Signs & Portents

WARGAMER

28

The Battle of Turk's Drift

Massive Starship Troopers Battle Report

Arms Buyers' Almanac: Energy

More New Weapons for Gangs of Mega-City One

Argent's Crusaders

New Raider List for A Call to Arms

Plus. . . Optional mine rules for Starship Troopers, lunar surface terrain making and lots, lots more!

Signs & Portents

Hello there,

This month's ACTA article sees the first miniature conversion to appear within the pages of *Signs & Portents Wargamer.* Converting miniatures may seem a bit daunting, but it can be well worth it in the end. I'm very partial to converting my miniatures – I currently have several totally unique robot miniatures for *Gangs of Mega-City One* on the go, made from such diverse elements as the *Paranoia Bots Box Set,* a *Mighty Armies Dwarf Engine of War,* bits of Vree saucers from *A Call to Arms,* heavy weapons from the Reliant gun platforms for *Starship Troopers* and lots of arms from a *GoMC1* robodoc (most of these can now be ordered separately from the new 'Parts Service' of the Mongoose website – take a look!) It can take a bit of practice, but ending up with a totally unique miniature is definitely well worth the effort. And don't get disheartened if it all goes wrong – no one gets it right first time. It's also worth pointing out that you need to remember to *stop* converting at some point – I have a conversion of an orc miniature that has been so modified that it contains nothing of the original mini! And don't worry – sawing off a finger tip is something you only ever do once.

I'll see you in 2006!

Matt

Signs & Portents Wargamer Contents

Features

Regulars

EYE ON MONGOOSE

New Releases This Month

If you want to terrorise rival street gangs, what better way than to hire a huge, brutal, carnivorous alien? Originally recruited by the mad Chief Judge Cal to rule over Mega-City One, a few Kleggs still remain in the Undercity and ruined sectors. A cautious top dog can track one of these murderous aliens down, though Kleggs do have a habit of eating any hostages the gang takes!

Carrying a heavy spit gun as easily as a punk swings a pistol and able to carve up anyone in close combat, a Klegg is an expensive investment but one that will ensure countless victories for a brave gang.

Top dogs looking for highly specialised support for their street gangs need look no further.

The Pyrokinetic can start fire with the power of her mind alone, making this girl an awesome addition to any street gang. Capable of rooting out enemy gang members from cover by causing them to burst into flame, the Pyrokinetic is perhaps the greatest psychic talent that can be hired.

The Jimp is a perp who can successfully impersonate a Judge, a useful trait when looking to shake down store owners on your turf. In battle against enemy street gangs, he proves a capable fighter and can cause enough confusion to win the fight.

Far from home, the Sov Spy sometimes hooks up with street gangs for short periods of time to hide from the Justice Department or even just earn enough creds to carry out his nefarious plans. Well-trained and utterly lethal, it is a lucky top dog who can persuade a Sov Spy to join his gang.
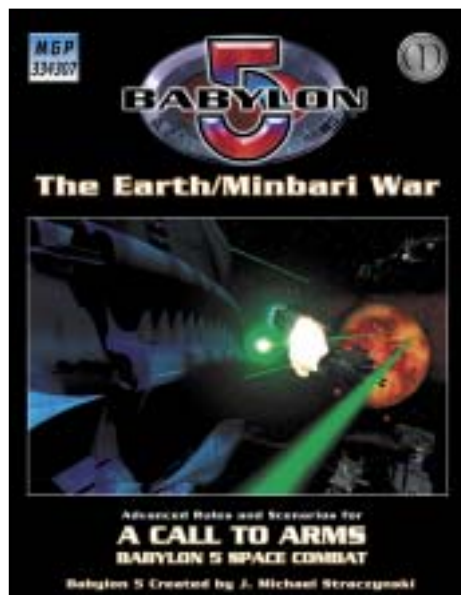
The year was 2245, the Earth Alliance was headstrong and prideful after their victory over the Dilgar just a few years before and the galaxy was their oyster. