundly for being the cowards they are, purge your dice of bad luck (personally, I would recommend you rubbing them clockwise around the B5 logo on the box set) and try again. Sooner or later you will play a game where you make every Stealth roll you attempt and it will be the Minbari player wondering just what happened to his highly vaunted technology...

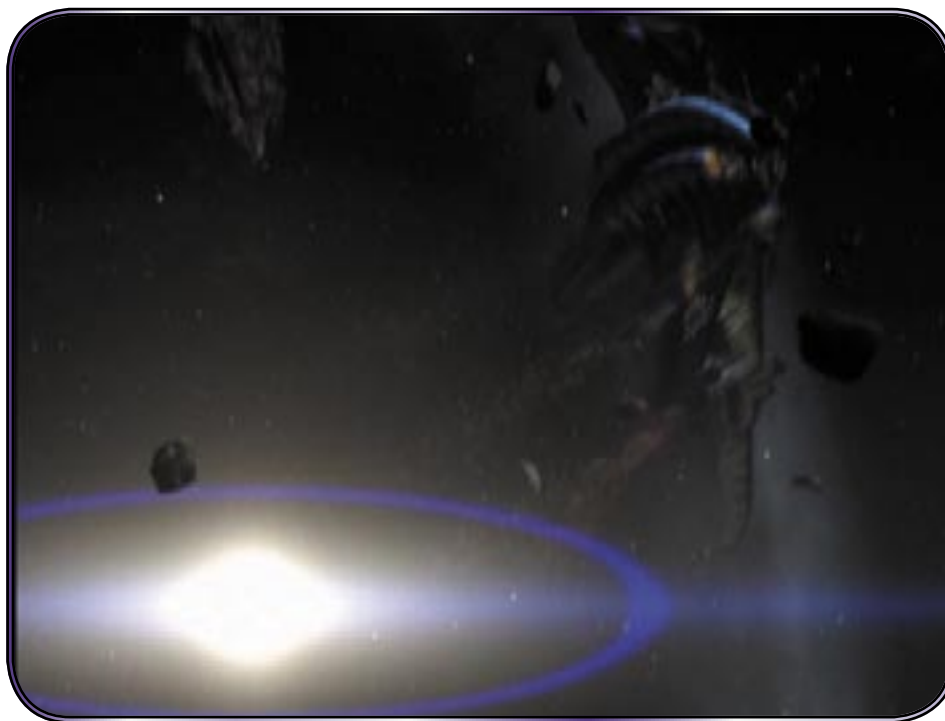
A Battle Well Fought

We spent a lot of time balancing the different fleets in A Call to Arms and, I (along with a hundred-odd playtesters) can assure you that the Minbari can be beaten – on a regular basis. Every fleet has its 'thing' that can make it seem unconquerable to another player. Earth has its Interceptors, Narn

have their Energy Mines, the ISA have White Stars, and so on. The Minbari, of course, have Stealth.

This was entirely intentional and done to keep the game lively and make players think long and hard about their tactics. However, we also ensured that for every benefit a fleet enjoyed, there was an effective counter too and just as Earth's Interceptors can be bypassed with Beams and Mini-Beams, we have also given you the tools you need to overcome Stealth.

Treat the Minbari as a souped up Earth Alliance fleet and you will have your backside handed to you every time. Play to their weaknesses and deny their strengths, and you will start seeing burning Minbari hulks littering your battlefields. 





GENCON UK '05

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THE BIG RED ONE

A MOBILE INFANTRY COMPANY

Matthew Sprange

It is always fun looking at other people's armies, no matter what game you play. You can see any conversions that have been done, as well as see what tactics are used in army creation – all in the name of inspiration for your own force. In this spirit, I would like to introduce you to what will eventually be the entire 1st Company of a Mobile Infantry battalion, also known as Bartlett's Buccaneer's, or (in tribute to a certain film), the Big Red One.

OFFICERS

The Mobile Infantry relies on a solid command structure when in battle and so this is as good a place as any to start a review of the company. Leading all the brave troopers is Captain Bartlett, using the officer model from the Heroes of the Mobile Infantry box set. Full rules for using captains in Starship Troopers are included in the *Klendathu Invasion* sourcebook but for most battles I use Lieutenant Moss who,



like his two NCOs (senior sergeants), has been constructed using nothing more than the plastic troopers sprue. All four officers have very little additional equipment, as I usually prefer to beef my officers up with traits rather than equipment



– though I have been planning to give an officer or two a Shock Stick. Likely a plan for the next platoon I work on.

The other two officers that have been painted up so far are another NCO, using the limited edition model of the standard bearer and Colonel Lyman from SICON Military Intelligence. The former serves as a rallying point for the army, though she only tends to appear in larger battles (the red number one on the banner is where the company gets its name). Incidentally, you will have a chance to pick up the limited edition standard bearer through a variety of different programmes over the next year, either at tournaments and open days or as part of package deals – keep your eyes open! You can, of course, make up your own standard bearer using the plastic kit and full rules for using the model are provided in the *Starship Troopers Painting Guide*.

Colonel Lyman rarely needs to keep an eye on the Big Red One but sometimes important missions see him assigned to the company where he can bring his own unique talents to the

battle. He tends to be loaded up with psychic talents, such as Rupture, Id Sending and Warning, rather than training or qualities. He is also useful for bringing Atomic Protocols to the army when some serious firepower is required but normally just works alongside power suit squads, supporting them with his psychic abilities and trying not to get killed!

I also have a single Neodog who usually trots alongside an NCO. After playtesting the forthcoming Pathfinders, I have been finding all sorts of cool things to do with Neodogs in armies and the right combination of traits for a K9 NCO can prove to be very powerful on the table – I'll leave you to experiment with your own choices here!

SQUADS

So far, I have five full squads in this company which will serve to fill out the first platoon and make a start on the second. Incidentally, there has been some chat on our forums about how many squads 'officially' makes up a platoon. Well, officially, a platoon consists of 4 squads, 1 NCO and 1 Lieutenant. However, we have built a great deal of variation into the army list, allowing you to field larger 'reinforced' platoons or forces joined with allied platoons without breaking the rules.

I tend to specialise my squads, padding out the weapon options with identical choices. So, a squad will have two Morita Long sniper rifles, for example, rather than a mix of weapons. This means that squads will often have to support each other on the battlefield, rather than being capable of operating alone, but it also means they will (individually) have that much greater an effect. This is a personal choice and it must be made according to your own style of play. Try it for yourself and see how you get on!

At the moment, I have squads armed with Morita Longs, Javelins, and Triple Thuds, giving this company a broad range of weapon options that can deal with just about anything an Arachnid force can throw at them. I *do* have one squad armed with Javelin missile launchers with the Pee-wee atomic warhead but I usually just use them as additional Javelins if I think I'll face multiple tankers and plasmas. Two Pee-wees in any army less than 3,000 points in size is probably a bit much!

In most battles, I take the Triple Thud and Javelin squads as first choices. Between them, they have an even spread of firepower that can be applied to tankers or warriors with equal success. However, I always say you should never, ever run down the potential of a Morita Long sniper squad (usually fielded with a sergeant who has Sniper Training). Two of these weapons only cost an additional ten points for a squad and, against warrior bugs and similar Arachnids, they can prove to be utterly lethal – a roll of a six means instant death, no save! They can also be used against things like tanker bugs but the Morita Long is usually defeated by the big bug's armour. However, if you have nothing left to throw against a tanker that has been reduced to a single Hit, this can be a valid tactic.

The one exception to this is my squad of female cap troopers. I have been meaning to 'integrate' my girls into the rest of the army, spreading them between other squads – I have just not got round to it yet! They'll likely be spread around (so to speak) once more squads get added. For now though, they remain my only mixed weapons squad with a Morita Long and Triple Thud – which is actually not a bad combination. Once they get assigned to different squads, I may revisit the sergeant and promote her to a lieutenant with a bit of judicious repainting once I move onto another power suit platoon.

The one glaring omission here is a squad of flamers which, against Arachnids, is something of a large hole right now. As squad weapons dealing a large amount of damage, flamers are superb when the bugs get close.

A LITTLE BIT OF SUPPORT

One of the most enduring images, for me, of the Starship Troopers movie is the assault on Whiskey Outpost – specifically, the Twin-Fifty autocannon emplacements that constantly chatter away to bring down warrior and hopper alike. Cool stuff!

So, when it came to giving a bit of heavy support to the Big Red One, I decided to grab a box of Reliants but, instead of mixing weapon types as most players seem to do, I went for Twin-Fifties all the way! This is the cheapest weapon emplacement option (only 150 points for all three) and they kick out a fearsome amount of firepower. In fact, unless a tanker bug gets thrown into the fray, they are capable of handling an entire flank by themselves, leaving the rest of the army to concentrate its efforts elsewhere. I'll leave it to your imagination to speculate what happens when Lieutenant Moss joins the Reliant squad with the Fire King trait. . .

MARAUDER PLATOON

I have to confess, this one is a personal favourite of mine. The third platoon of the Big Red One fields Marauders and is a real heavyweight on the battlefield, whether they are on their own or supporting a power suit platoon.

Led by Lieutenant McGarry in an M9 Chickenhawk, this platoon is the epitome of mobile firepower. It already has two NCOs in an M8 and M9 and I have already built up two Marauder squads – again, one M8 and one M9. By now, you may have spotted a trend in my armies. I rarely mix and



match my units, preferring specialised troops at my disposal. While this means you have to be very careful about their positioning on the battlefield, so as not to have the wrong unit in the wrong place at the wrong time, you can usually expect them to accomplish the missions you assign.

The first choice when choosing a Marauder platoon is always the M8 squad, usually supported by the M9 NCO and lieutenant for some long-ranged firepower. The M8 Marauder is a good all-rounder, with weapons capable of dealing with most Arachnids and enough armour to survive counter attacks. You can even risk close combat with tanker bugs in a pinch – while the tanker will probably crush one Ape in close combat, it will never lay low a whole squad.

its inability to fire while jumping, the M9 squad has to be watched carefully when the Arachnids get close as it is easy to be caught on the wrong foot. There is a lot of points wrapped up in this squad and its destruction can be a potential game-loser.

THE FUTURE

A miniatures army is never truly finished, as there are always new models and different units that you can add. On top of this, it is my intention to build an entire company – it may never be fielded as a whole in battle. I just want one!

So, what is coming for the Big Red One in the near future? Well, I have already mentioned the flamer squad. For the

The M9 Chickenhawk squad has a broad spread of weaponry. Blizzards are great for the opening shots of the game, opening up huge holes in the Arachnid line before they even start moving. An M9 squad is also a good opening gambit for taking out a plasma bug before it gets a shot off, so long as you can get a decent line of sight. Their anti-aircraft weapons are also suitable for destroying hopper swarms that decide to fly high but you must be wary of Arachnid attacks. The M9 has less Hits than the M8 and has weaker armour. Combined with

power suit platoons, I would also like to add a WASP squad or two to act as a fast attack unit, as anything that keeps the Archnids on their toes can only be a good thing. The Marauder platoon also needs to be finished with another two units – again, one M8 and one M9. Or maybe two M8 squads, with some more M9s to use as ‘swap out’ options.

For heavy support, I would like to add some Fleet support missiles. The Flamberge is a very cheap way to take out large numbers of bugs (50 or 100 points, depending on the warhead used – and I like Firestorms a great deal). The Sarissa is just plain rude, especially when atomics come into play. Unless the Archnid player is very alert and prepared for them, support missiles can be virtually unstoppable. More Reliants would be a plus as well. I could probably squeeze in just one more Twin-Fifty (!) but the two lasers are very tempting choices in defensive battles as they can scythe through swarms of warriors and a tanker or two alike. Then again, I still have not got round to adding the three CHAS units I have promised myself for quite a while and I know, from using the Studio army, that they can be a lot of fun.

Last, the Roughnecks unit has just landed on my desk. Now, they are not officially part of the Big Red One but I am sure I can work out a storyline whereby the Roughnecks fight alongside my troopers for a mission or three.

I want to finish these units off fairly soon as, looking further down the road, we have some great new units coming out for the Mobile Infantry. A Pathfinders platoon may well be used to round out the Bug Red One as the fourth platoon, bringing some real elite troopers to my games. However,

when the Mobile Infantry Army Book comes along, there will be all sorts of technological goodness coming along – TAC UAVs, Bigfoot Marauders, micro support platforms. . . Oh my!

As you can see, once you have your basic power suit squads complete, it does not take a huge amount of effort to complete an entire Mobile Infantry company. Though it may never see battle as a complete force, a whole company gives you all the weapon and equipment options you can possibly want, allowing you to tailor your army against any force you face. It also looks suitably impressive in the display cabinet.

So, what will I do when the Big Red One is all fleshed out? Well, there is always the Big Red Two company. Or how about working on a complete Mobile Infantry battalion. . . ?



THE BIG RED ONE - BARTLETT'S BUCCANEERS

Captain Bartlett 310 pts

Plasma Muniton, Close Combat Expert,
Dirty Fighter, Fire King, Sniper



Colonel Lyman,

Military Intelligence Agent 180 pts

Id Sending, Rupture, Warning



FIRST PLATOON (POWER SUITS)

Lieutenant Moss 170 pts

True Grit



Senior Sergeant Young (NCO) 155 pts

K9 Corps

Power Suit Squad 340 pts

8 Troopers, Sergeant: Sniper, 2 Morita Longs

Power Suit Squad 375 pts

8 Troopers, Sergeant: Armourer, 2 Triple Thuds



Power Suit Squad

8 Troopers, Sergeant: Jumpball Player!, 2 Javelins

410 pts

**SECOND PLATOON (POWER SUITS)****Colour Sergeant Cregg (NCO)**

145 pts

Fast Mover, Standard Bearer

**Power Suit Squad**

8 Troopers, Sergeant: Medic, Morita Long, Triple Thud

350 pts

**Power Suit Squad**

1,000 pts

8 Troopers, Sergeant: Rallying Cry, 2 Javelins, 2 Pee-wee Atomics

THIRD PLATOON (MARAUDER)**Lieutenant McGarry**

320 pts

M9 Chickenhawk, Protagonist, SICON Military Intelligence, Stay Frosty

Senior Sergeant Young (NCO)

265 pts

M8 Ape, Sense Presence

Gunnery Sergeant Ziegler (NCO)

300 pts

M9 Chickenhawk, Blizzard, Twin-Fifty, Stay Frosty



Marauder Squad

3 M8 Apes, Corporal, Sergeant: Dirty Fighter

615 pts

Marauder Squad

3 M9 Chickenhawks, Corporal, Sergeant: Sniper, 2 Blizzards, 2 Infernos

720 pts

EMPLACEMENTS

Three Reliant Weapons Platforms

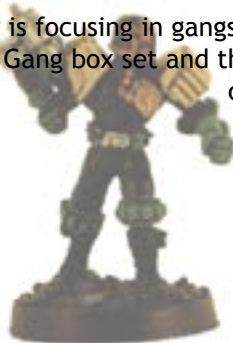
3 Twin-Fifty Autocannon

150 pts

TOTAL: 5305 PTS



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This month Monty is focusing in gangs of Mega-City One with his *Tough On Crime* special offer. You can pick up the Street Gang box set and the Street Judges blister for just \$40.00/£25.00 post free! Just print out the coupon and send it in!



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OCT '05

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STARSHIP TROOPERS™

THE MINIATURES GAME

SKINNIES

Many of you have been asking for some preview shots of the Skinnies in development, and not wishing to be spoilsports, here's a few tasty morsels that Ted Chang acquired from Ian Barstow's desk for you to check out. These are just a few of the many ideas that are being considered, so enjoy!



Skinny Guard



Skinny Soldier



Skinny Venerable



Skinny Militia



Skinny Brute on Riding Lizard

Write for the Mongoose

Want to write for your favourite RPG publisher? Want to get paid for it? Got a great idea for an article? If the answers to these questions are 'yes', then Signs & Portents wants to hear from you.

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We will need a brief synopsis of your intended article, no more than one page long. Also include a paragraph or two of your actual writing style, so we can see whether you have what it takes and any samples of previously published work. If we like what we see, we will commission a first draft from you and you will be on your way to becoming a Mongoose contributing writer. And every article we publish will be paid for...which is nice.

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So, you have chosen your game, but what do you actually write about? Scenarios are good. In fact, we love them. Give me a scenario to edit and I am a happy camper. Perhaps you want to discuss the philosophy of a game. That's good. We encourage intellectual thought process around here. If you have something meaningful to say, then try us out. If we don't like it, we *will* tell you. Think hard before you try humour though. With guys like Jonny Nexus about, you will need to be sharp if you want to break in. If you think you have what it takes, though, then feel free to try your hand. Just be prepared to be told you may not be as funny as you think you are.

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some new feats, then be our guest. We cannot promise that we will like what you have done, but you will get constructive criticism in return, and not just a terse one-line rebuff.

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It is a painful fact that whatever you write, it will get edited. That is why editors exist, after all. Even this passage will have been edited. If you can get over this hurdle you are well on your way to attaining the mentality needed to be a writer. It will help if you can handle criticism as well. Take it from us – writing is a tough business. Just ask any author doing the rounds looking for a friendly publisher.

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All in the Name

NAMING EARTH ALLIANCE SHIPS IN A CALL TO ARMS

Matthew Sprange



There are many ways to enhance your chances of victory in miniatures games. Keeping your dice in a quality dice bag. Fielding a fully painted set of models. In *A Call to Arms*, it appears that if you take the time and trouble to name each ship in your fleet, it will have a better than even chance of surviving to the next battle – an important consideration in a campaign or tournament!

Whether you paint the name of your ships on their bases (the really dedicated will paint very small type on the actual ships...) or simply note down their titles on your fleet roster,

giving ships actual names not only enhances their chances of survival (take my word for it!), it also lends far greater atmosphere to your games. Imagine the following. Would you rather say:

‘Okay, I am moving my two Omegas to flank your Octurion.’

Or would your game seem more fun if you could say.

‘Ha! The *Heracles* and *Nemesis* thunder forward to outwit the *Cartagia* with a pincer move!’

See the difference? Once you name your ships, and encourage your opponent to do likewise, things get more personal which, in turn, leads to you getting more involved in the game. If you are playing a long-running campaign, watching a named ship survive battles and gain an experienced crew can be an immensely rewarding experience.

The Earth Alliance

The vast majority of named ships in the *Babylon 5* TV series come from the Earth Alliance. We see many other vessels, of course, with alien names. These are relatively easy to come up with, as you can get a sense of the language of any given alien race by looking at the names of characters and ship classes. Minbari names, for examples, tend to end with

syllables such as ‘fi, ‘enn and ‘ier. Place a soft sounding syllable in front of one of those and, magically, you have a Minbari ship. Narn ships usually have two hard sounding syllables separated by an apostrophe, and so on.

The Earth Alliance, however, has certain established rules and conventions when it comes to ship names. Feel free to ignore these by all means (they are your ships!) but if you follow the guide below for each class of vessel, you will soon find you have a fleet that has the right ‘atmosphere’ for the Earth Alliance.

In most cases, the first ship of a new class will carry the name of that class. So, the first Hyperion-class cruiser was called the *Hyperion*. Once this ship has been launched, the standard naming conventions of the Earth Alliance come into use. Most of the names presented below are ‘canon’ in that they have (or, in some cases, will) actually appeared as ships of that type in *Babylon 5*, whether on screen or paper. Some, however, have been inserted as examples (you can test your *Babylon 5* knowledge here!). You can freely pinch these names for your own ships or use them as inspiration for your own creations.














It is important to remember that there are often exceptions to the standard naming convention for all kinds of ship. Sometimes a ship is named to commemorate a specific event or individual. At other times, the naming convention may fall out of favour, either temporarily or for all time. You must thus not feel bound to use the names presented here. They are intended as a guide only for the majority of ships in the Earth Alliance.

At all times, the name of a ship is preceded by the letters EAS (Earth Alliance Ship). So, the full name of a certain famous





Omega would be the *EAS Agamemnon*. In text, it is common for the ship names to be italicised.

OMEGA

The Omega has a divided naming convention. Before the rise of President Clark, names chosen for each new destroyer tended to be based on Greek mythology or, sometimes, that of Rome. By watching the TV series, you are unlikely to run out of names for your Omegas! These names have included:

-  Acheron
-  Achilles
-  Agamemnon
-  Agrippa
-  Apollo
-  Furies
-  Heracles
-  Hydra
-  Juno
-  Nemesis
-  Perseus
-  Pollux
-  Vesta





Though it started some years before President Clark came to power, new Omega destroyers began to lose their Greek and Roman connections in the naming convention. Instead, like the older Nova dreadnoughts, they began to be named for famous generals and other leaders throughout real history. These include the following:

-  Alexander
-  Churchill
-  Eisenhower
-  Nelson

HYPERION





In general, the Hyperion class follows the same naming convention as the Omega and it too went through a change in naming conventions just before the reign of President Clark. Examples include:

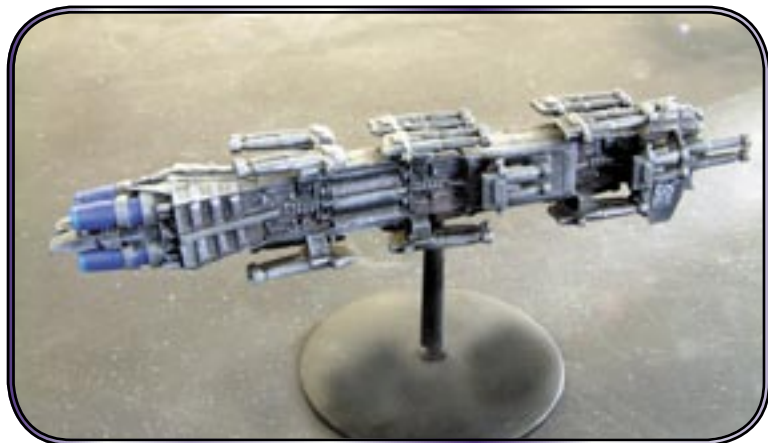


-  Chronos
-  Clarkstown
-  Lexington
-  Prometheus

NOVA

It was the Nova that started the trend of using famous leaders from Earth's history as names for vessels. Such personalities are typically at least a century in the past, to avoid any political problems.

-  Bonaparte
-  Dowding
-  Rommel
-  Schwartzkopf




 Washington

 Yamato

WARLOCK

The Warlock advanced destroyer fell back to an old Earth wet navy naming convention in that it uses names based conceptually on the title of the whole class. In this case, Warlocks have been named after practitioners of magic, either by type or specific name (please don't call such an awesome ship the *EAS Harry Potter*...)

 Enchantress

 Hermione

 Merlin

 Necromancer

 Prestidigitator

 Sorcerer

VICTORY

After the first vessel was launched, bearing the name of the class, subsequent Victory advanced destroyers drew upon Arthurian legend. Due to lingering superstition, it has been decided that the name Guinevere would never be used for this class of ship.



 Badon

 Caliburn

 Camlan

 Galahad

 King Mark

 Lancelot



 Pendragon

 Percivale

POSEIDON

The original Poseidon (named after the class) was destroyed during the Earth/Minbari War but the later and more capable ships adopted Latin names of various birds, allegedly to emphasise the ‘flock’ of Starfuries that swarm out of its hangers.



 Corax

 Diomeda

 Raptor

EXPLORER

Only six Explorer ships have been built but all have been given names of famous explorers in Earth’s history.

 Cortez

 Maggiolo

 Livingstone

 Vespucci

 Verrazzano





 Shacklton

SAGITTARIUS

Predictably, the first dozen Sagittarius cruisers were named after the signs of the Zodiac but they soon reverted to the Greek/Roman convention.

SCOUT VESSELS

Ships dedicated to the scouting role, such as the Delphi and Oracle are unusual in that although they use a Greek naming convention, they use specific titles relating to the sites of Greek oracles.

-  Claros
-  Delphi
-  Didyma
-  Trophonius

OTHER VESSELS

In general, other types of ship in EarthForce will use the same naming convention as the Omega and Hyperion. These are two of the most common vessels in the fleet and, given the vast number of ships that EarthForce has supported in the past, it has often been easier to simply adopt names from the set roster. However, there are many exceptions. There are many cases where an entire production run of ships in a certain class have been given related names that veer from the standard convention. For example, early Avenger-class carriers were given names meant to inspire the idea of freedom and liberty, and titles such as Emancipator, Fraternity and Liberator are still remembered fondly by older EarthForce officers.



SUMMARY

As was said earlier, you should not feel constrained by the names given here – indeed, they should serve as a jumping point for your own imagination. You will also find it constructive to plough through the Internet for inspiration (Googling the words Greek, Rome and Mythology will get you a long way).

Just remember, a well-named ship will always have lucky dice!



SCENIC MAYHEM!

MAKING AN ANTHILL OUT OF A MOUNTAIN

Darell C. Phillips

I'm sure you've heard your friends at least once (and possibly many more times) graciously informing you, 'You are making a mountain out of a mole hill'. No? Not ever? Come on now. Well, at least you can think some more on that as you read further (sheesh...)

The rules for *Starship Troopers the Miniatures Game* describes the use of terrain features that can be used for battles. While there are endless ways of making terrain boards and structures so that your troops have something to consider tactically while moving on with their mayhem, in this exercise we will look at one way to build something a bit different.

I hit on this idea while performing a tactical sweep of the aisles of a major toy store chain (good enough hint there, or are you still wondering why that 'making a mountain' phrase is strangely so familiar, somehow?). Right, well on this visit I was looking for some nifty trees to add to some 'greened up' gaming boards I was thinking of building. I stopped when I found something interesting sitting on the shelf. Looking back at me was an 'Animal Planet-Safari Mountain Playset' with four nice fluffy trees included. The trees were possibly of the Acacia variety, but were definitely something to be acquired regardless of the species of plastic they consisted of. At a price of \$12.99 USD, it wasn't overpriced for what I could use it for. If I figured each tree at \$3.00 USD, then it



meant that I got a bonus hollow mountain shell for the bargain price of a dollar. What a deal- I quickly grappled onto two sets. Briefly, I glanced at the age suggestion on the packaging stated as 'Ages 3+'. Quickly ticking off on my fingers 'Stone, Bronze and Iron' to myself, I calculated that the '+' meant the 'Plastic Age' and felt satisfied that I met the requirements. By the way, I know what you're thinking right now. You're thinking of 'that phrase', and how it might apply to me? No way. Just forget it. We're moving on now.

When I returned from my supply mission, I happily separated the trees from the playset. Then my vision of a 'green' gaming board was quickly put to the back of my mind when I thought of what could possibly be done to salvage the two tan shells of plastic for use as gaming terrain. As you can see from the photos, they were destined to be joined together to form a slight homage to the 'Ant Hills' of the *'Roughnecks: The Starship Trooper Chronicles, the Complete Campaigns'* DVDs that I had been viewing for uhh, *research* purposes. Seriously though, buy the DVD collection. It's great entertainment.

Noting that the two halves are not symmetrical when placed back-to-back, I had to come up with a way to hide this difference. By fitting a two-inch Styrofoam filler in between the shell halves, it helped to hide the different outlines of the pieces when they are closed like a clamshell. The method I used was to trace one shell back outline with a black marker onto one side, and then flip the chunk of Styrofoam over and trace what is actually the same pattern again. With the use of a very inexpensive wire foam cutter (about \$10 USD), I trimmed the foam to match the lines on each side (yes, it was a tricky thing, that). Another option would be to do this step later when the two halves are bonded together and then follow the contours with the cutter (but not nearly as much fun, you know).

By using duct tape to temporarily join the two halves and the foam 'buffer' together, I was ready to fill the gaps and to join the parts into a single shape. I decided to use a can of foam sealant for this, easily found at home improvement stores. As



you can see from the photo, even knowing ahead of time that this stuff is very expanding didn't seem to help much. After allowing enough time to dry, I used a hacksaw to remove the excess foam. And no, I haven't thrown it away, because I might make some terrain out of it later...

With the bottom now cut flush, I wanted to reinforce the outside of the Styrofoam and further bond the pieces together. Now the step that I took next might be the hardest to replicate if you are undertaking this project. I had the availability of polyurethane plastic resin to mix up and pour over the terrain piece. I would think that either skipping this step or perhaps using an alternative material might work as a substitute. Paper Mache might just do the trick, as an alternative. Since I did use plastic resin however, I allowed some of the overspill to form a bottom flange that would rest on a game table.



The next step was to put several coats of primer over the whole of the project. It was at this time that it started looking like a single terrain feature. By the way, I was able to use a computer motherboard static bag (as seen in the photos) as a release for the plastic flange. I also believe I used a bit of spray silicone mold release on it as well to assist in it not sticking.

Another step I used in this construction that might be skipped without major side-effects is the part that looks like 'snow on the mountain'. I wanted a little more relief on the model surface, so I added a layer of spray texture that is best known as 'orange peel' texture for household walls. The misfortune in this step comes when the final colour is applied. The chalky nature of the texture makes the paint chip more easily with a fingernail strike. I found this out to my disgust only at the end (sigh). My solution was a very thick coat of acrylic sealer to help protect the finish. That seems to be working,

but if you ever see my creations at a game convention, I had better not see your fingernails testing the surface of my prototype Ant Hill. Just in case, remember to trim your fingernails before going off to any game conventions. Then when someone asks you years later why you always do that before gaming, you can say you don't remember why (because I already tested your recall at the beginning of the article, right?)

One little touch I added before the finishing paint (and that thick sealer) was to carve out the Styrofoam where the 'cave' entrance is cast into the mountain shell. I also cut out a similar one on the top shelf level. It adds a bit to the 'Ant Hill' concept. For paint, I would choose something that doesn't eat at Styrofoam (I use Krylon water-based latex spray paints for my terrain projects). I varied my paint effects by blending at least three cans for a 'sandy' stone look. If anyone is wondering what I did with the safari animals, I'll add my standard disclaimer 'No plastic safari animals were harmed in this demonstration'. I gave them to children. See, you can finish the project and can even have a warm feeling left over at the end of it (although after a time you'll wonder why you get a warm feeling every time you clip your fingernails...)

To embellish the project a bit further, I've found that carving up some Styrofoam stalagmites and placing them around the 'Ant Hill' gives the tabletop terrain board some awesome gaming depth for units to use (and makes for a visual delight as well). Your MI can 'jet pack' their way up to a high point for a look-see around the area. Just remember though what happened to the radio operator in the movie 'Starship Troopers' who was looking for higher ground to get a better signal. Hoppers like higher ground as well, as we've all found out. Lesson learned (at least he won't make that mistake a second time, that's for sure...)



One method of building up a simulated time-weathered sandstone rock formation is to cut irregular-sized pieces out of a single thickness of Styrofoam material. If each is a bit larger than the previous one you make, a 'pyramid' of these can be assembled into a usable gaming artefact. While a wood skewer (found at most grocery stores) can be used to make a 'low calorie Styrofoam shish-kebob', to support the finished assembly, I was lazy because I had some excellent foam adhesive (3M #6070). Besides, I can always add one later to them if I get into a 'voodoo-doll mood'.

The first step is to acquire either a sharp knife or I suggest you use a battery powered foam cutter. These are very affordable and are found at most hobby/craft stores. I'll admit that I used my more expensive cutter for some of the work (it has a bendable wire), but the 'craft cutter' should work to get the

same effect that I received. Using a permanent marker, make a series of sequentially larger irregular shapes on a piece of sheet Styrofoam. I used two-inch thick material for the ones I made to complement my Ant Hill. A standard step that I include in my Styrofoam cutting is having several strong cups of coffee (or tea) and having them 'assist' in the jaggy shape of the cut (mentally insert smiley here).

Additional optional sculpting can also be done to the pieces before assembly by trimming bits out of the sides and top/bottom edges (you might call this 'nibbling' at them a bit, but don't take the term literally, ok?). It's probably a good idea to assemble a stack of pieces to see what the final appearance is before gluing them together. For additional gaming functionality, I allowed some pieces to have a horizontal overhang offset so that a trooper gaming miniature for example might have a place to base on at various altitudes from the surface (while occasionally ducking Hoppers).

As stated previously, I prefer Krylon latex spray paints for finish effects (note how cleverly I dodged that whole colour/colour thing). An interesting side note is seeing my 'Yank' version of MS Word helpfully showing me a squiggly red line (for spelling) under 'colour' (there it is again!), and when it goes 'over the pond' the editor's version will move that red line elsewhere (I'm right, aren't I Mr. Editor?) (*ermmm, no. I'd already run the whole thing through the spell checker before I read it, so the whole article is in Queen's (Cambridge) English (or, if you prefer, 'proper posh chat') before I looked at it – The Olde English Editor*). It somehow reminds me of the 'sighing' door effects in the Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy, but I digress (sorry).

Where were we? Ah yes, ‘finish effects’. Well then, I decided on using four different cans for the rock stalagmites: #2614 White Primer (optional), #2611 Gulf Gray (I know, I know, it should be spelled ‘grey’ but that’s what the can says, dang it!) (*actually, grey is a perfectly acceptable spelling in Oxford English, as are words that end in ‘iz’ (such as ‘Americanize’ vs ‘Americanise’) – however, we’re Cambridge English here at Signs & Portents, dontyerknow - The Editor*), #2608 Java Sea Brown, and #2613 Panama Canal Beige. By the way, ‘Google’ for ‘grey or gray’ if you have the time to kill (I particularly like the ‘Bernie Zimmermann’ site for the story he tells). I also now know just why the Arachnids have a hive mind - they don’t have to deal with spelling conflicts! When using this paint, I do not wait for it to dry. Instead, I quickly switch cans and apply the next coat with a sweeping motion. Each time, I make sure to hit a random area so that some of each can is left showing through. This method of application also creates a blending effect due to the previous layer not drying. If you need to, you can go back and forth, switching to other cans to achieve the effect desired. My choices provide for a bit of a rock ‘look’, but with a greater influence towards sandstone, which is my goal. After drying, I usually apply a brush coat of a water-soluble

craft sealer called ‘Mod-Podge’. If you add this step, be sure to skip past buying the gloss version label. The one you want is called ‘Matte-Mat’ (and you thought I was the only one with spelling problems, eh? EH?). Actually, I rather like their package label. It makes me feel like I found my towel and I’m safe again (if you don’t get that one, you need to see/hear/read the aforementioned Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy).



The nice thing about terrain boards is that the more things you build for them, the more ways you can find of combining the different pieces to add game tactics and break up line-of-sight. I also made a few of the ‘rock towers’ so that they combined in different ways. By that I mean that I made a long bridging piece that can sit directly on a game board surface, or optionally stack onto two of the other

stalagmite towers that are the same height. Toothpicks could be used to join the pieces temporarily if desired. Your terrain is only limited by your imagination. It doesn’t cost an excessive amount to make some very usable terrain boards. And like tabletop gaming itself, it sure can be fun, too.



THE FINISHED ANT HILL



The Arms Buyer's Almanac, 2127: Sonic Weapons

New Weapons and Equipment for Gangs of Mega-City One

The principles behind sound-based weapons have been utilised for decades, but it is only in the last few years that the technology has become available to the average punk on the street. Previously, only the forces of the Justice Department had ready access to sonic hardware in the form of the greatly feared Sonic Cannon, a vast weapon that is capable of disabling whole mobs in a single blast of high volume infrasonic white noise but is so colossal that it requires its own dedicated transportation vehicle. Advances in weapons technology has allowed the development of sonic oscillators that can be carried in one hand, although such a weapon is still extremely heavy and bulky in comparison to other small arms of similar size. Unlike the Justice Department issue equipment that is dedicated to merely disabling its targets by firing waves of low frequency infrasound, sonic blaster technology projects a beam of high volume, high frequency ultrasound. Although the blast is, in theory, extraordinary loud, the frequency range is pitched far above the range of normal human hearing; such a weapon is completely silent when used, manifesting as a beam of rippling distortion – although it is not unheard of for technologically minded punks to adjust the frequency into the audible range, so that they can shatter their rivals with destructive blasts of their favourite Drokk rokk tunes. A hit

Matt Sharp

by an ultrasonic blast can be devastating, as sympathetic vibrations rip through the target, liquefying flash and plastic and shattering rockcrete and bones. Although powerful, sonic weapons are short ranged and are dependant on prototype technology that is rather unreliable; most are prone to vibration induced feedback loops – in other words, the weapon can vibrate so much that it can become red hot and cause severe damage to its user.



Soundblade

Like the las knife and the las cleaver, this is another example of an industrial hand tool that has been assimilated into gang culture as a lethal weapon. A soundblade is a small, hand-held cutting tool that produces a short ‘blade’ of ultrasonic force that, according to its makers, ‘can cut through anything - effortlessly!’ A soundblade consists of a handgrip similar in appearance to a las-knife, although it is slightly chunkier and much heavier. However, the differences are obvious when the weapon is activated – in place of the las-knife’s hissing red neon cutting edge, the soundblade consists of a ten-inch long projection of high frequency ultrasound. This manifests as a heat haze-like ripple, capable of cutting through almost anything short of a military grade force field. Despite its lethal nature, a gang member needs to be cautious when using a soundblade as the prototype technology has a tendency to overheat and vaporise explosively with prolonged use, usually taking the user’s hand with it.

Sonic Blaster Pistol

Bulky and angular in appearance, the sonic blaster pistol is becoming an increasingly common sight on the plazas of Mega-City One, much to the alarm of the Justice Department. Large, heavy and intimidating, sonic blaster pistols are serious



weapons only carried by serious perps – or at least, those with the serious amount of creds required to buy one. Unlike most other beam or wave based sonic weapons, the sonic blaster pistol is a pulse weapon that projects a small ‘squib’ of high volume ultrasonic vibration. These sonic bullets induce severe but short-lived sympathetic vibrations to rip through any solid surface that they impact with, often causing the target to blow apart.

Heavy Sonic Blaster

Extremely bulky and heavy, the heavy sonic blaster has a rather Heath Robinson appearance, looking like it has been constructed from bits and pieces of technology found lying around in a Tek Lab. The weapon consists of a heavy, tubular body covered in dials and switches with a large blunderbuss-like barrel. Like most sonic based weapon systems, the heavy sonic blaster fires waves of high volume ultrasound that is capable of shaking its target into pieces, which can be devastating to structures and organic targets but the complex focusing mechanisms ensure that it is extremely short ranged and slow compared to weapons of similar size.





Quake Grenade

Noisy and intimidating, the quake grenade would no doubt be extremely popular among street gangs if it were not for their sheer expense. A quake grenade consists of a small but incredibly powerful amplifier capable of producing unbelievable volume – loud enough to shatter rockcrete and human bones. Fortunately, the blast is extremely short lived; as the amplifier cannot resist its own sonic emissions, it will vaporise less than a second after activation. However, this split second of incredible sound is more than enough to cause severe damage to the surrounding area as the sonic blast wave rips the very air apart. Like all grenades, a model that buys quake grenades only buys enough to use in one fight. After this fight, he must purchase more quake grenades if the model wishes to continue using them.

Infrasonic Grenade

The infrasonic grenade was an attempt by the Justice Department to refine their own sonic cannon technology, producing a hand-held weapon that could be used to quickly and efficiently subdue rioting and unruly groups of citizens. However, the technology proved to be far too expensive to develop on the large scale needed and the Judges retained their traditional Stumm Grenades. Civilian manufacturers refined the technology and it was not long before infrasonic grenades began to appear on the streets. Small and heavy, these egg-shaped weapons produce a high-volume blast of infrasonic sound. Unlike ultrasound frequencies, infrasound is pitched *below* the range of human hearing. These frequencies lack the disruptive power of ultrasound, but exposure to infrasound can have a devastating effect on the human mind, with effects including severe disorientation and nausea, but can also induce a wide variety of reactions including epilepsy, temporary paralysis and blindness, terrifying hallucinations and uncontrollable incontinence. Fortunately, the effect of an infrasonic grenade is relatively short lived in comparison to infrasonic blasts from a Justice





Department sonic cannon, which have been known to last for hours. Any model successfully damaged by this weapon is Stunned for 2D turns. However, an infrasonic attack will have no effect on non-organic targets, such as robots. A model that buys infrasonic grenades only buys enough to use in one fight. After this fight, he must purchase more infrasonic grenades if the model wishes to continue using them.

Weapon	CC Bonus	Dam	Cost	Required Reputation	Special	Rep Bonus
Soundblade	+1	1D+2	900 cr.	10	AP 2, Break +2, Dangerous, Unarmed	-

Weapon	Range	SD	Dam	Cost	Reputation Required	Special	Rep Bonus
Sonic Blaster Pistol	8"	1D	1D+4	8,000 cr.	20	AP 2, Break +2, Dangerous	+6

Weapon	Range	SD	Dam	Cost	Reputation Required	Special	Rep Bonus
Heavy Sonic Blaster	8"	1D	1D+4	15,000 cr.	25	Ready, AP 3, Break +3, Dangerous	+9

Weapon	Range	SD	Dam	Cost	Reputation Required	Special	Rep Bonus
Quake Grenade	8"	1D	1D+2	750 cr.	15	Explosive, Ready, AP 2, Break +4	-

Weapon	Range	SD	Dam	Cost	Reputation Required	Special	Rep Bonus
Infrasonic Grenade	8"	1D	1D	500 cr.	15	Explosive, Ready, Stun	-

MONGOOSE INFANTRY FIELD REPORT: GENCON-INDIANAPOLIS 2005

Bryan "Stratos" Borgman and Sky Marshal Marc Farrimond

The Mongoose Infantry Programme is now a year old and has gone from strength to strength, with troopers in America, the United Kingdom, Europe and Australia and new territories coming into the fold every week. Wherever there is a stockist or games convention you will most likely find our valiant troopers out there in the field, bringing the good word of Mongoose Publishing products to the ever-hungry masses.

This August saw the annual Gencon games show and convention, held at the Indianapolis Convention Centre, Indiana. The Mongoose Infantry were present throughout the four-day event, running roleplaying games, demos and tournaments and generally having a good time in downtown Indianapolis. This is my report.

As the Mongoose Infantry Field Marshal for Gencon, I arrived bright and early on Wednesday morning to begin setting up



both the Mongoose product booth in the exhibit hall and our 12 gaming tables in the Miniatures HQ. When I arrived at 8:30am, I found Alexander Fennell, Top Dog of Mongoose, already busy at work sorting and setting up the product booth. Shortly thereafter, the guys from Danger Planet Games &



Hobbies arrived at the convention centre with their fabulous 6 tables of custom-built terrain for the Starship Troopers Miniatures Game. After several hours of setting up both areas, additional errands to be run, and the arrival of more assistance from both Mongoose HQ and fellow Infantrymen, we were finished for the day and ready for the “Best Four Days in Gaming” to begin the following morning.

Gencon officially kicked off at 10:00am on Thursday 18 August. In the Miniatures HQ (Sagamore Ballroom) we had 6 tables scheduled to run Gangs of Mega-City One and another 6 tables for Starship Troopers. Both events were supposed to run a good portion of the day; however, things don't always go as planned which is why we must remain on the bounce at all times! The scheduled Day 1 of SST-Operation Ajax: Return to Selvache 3 turned into organized demos of the game instead of actual tournament play. Meanwhile the number of players for Gangs of Mega-City One's “Bring-N-Battle” scenario was also low and no one brought their own models for either event!

As the miniatures gaming was underway, several MI were tasked with running demonstration scenarios of various Mongoose RPGs. On Thursday the MI ran a Starship Troopers RPG event, a WARS RPG event, and Infernum. Despite some low participant numbers, the MI on hand handled the situation brilliantly and it was a good first day of gaming!

On Friday the MI ran more demo scenarios of the Starship Troopers and WARS Roleplaying Games and a session of both the Paranoia and Babylon 5 RPGs as well. The RPGs really picked up on Friday and went over really well. Feedback from those that participated was positive and the MI serving as GMs of the events each did a top-notch job.

As the RPGs were underway in “Room 9”, the Babylon 5: A Call To Arms Tournament took place under the leadership of Bryan Steele, author of Sky Full of Stars, in the Miniatures HQ. The tournament had six participants with the following results: Joel Copeland took First Place with his Drazi Fleet. Jeff Flowers took Second Place playing his Narn Fleet and





Rob Fernandez came in Third Place fielding the Minbari. Meanwhile, Chris Yu received the “Best Painted” Award for his stellar Minbari Fleet and a unanimous vote was cast as Robert Lewis (playing the Earth Alliance) was awarded the “Sportsman” Award. Dino Minakis also participated in the tournament as the Centauri.

Saturday started off with a major disappointment. Soon after I arrived at the convention centre I learned that there was an overnight theft of miniatures and roleplaying materials that had belonged to several MI members volunteering for the convention. Police reports were filed with Gencon and the convention centre security but unfortunately no one’s stuff has turned up. As Field Marshal of the event, I did my best to compensate those Infantry members who had items stolen. Unfortunately nothing can replace the time and dedication spent as a labour of love on their original items.

Once it was time for Day 2 of Starship Troopers – Operation Ajax to begin, I was surprised to see that only half of the ticket holders actually showed and none brought models of

their own. Fortunately the MI were quick on their feet and turned the event into three well-coordinated four-player demos utilizing many of our personal models on hand in addition to Danger Planet’s terrain. Regardless of these obstacles, I commend the MI for their good attitudes and abilities in helping to turn a potential problem into an enjoyable event.

Not all was bleak on Saturday though. Some highlights of the day included moving one table (the awesome shot-down starship terrain) down to the Mongoose product booth in the exhibit hall where several dedicated MI served on 550-point SST demo duty on both Saturday and Sunday. Also on Saturday Jason Coleman of the MI ran a demo scenario for the Conan Roleplaying Game. Lastly, Mongoose auctioned off two complete (though package and instructions free) Plasma Bugs with all the proceeds going to Toys For Tots. The amount of money raised for charity was a combined \$170.00 and will go a long way toward this wonderful cause.



Sunday was a day of rest for most of the Mongoose Infantrymen. A final slot of the WARS Roleplaying Game and turns taken at the booth running both the Paranoia Card Game and 550-point Starship Troopers Miniatures demos was all that was really on the agenda for most of us. An Awards Ceremony had been scheduled for 2:00pm to award certificates to those who won in both the Starship Troopers and Babylon 5: A Call To Arms tournaments but only a few showed up (actual prizes and cash vouchers were awarded immediately proceeding the events so most people went right a way to the booth to make their winning purchases).

At 4:00pm on August 21, 2005 Gencon-Indy came to a close. Many MI were already home or on their way with a few staying behind to help myself and those from HQ tear down the booth and assist Danger Planet Games with loading the terrain into their van. At the end of the day it was a very good show and Mongoose Publishing made a good presentation of all its fantastic and expanding products – many of which sold well or sold out long before the show was even over. I know from talking with Alex and the rest of the Mongoose staff on hand that they are very pleased and grateful of the MI who volunteered for Gencon.

My personal thanks go out to: Bryan Steele for helping coordinate and facilitate the *Babylon 5: A Call To Arms* with the help of Patrick Maloney and James Flanagan of the

Mongoose Infantry. To Patrick and James for also helping coordinate and facilitate the *Starship Troopers Miniatures* events with the help of Jason Coleman, Jeff Flowers, Jim Graham, David Schoborg, Jason Varisco, and John Vogel all of the MI. To Dan Kelly of the MI for helping coordinate and facilitate the *Gangs of Mega-City One* miniatures event with the help of Jeff Flowers. To Al Rivera of the MI for helping with long hours on booth duty and running demos of the fantastic new *Paranoia Card Game*. To Aaron Frede, on behalf of Decipher, for being on hand to run the *WARS Roleplaying Game* slots. To Chaz Estell for running the *Paranoia RPG* event. And everyone else already listed who doubled (or sometimes tripled and quadrupled) their workloads and served not only as Judges for particular miniatures events but also served as the Game Masters of the above listed RPGs. I consider all of you invaluable members of the Mongoose Infantry program and look forward to serving with you all again possibly in 2006 at either Origins or Gencon-Indy or both!

If you are interested in joining the Mongoose Infantry programme, then why not check out the Mongoose Publishing website or contact your area Sky Marshal, D. Scott Stewart in the US and Canada or Marc Farrimond in the UK and the rest of the world. Service Guarantees Citizenship!

Photo credits: James Flanagan and John Vogel.



Going Downtown

MULTI-LEVELLED TERRAIN IN THE STARSHIP TROOPERS MINIATURES GAME

Matthew Sprange

Most 28mm scale wargames are written with a certain sort of terrain in mind – typically the ‘green fields of Kent’, with verdant fields, clumped woods, some rolling hills and the odd building. There are many variants on this theme, covering deserts, ice worlds and alien landscapes but the terrain itself ends up being pretty much the same from a rules perspective. We all have this terrain in our collection because it is easy to put together, looks good on the battlefield and feels intrinsically ‘fair’ to all armies, without unnecessarily penalising one or the other.

That said, there are gamers who go the extra mile with their terrain, building complete jungles or cities to fight battles that give a very different experience. From the outset, we wanted *Starship Troopers* to be a very ‘open’ game, where a player’s imagination would be the limit, rather than the rules themselves. This is why, for example, defence assets such as bunkers and weapon emplacements are built directly into the rules system. In other games, you need special scenarios to field such things and it always feels a bit of a ‘cheat’ when you do. With *Starship Troopers*, you can load up on bunkers and other fortifications just by selecting Defence tactics – and your army will even be tourney legal!



The other aim was to quantify terrain, so that you could tell what hid which unit or gave it cover, simply by glancing at the table – no need to get down and get a model’s eye view, and then argue about it with your opponent (‘yes, I can see your model’s outstretched arm, so it must be a target’).



All this has worked well so far but Starship Troopers is a very organic game that allows players to come up with all sorts of tactics and ideas. That is great as far as it goes but a bit of a nightmare for games designers as we have to ensure there are no loopholes or exploits that will ruin the game – again, so far, the game is holding up well but a few posts on our forums have made us realise that there are a growing number of gamers who want to move away from the green fields of Kent and move into the suburbs and shopping centres. Troopers want to go urban!

Because of this, it is worth reviewing the rules for Starship Troopers and clarify a few areas that you will run into when fighting in urban or similar environments.

ELEVATION

If you are reading this for clarifications on playing Starship Troopers (rather than just wondering what on Earth we are discussing here!), then you will already know the rules for Line of Sight, based on the size of models and terrain. However, in multi-levelled environments, models are going to be perched on top of terrain pieces a lot of the time and this can effect Line of Sight greatly. After all, if your squad of troopers insists on standing on the highest point of the battlefield, then they will be exposed to anyone who wants to take a pot shot at them!

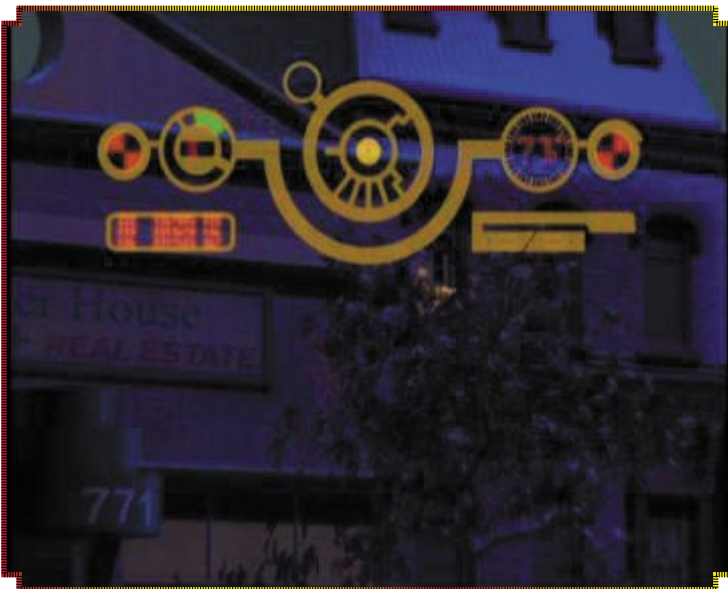
It is fairly obvious but worth clarifying nonetheless. Add the size of the terrain piece to your model's size for the purposes of Line of Sight only. Also remember that Line of Sight works both ways, so if they can see you, you can see them. This means that a unit on a high enough vantage point will be seen by every model on the battlefield but, at the same time, it will be able to see everyone else too. This is why snipers like high spots to hide...

MEASURING RANGE

Once models start climbing large terrain pieces, you will be tempted to start angling tape measures upwards when gauging range. Don't! All range measurements in Starship Troopers should be measured along the flat plane of the table without taking any vertical distance into consideration. If this sounds a little odd, there really is not much difference in the two methods but this way will result in less arguments ("but my tanker bug is a big model, and so I should start measuring two inches off the ground!")

BOUNCING TROOPERS

The rulebook states that any model using the Jump movement mode can clear any terrain, so long as it is no more than 6"



tall. But what if you start your movement on the top of a 12” tall building or cliff?

While using the Jump movement mode, you can clear any terrain that is up to 6” higher than your starting point. So, if your troopers started on the top of a 12” high building, you could clear another that was up to 18” high. This also means that if you start in a trench or pit, the height of a terrain piece that you can freely cross will be reduced by the size of your starting position. For example, if you started in a size 1 trench, then you could only jump over terrain up to 5” in height.

You can descend any amount freely while using the Jump movement mode, so you could automatically descend from the top of an 18” high building to the ground.

REMOTE SENTRY GUNS

The director’s cut of *Aliens* has a lot to answer for – still, the idea of remote sentry guns that do not require crew

are inherently sexy. However, artificial intelligence in the Federation still has a way to go (the success of the CHAS has yet to be repeated) and so sentry guns are generally used only in strongholds and on battlefields that expect to see a lot of short-ranged combat, such as the streets of towns and cities. The sensors and targeting systems of these weapons are limited in range but can prove effective when sited near bottlenecks.

Any Reliant weapons platform can be upgraded to be a remote sentry gun for +15 points. Once upgraded, the weapons platform may not be used by crew. Instead, it is deployed like any other defence asset and is treated as a separate unit. However, it cannot take actions and may only make Shoot reactions.

Note that this is not an ‘official’ rule and should not be used in tournaments. But give it a whirl in your games and drop by our forums to let us know how you got on – if these rules prove popular, they may appear in a future *Starship Troopers* release!



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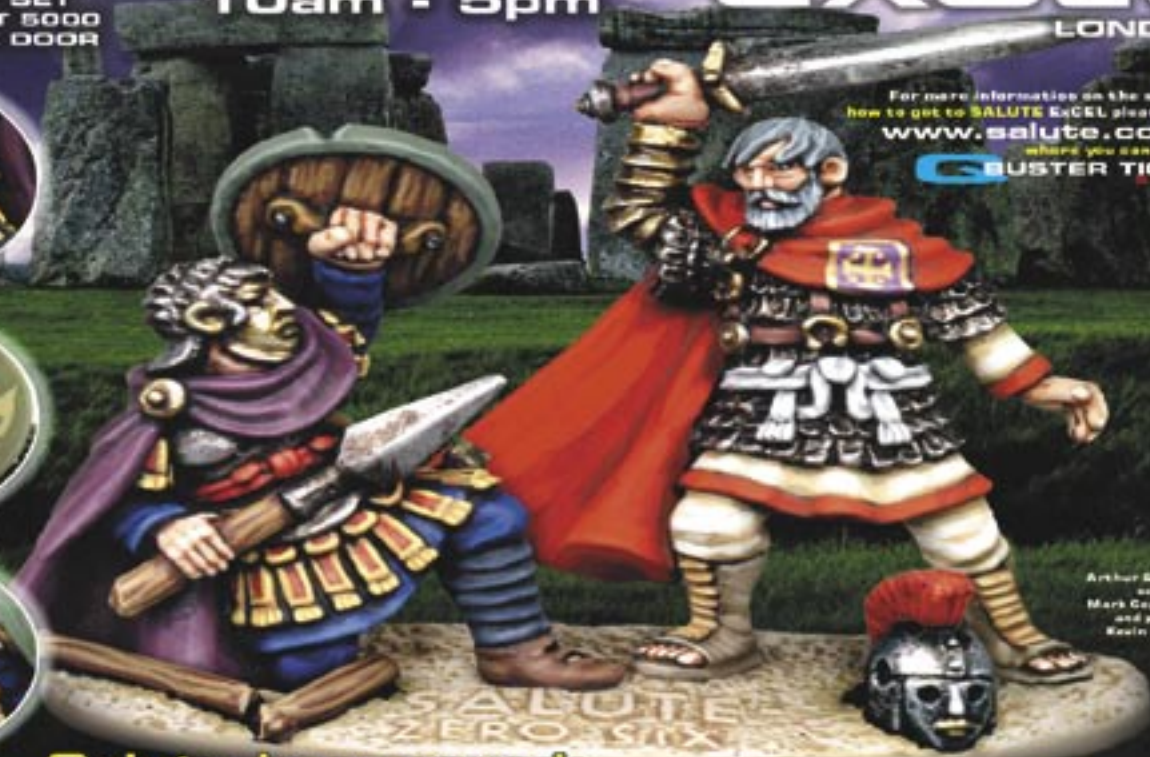
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The Desert Oracle

Episode One

Ty Falco

Chapter One

The view from the top of the tower revealed the defences of the fortified town. The man smiled to himself with satisfaction as he gazed over the battlements. Soon the town would fall to his king with the help of his well-drawn map. He retrieved a sheet of papyrus from his pack, along with an eagle feather and a bottle of ink. Quickly but accurately, he sketched out the locations of the town's fortifications, vulnerabilities, and points of interest like a powerful god forging a blueprint for creation. The smells of the filth in the streets drifted up to him and the guttural sounds of the townspeople passed through his ears, but he blocked all of this out and remained focused on his mission.

After a small passage of time he judged his work to be complete and put his materials away. The map was placed in a special tube he wore around his neck, beneath his leather armour. The sun was setting so he decided to wait where he was until nightfall to make his escape. The bandit princes who ruled this town would be made to suffer for their indiscretions on the Morgundian border. The man turned toward the doorway he had used to access the roof of the tower, clutched a hand crossbow loaded with a poisoned bolt, and shut his eyes to regain his strength through meditation.



A cry jerked him back to reality. Someone was screaming as the sound of metal plates crashing on stone faded into the distance. An unfortunate person had slipped on the miniature glass balls he had left on the top steps of the tower and was now falling the length of the four levels of spiral stairs. They might live but would be in no condition to stop his departure. All of the nearby guards and citizens of the town would now be alerted so he would have to alter his escape route. Fortunately, it was twilight so his black clothing would help him become one with the shadows.

He removed a collapsible grappling hook attached to a lengthy measure of black silk rope from his pack. He heard shouts emanating from the bottom of the stairs. His pulse quickened not with fear but with the challenge now presented. He had been in worse situations than this but the thrill of getting away with something, an important piece of information that could alter the course of future events, always gave him a burst of energy and confidence. He crawled to the edge of the roof to review his options. On the north side was the main entrance to the tower and he could see the town guards forming up in front already. To the east and west were lower buildings that bordered the tower. He could descend to one of their roofs but would then have to crawl down on the north side and say hello to the nice town guards. On the south side was a dark and narrow alleyway, perfect for an escape-except for the two town guards with pole-arms milling around. Trapped? No. Challenged? Yes.

The sounds of metal clanging and heavy footsteps from the directions of the stairs caused him to stop pondering and make up his mind. He would go down the south side of the building. He moved in a low crouch and placed the grappling hook in a secure position. Silently he measured out the black silk line until it reached the bottom of the tower. The two guards were talking amongst themselves, he could not make out what they were saying, but they failed to notice his rope. He pulled a generous packet of flash powder from his pack and held it between his teeth. He quietly slipped over the edge of the tower and made his way down. At the halfway point he stopped and threw the flash powder as far to the west as he could. It exploded with a brilliant flash and a loud bang. A large puff of smoke marked its place. The town guards quickly moved towards the source of the commotion like goblins rushing to gold pieces falling from a table. He slid the rest of the way down and moved east along the alley, disappearing into the shadows.

Chapter Two

Prince Vadrex was waiting in the royal throne room. His father, King Tyrnon, had invited him to attend a meeting. He had not revealed who else would be attending but Prince Vadrex knew it would most likely be a meaningless diplomatic intrigue with moron underlings or grovelling petitioners. He loved being a prince but hated the work of actually ruling a kingdom. While his father indulged the subjects of Morgund, he would simply have ruled, as he felt like and if others objected it would be too bad. His father had risen from lowly barbarian to noble by the might of his sword. As prince and firstborn, he would undoubtedly inherit the throne. So what if he had Morgund handed to him. His father had already conquered almost everything. Only a few scattered city-states ruled by bandits still eluded his grasp.

The great oak doors of the throne room opened, interrupting the prince's musings. Two guards in full plate armour with regal halberds marched in with military precision. They took positions on either side of the unadorned throne from which his father ruled. Four more people entered and stood to one side of the throne. Vadrex recognised them as knights in his father's army. Lastly, one of his father's heralds entered bearing several scrolls.

'All hail King Tyrnon!' the herald cried. 'King of Morgund, Overlord of the Greater Realms, Chief of the Belgrics.'

Everyone bowed low except Prince Vadrex who remained standing contemptuously. The king entered and slowly made his way to the throne. He was powerfully built yet tempered by age. His long white hair and distinguished face spoke of many noble achievements to those who looked upon him.

‘Please announce our guest of honour,’ the king said to the herald.

‘The king would speak with Falconius, master spy of the royal army,’ the herald cried

A man dressed in black clothes covered by a hooded black cloak slowly entered the throne room. He approached the throne and kneeled before the king.

‘Arise Falconius,’ said Tyrnon as he stroked his chin. ‘I have been informed that your mission was a success.’

‘Yes my king, your will has been carried out. I have brought what you seek.’ Falconius reached inside his tunic and removed a small tube. He took a rolled parchment from it and handed it to the king.

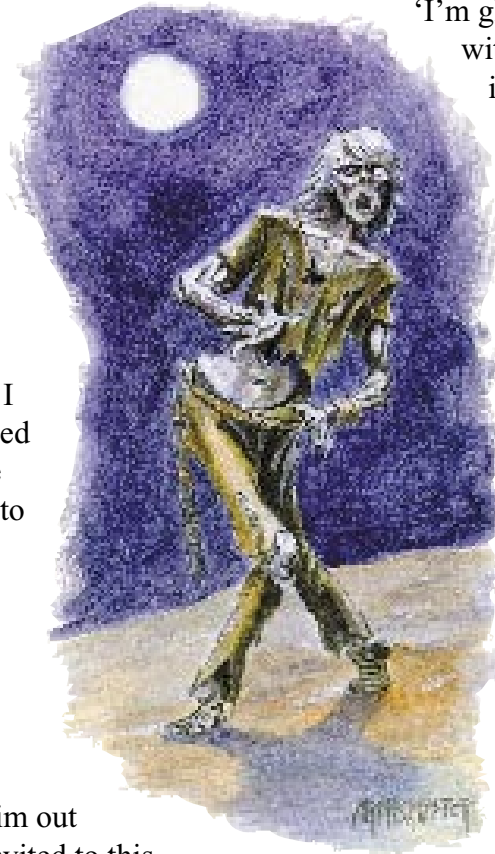
Prince Vadrex moved to the throne so that he could look over the king’s shoulder as he unrolled the parchment. His curiosity was peeked and he was usually not around when intelligence came in. Though he was fully trained in the art of war, his father often left him out of military planning meetings. Why was he invited to this one?

‘Yes, yes Falconius,’ said the king as he glanced over the parchment. ‘This is excellent.’ He handed it over to Vadrex who was straining to see what it was. The king turned his head to look at Vadrex and said, ‘This is a drawing of the city-state of Krone, ruled by the bandit king Vadmar. He has been

menacing our borders again and this time he will pay.’

‘Yes father, he must be crushed. The people of Morgund should not have to live in fear of bandit attacks in the night.’

‘I’m glad you feel that way son,’ said Tyrnon with a slight smile. ‘You’re going to use this information to lead an attack on the city. Destroy the town and bring me Vadmar—or his head.’



Prince Vadrex was momentarily stunned. This was not at all what he had expected. He had never even been in a battle before, much less a siege. Sure he had gone on petty raids and the like, but that was when his father was with him. Everyone was waiting for his response. He had to say something. ‘Thank you for this honour,’ he stammered, trying to hide his trembling hands and quivering body.

‘Don’t worry son, my ablest siege engineers will be going with you along with my finest troops. You’ll be done in a few weeks and back to your brothels and taverns before you know it.’

The prince’s face turned red. He knew his father was aware that he spent most of his time carousing but he did not have to bring it up in front of everyone. ‘I won’t let you down father,’ he said with firm resolve. ‘I’ll begin preparations at once!’ Vadrex marched resolutely out of the room before his father could say anything else to humiliate him.

Chapter Three

Falconius watched the prince leave the room. He was glad that type of pressure was not his to bear. He bowed again before the king and then turned to leave.

‘Wait Falconius,’ said Tyrnon gesturing with his hand. ‘I wish to speak to you on another matter. Everyone else, leave us.’ The rest of the group filed out, the guards being the last to go and taking up positions just outside the great doors as they were closed.

The spy waited anxiously for the king to speak. A private audience with him was an honour and trust that was seldom granted, not that the king had anything to fear from him. The noble savage stilled retained enough of his marshal skills from his barbarian upbringing to thrash him in a second.

‘Falconius, I have a special assignment for you,’ the king said as he got up from his throne and put his arm around the spy’s shoulder. ‘The room has eyes and ears; we must talk quietly.’

‘I’m ready to serve you and Morgund in any way I can,’ said Falconius earnestly.

‘I’m glad to hear you say that. This assignment is the most important and possibly the most dangerous you have ever undertaken.’ The king walked over to a prepared serving table with Falconius and bid him to sit down. He poured them both some amber coloured liquid out of an ornate vessel into gold and gem encrusted goblets. The substance smelled of honey and barley and tasted spicy when Falconius tried it.

‘This is excellent my king,’ said Falconius. The two of them sat and enjoyed the drink for a few minutes. When the spy had drained his goblet the king refilled it and then began to speak in a hushed tone.

‘I have been the king of Morgund for twenty years. I carved this land out of the wilderness and brought peace and prosperity to its inhabitants. To insure the security and well being of Morgund, I feel it is time to choose my successor. Everyone assumes it will be my eldest son, Prince Vadrex, but I am uneasy with that choice. He is reckless and self-indulgent and has never shown the leadership qualities a king needs to have.’

Falconius set his drink down. ‘But how can I help you with such an important decision? Surely the high priests or your royal counsellors would be a better choice to help you select the right heir.’

The king sighed. ‘I’m not asking you to help me choose but to find someone with greater wisdom than anyone in the entire kingdom. There is one who helped me in the distant past when I was just a young barbarian, newly blooded.’

‘Tell me who it is and I shall seek them out.’

‘She, is the oracle known as Keriwena, a radiant beauty unlike any other. Her golden hair, blue eyes, and delicate features are unlike any other woman I have ever encountered. It is said that she does not age and has the greatest of powers in her gift for prophecy. As a young man I was going about with my barbarian brother, looting and burning helpless villages and towns. One night she appeared to me in a dream and said that I was destined for a higher purpose. She told me to build rather than destroy. The next day I awoke and would have dismissed the whole thing except for this.’

The king removed a silver ring from his finger and handed it to Falconius. The ring had a fire-orange jewel set in the centre surrounded by small blue gems that the spy recognised to be

sapphires. His training in appraising jewellery told him that it was worth a fortune. ‘This is exquisite. I’ve never seen its equal.’

‘I found it on my finger that morning. The whole experience changed me and set me on the path that led me to become what I am today. Now, in the twilight of my existence, I seek her counsel again. Take the ring to her. Ask her to name the worthiest successor to take my place when I no longer rule. Her wisdom brought the kingdom of Morgund into being and will insure its prosperity.’

Falconius had an overwhelming feeling on the inside but managed to keep a straight face. ‘Where is Keriwena today? Why not go yourself?’

‘Prince Vadrex assumes the throne will be his since he is my eldest son. If he found out I was considering naming a different heir, he would not be above the foulest treachery to seize the throne for himself. I have sent him on a little siege to keep him busy. This will give you time to find the oracle and bring me her answer. My seers have advised me that she resides alone in the desert wasteland that lies on the southern border of Morgund. They cannot be more specific.’

‘I will find her for you and get your answer post-haste.’

‘I will have my steward provide you with anything from the royal armoury you feel is necessary to complete your mission.’

Falconius rose from the table and bowed. ‘Thank you my king. I will not fail you.’

Chapter Four

Falconius left the room and started towards the royal armoury. He was making a mental list of what items he would need as well as a few magic items he was going to inquire about when a hand grabbed his arm and pulled him into an alcove. He was surprised to see Prince Vadrex confronting him.

‘You think you’re pretty clever producing that map of Krone so my father would make me go on a siege,’ said Vadrex gesturing angrily. ‘What are you really up to? I know that my father talked to you alone in there. What did he say?’

‘I’m afraid that’s something you’ll have to take up with him.’

‘Insolent little pig!’ Vadrex grabbed Falconius by his tunic and shook him. ‘I could have you killed for defying me. No one cares if a spy goes dead.’

Falconius locked eyes with the prince. ‘It would be wise to let me go about my business.’

‘Fine.’ Vadrex released him and took a step back. ‘Play your little games. I’ll be watching you Falconius. This isn’t over.’

‘We’ll have to take this up again some other time,’ said Falconius as he walked away. He realised he had just made a deadly enemy. He already had lots of enemies, many more dangerous than the prince. Now he understood the king’s reservations about his son ruling Morgund one day.

Falconius found his way to the royal armoury. Two guards were standing on each side of a large iron door. An elderly man, hunched over and using a cane for walking assistance, was slowly making his way toward him.

‘You must be Falconius,’ said the elderly man. ‘I was advised by the steward that King Tyrnon has offered you whatever you need from our royal stores.’

‘Yes, he was most generous. I won’t require much. I’ll be going on a mission to recover some information.’

The elderly man produced a key and unlocked the door. He lit a torch and motioned for Falconius to follow him inside. As Falconius entered he was amazed by what the torchlight gradually revealed. The room was large and filled with shelves and tables. Weapons of every type imaginable rested in an orderly fashion along with objects he did not even recognise. Potion bottles filled with glowing liquids in a myriad of colours were lined up on one wall like a mad scientist’s lab. Another wall held lamps, rings, wands, staves, and dusty parchment scrolls.

‘Well don’t stand there with your mouth open,’ said the elderly man. ‘I haven’t got all day.’

‘I am not sure what to ask for. There’s so much here.’

‘You’re a thief or spy of some kind, right?’

Falconius’s eyes narrowed. ‘Correct.’

‘Well then, what talents do you want to boost and what assets do you wish to protect?’ The man’s wise eyes said that he had done this many times before.

‘I’d like to enhance my ability to heal from wounds quickly, and perhaps my speed or stealth. If you have any prepared poisons, I’d like to browse through those also. I won’t have time to prepare my own.’

An hour later Falconius walked out of the royal armoury with a backpack full of magical and mundane provisions. He made one final stop at his quarters and then departed for the desert wastelands on the southern border of Morgund.

Chapter Five

The enigma Glycon closed the door to his black stone tower. A royal messenger had called, delivering a scroll bearing the seal of Prince Vadrex. Glycon had accepted the message and then performed the customary spell to erase the location of the tower from the messenger’s memory. Only the prince could retain the knowledge of his hidden domain. Glycon liked the prince. He was a good employer. He paid well for Glycon’s special services and sometimes brought him obscure tomes of ancient rituals and black arts. Above all Glycon craved ultimate power. He would kill anyone or do anything to achieve it. He had no loyalties except to himself and the pursuit of diabolical magic.

Glycon moved through his entryway, past the entrance to the dungeon from which faint cries could be heard, and into his study. He settled into a chair by his fireplace. The preserved bodies of humans, elves, and other unfortunate creatures looked down on him in silence from the walls and corners of the room. He broke the seal on the scroll and read the message from the prince. It stated that he needed someone stopped, by any means possible. He was to locate a man, a Morgundian spy named Falconius, and eliminate him. The prince stated that the spy was up to something, he did not know what, but his death was necessary. How delightful! Glycon loved being paid to kill people. Of course he would secure the soul of this Falconius before death; demons were known to give up good secrets for such prizes. He burned the scroll in the fireplace and then pondered upon a plan of action to locate and kill the spy.



After an hour or so of meditation, Glycon rose from his chair and moved up the spiral stairs to the top floor of his tower where his spell-casting chamber was located. A vast array of magic supplies and tools were scattered about the area. Scrolls were spread out on long tables, held flat by the skulls of various beings. The skeletal remains of victims who had

died hideous deaths from his last magic experiment still lay strapped to tables on one side of the chamber. Glycon made a mental note to have the remains removed to make room for fresh specimens from his dungeon.

He moved to his jars of magical components and selected mandrake from the assortment. He opened the jar and wrinkled his nose as a foul odour drifted up from the root. Carefully he removed one. He was always amused by the fact that the root was in the vague shape of a man. Glycon took the mandrake and several other ingredients to his worktable. His book of shadows, bound in human skin and clasped with fairy bones, awaited him.

Glycon opened the tome and turned to a page he had marked. The writing on the page was in the dead tongue of a long forgotten race but he had learned to read it. He combined the ingredients according to the directions in the book and then consumed the potion to enable the casting of a clairvoyance spell.

After a few minutes in a trance-like state, Glycon was able to see an image of a man in white. He was alone and travelling through an endless sea of sand. Only the occasional dune punctuated the bleak landscape. The man appeared to be consulting some kind of map. Perhaps he had a specific destination. After a few minutes the image faded from Glycon's mind like a shadowy dream from which one is suddenly awakened. He had seen enough. The only desert anywhere near Morgund was on its southern border. He had servants in the desert. They would easily intercept the spy and hold him until his soul could be extracted. After that, Glycon would send Prince Vadrex the man's head to show that the deed was done. He could hardly wait to see what foul manual the prince would give him for killing the hapless spy.

Chapter Six

Falconius felt the heat of the sun on his body as he shuffled along through the soft warm sand. He was following an old caravan route to consult with an old contact named Silvanus. They crossed paths early in Falconius's career and had maintained contact ever since. They helped each other out with bits of intelligence and support from time to time. Silvanus had once been one of the finest spies in the service of King Tyrnon, but after Prince Vadrex came of age, he had retired to the desert wasteland that he was now struggling through. He could never figure out why Silvanus would want to live in such a bleak, remote wasteland. Once Silvanus had tried to explain it to him, something about freedom and independence, but it had all been beyond Falconius at the time. Apparently he was now living at a small oasis and was quite content. He had sent a map to Falconius in case he ever wanted to visit. Now he was taking him up on the offer. Hopefully he would arrive before nightfall. Rumour had it that all sorts of monsters and marauders roamed the desert after the merciless heat of the sun was done for the day.

After a few hours, Falconius judged that he was making good progress. He was in an area of golden dunes that formed a gently sculpted landscape. The air he breathed in was hot and dry. He had not heard or seen a single living creature for some time. At the base of a particularly large dune, he decided to rest. He sat down in the hot sand and opened his pack of provisions. He drank a few gulps of fine Morgundian wine, which the king had been so kind to provide, and chewed on some dried and spiced venison. The monumental importance of his mission began to dawn on him as he started to relax for the first time since he left Morgund. This assignment was different than all he had taken in the past. The destiny of the entire nation depended on the answer that

Keriwena the oracle would send back with him to the king. Unfortunately, he had unintentionally made an enemy of Prince Vadrex and that could prove costly in the long run.

A slight movement of sand dragged Falconius from his revelry and heightened his senses. He studied the sand around his resting-place, looking intently. Perhaps he had just imagined the movement in the corner of his eye. The desert heat and the monotony of the landscape were known to play tricks on the best of observers. Suddenly the sand beneath him gave way as a huge black beetle-like creature emerged from the sand next to him. Two huge mandibles snapped hungrily as the insect lunged toward his head. Falconius was struggling to move out of the depression of sand he was sinking into. He could not draw his scimitar or reach his hand crossbow. He kicked recklessly at the monster, trying to keep it at bay while his mind raced for a solution to his impending demise. Countless situations had tested him in the past. He had never been trapped by as dangerous a hunter as this one.

As the creature caught his flailing hand, the sun reflected off a plain golden ring he wore on the trapped appendage. Why didn't he remember this sooner? The ring was from King Tyrnon's armoury. He touched his thumb to the ring and it instantly transformed into a gleaming golden knife. He slashed the edge of the knife against one side of the insect's mandible and severed it. Black ooze gushed from the wound and the creature emitted a high-pitched shriek that caused Falconius to cringe. He quickly recovered and took advantage of the creature's pause to remove himself to a better position. He drew his scimitar and lunged at the insect, hacking it to bits with a few quick cuts.

Chapter Seven

Silvanus brushed the coppery blonde hair from his eyes to get a better look at the stranger dressed in white that was approaching his oasis. The sun was setting and the leaves of the date trees cast shadows over the oasis making it appear shrouded in darkness. The location of his home was secret so the stranger was either lost or one of his close friends, or enemies. Two humanoid creatures that looked somewhat human but with misshapen faces came to stand next to Silvanus. They appeared to be waiting expectantly so he motioned them forward to intercept the visitor. The humanoids carried longbows and swords. As they approached, the stranger called out to them. 'I'm looking for a man named Silvanus.' the humanoids said something to each other that was unintelligible and then looked back at Silvanus.

Silvanus motioned them back and said, 'I'm Silvanus. Who might you be?'

The man in white drew closer and a huge smile spread across his sun beaten face. 'It's Falconius from Morgund.'

'Falconius!' Silvanus's face lit up. 'Why didn't you say so sooner? Come on in. You're always welcome here.'

'Thanks old friend. I'd hate to spend the night in this cursed desert.'

Silvanus eyed several black and gooey stains on Falconius's clothes. 'What did you do to yourself? Fall into a tar pit?'

Falconius chuckled. 'I had a run-in with a giant black bug. It just came up out of the sand from underneath me.'

'Isn't a spy suppose to have a heightened sense to surprises?' Silvanus said laughing.

'Maybe I'm getting too old for this line of work or something. It looks like you've been doing well for yourself.'

'Things are quiet for me nowadays. I have my little piece of paradise and a harem to keep me occupied. How goes it in Morgund?'

Falconius sighed. 'Well, King Tyrnon is still in good health but getting up in years of course. He worries for the future of the kingdom after he is gone.'

'And Prince Vadrex?' ask Silvanus in a less enthusiastic tone.

'He is a chief worry for Tyrnon.'

'I thought as much. He was one of the chief reasons I left Morgund.'

'I understand where you're coming from,' said Falconius in an understanding voice. 'He's part of the reason I'm here.'

'Really? How's that?'

'It's a long story.'

'Well we have the time and drink here for it,' Silvanus beamed. 'Let's discuss it over dinner. You look like you could use some rich food and a long rest.'

Falconius nodded wearily. 'Sounds great my friend.'

The two progressed towards a spacious and elaborately coloured tent. Two attendants standing outside the entrance parted and they entered. Inside were large, comfortable looking pillows of different shapes. Veils of silk shimmered

in candlelight as they cloaked various parts of the tent. Ornate tables were piled high with plates of dates, sweetmeats, and other treats. Three mysterious and alluring girls, veiled and clothed in translucent gowns that left little to the imagination, greeted them.

‘You’ve done well for yourself,’ said Falconius as he gazed about the tent.

‘I managed to put back a few gold pieces and make some connections with the local caravan traders while I was spying for King Tyrnon.’ The two sat down on plush pillows by one of the tables. A beautiful woman approach and poured wine for both of them. Silvanus handed a bowl to Falconius. ‘Try one of my dates. I think you’ll find they are some of the best around.’

Falconius tried one. ‘I have to agree with you. What’s your secret?’

‘A little magic and the right formula from my alchemist makes all the difference.’

The two spies relaxed and caught up on old times. Falconius brought Silvanus up to speed on his new mission as they ate and drank together and exchanged stories long into the night.

Chapter Eight

Falconius woke with a start. A loud crash had shattered the quiet stillness of the desert night. He did not move but listened as he let his eyes adjust to the darkness of his surroundings. He was in a private room of the great tent; smooth and silky looking curtains surrounded him. Another loud crash followed by shouts of alarm and confused voices dragged him into action. He crept out of bed and found his

pack of supplies and weapons stacked neatly in the corner where he had left them. He armed himself, put on his pack, and stealthily slipped out of his room into the main chamber of the tent. It was deserted. He eased over to the main doorway.

He peered out to find the oasis in a state of chaos. Huge boulders were flying through the sky, striking random targets and wreaking havoc. Silvanus’s humanoid comrades were running about with swords and longbows. Some were firing in the direction of the flying boulders while others carried torches, scrambling to pack their possessions and fleeing into the desert night. Some of the date trees had been turned into pulp and splinters. Smaller tents had been flattened, as had some unlucky animals. Falconius heard an odd noise from above, growing louder. He looked up to see a great flaming arrow hurtling through the sky towards him. He ducked and rolled away as the arrow struck the great tent, igniting it.

Falconius decided to find a safer place to observe the events so he quickly moved to the edge of the oasis, using shadows for cover from the firelight, and prostrating himself on the side of a dune where he felt he was hidden but could still see. More huge flaming arrows set date trees and tents afire. Silvanus was nowhere to be found. He did not see any of the ladies of the harem so maybe they had already escaped.

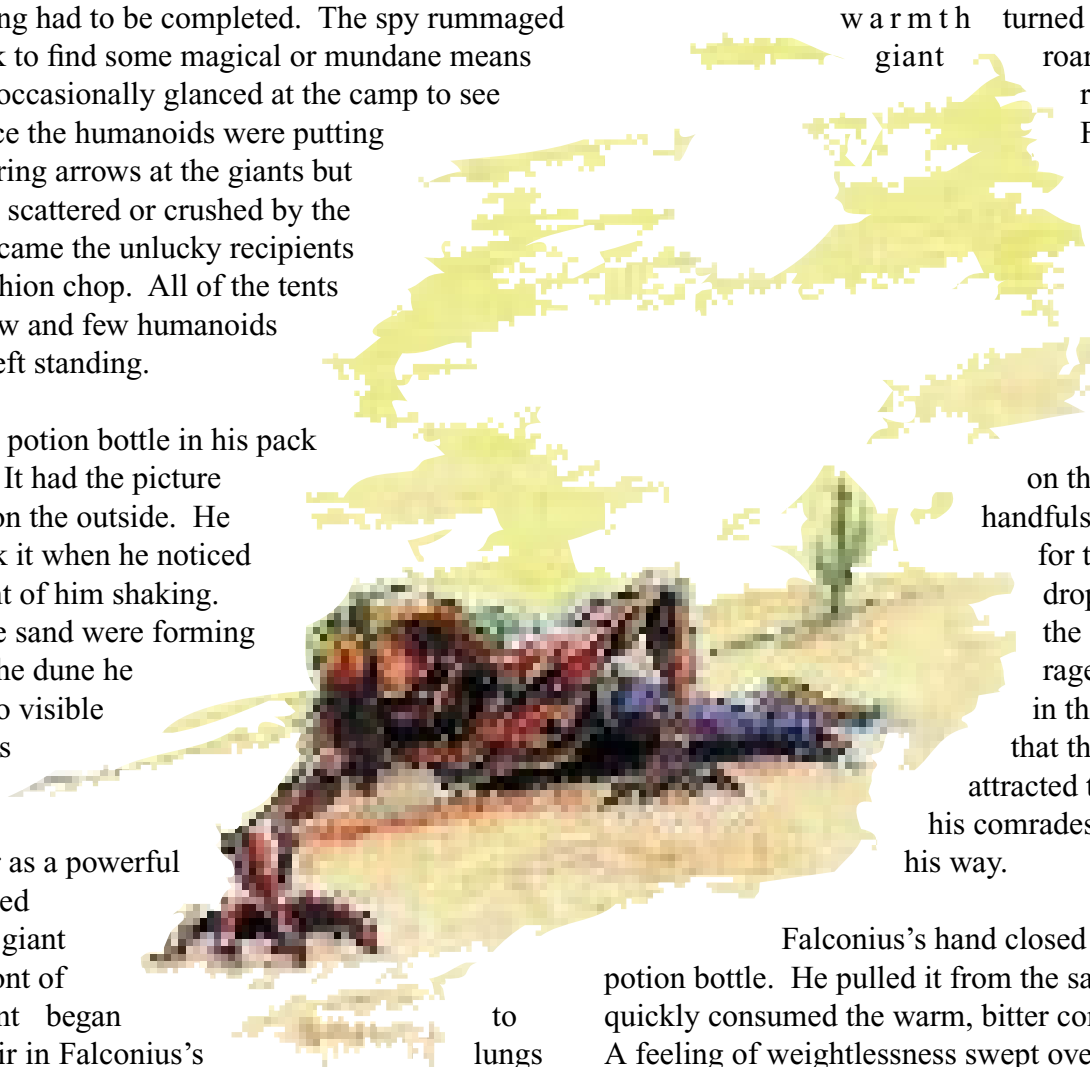
The dune he was laying on started to shake. The vibrations increased as he heard screams from the humanoids in camp and cries of alarm from the animals. In the distance he could see faint outlines of large objects. As they drew closer their shapes became self-evident. A group of giants, at least 10 feet tall, were running toward the camp. They wore chain mail armour and were swinging huge falchions back and forth in front of them as they charged in.

Falconius decided it was time to make his escape. Wherever Silvanus was, he would have to take care of himself. The mission for the king had to be completed. The spy rummaged around in his pack to find some magical or mundane means of departure. He occasionally glanced at the camp to see the futile resistance the humanoids were putting up. Some were firing arrows at the giants but they were quickly scattered or crushed by the raiders. A few became the unlucky recipients of a powerful falchion chop. All of the tents were in flames now and few humanoids or animals were left standing.

Falconius found a potion bottle in his pack and pulled it out. It had the picture of a bird painted on the outside. He was about to drink it when he noticed the ground in front of him shaking. Depressions in the sand were forming near the front of the dune he was on, but had no visible cause. Falconius's intuition screamed immediate danger as a powerful set of arms wrapped around him and a giant materialised in front of him. The giant began to squeeze and the air in Falconius's lungs rapidly exited. He felt himself lose consciousness as the giant bellowed a hearty laugh. The potion bottle fell from his grasp. The giant tightened his hold as everything in Falconius's mind turned to black.

A warm sensation roused Falconius back to awareness. The giant still held him. Why had he not just killed him? The warmth turned to a burning heat. The giant roared and dropped him roughly on the ground. Falconius looked up to see the giant's chain mail armour glowing red and an expression of obvious pain on his face. He did not know what had just happened and he did not care. He crawled on the ground, scooping handfuls of sand as he searched for the potion bottle he had dropped. The giant fell to the ground, shaking with rage as he thrashed about in the sand. Falconius noted that the afflicted giant had attracted the attention of some of his comrades and they began moving his way.

Falconius's hand closed around the neck of the potion bottle. He pulled it from the sand and opened it. He quickly consumed the warm, bitter contents of the bottle. A feeling of weightlessness swept over him as he gathered his equipment and searched his pack. He pulled his hand crossbow and several bolts from his pack. The giant who had attacked him appeared to be recovering from whatever had felled him. Falconius selected a bolt marked with a red circle



and loaded it into the crossbow. He took careful aim and fired it at the giant's exposed leg. The bolt struck him but barely did any noticeable damage. This was fine with Falconius, as the bolt tip had been coated with a thick red gel known as spell sapper poison. Made from mind flayer brain juices and crushed umber hulk eyes, it was designed to affect the nervous system of a creature. It temporarily dulled the wits of its victim and left them helpless. Falconius suspected the giant was a sorcerer due to his invisible arrival and this would leave him helpless for some time.

More giants were arriving on the scene so Falconius loaded another bolt, this time one with a blue circle on it, and then exercised the benefits of the potion he had consumed by flying into the air, away from the sorcerer and high above the camp. He observed the burning oasis. Several giants were attending to their fallen sorcerer while others appeared to be searching for something. Out of the corner of his eye he thought he saw Silvanus, flying through the air. Falconius circled the area, trying to catch another glimpse of his friend.

Suddenly a blast of hot air spun Falconius around. There was a crackle of red and blue light like lightning from a storm, and then the entire oasis was consumed by a huge wave of flames. Immediately Falconius sped upward, barely escaping the firestorm. He looked down to see everything in flames. The giants were roaring and flailing wildly as the fire ignited their hair, clothes, and everything else that was consumable on their bodies. The flames burned intensely for a few seconds and then disappeared completely, leaving the giants and the last untouched date trees afire. Blackened, glossy sand was left in the wake of the inferno and the pools of water that had once graced the oasis were obliterated. All that remained was a blasted area and dead or dying giants.

As Falconius wrestled to take in everything that had happened, Silvanus floated up next to him on a flying carpet.

'Glad to see you're okay friend,' said Silvanus.

'What happened down there? Did you do that?'

'Oh you mean the fire? But of course. You didn't think I'd let those giants get away with attacking me in my own home did you?'

'They may have been sent after me. Maybe the Prince had something to do with this.'

Silvanus shrugged. 'There are other oases. I got my harem to safety and some of my other companions escaped so we will rebuild somewhere else. In the meantime, I intend to see to it that you complete your mission for King Tyrnon.'

'No, I couldn't ask you to take so much risk,' said Falconius, shaking his head.

'It won't be as risky for me as it will be for you alone. You don't know everything about me. Besides, I'll be cursed before I see Prince Vadrex on that throne of Morgund. Even the desert won't be safe if that happens.'

Falconius sighed. 'I guess I can't refuse you. Come along at your own peril.'

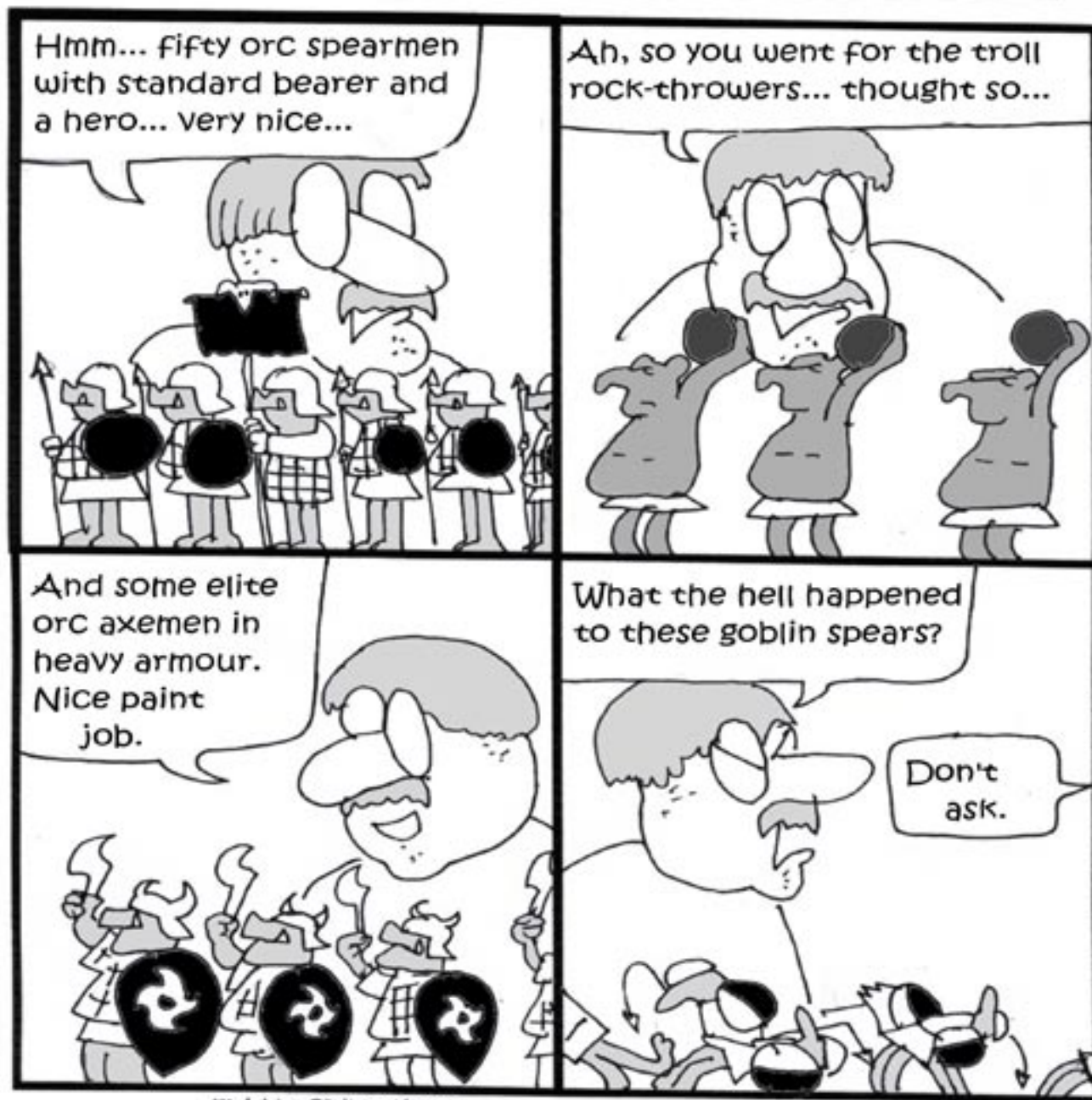
'You better get on this rug before your flying ability goes away,' Silvanus said motioning to Falconius. Falconius settled on the rug and the two of them circled the oasis one last time before flying off into the cold desert night.

To Be Continued...



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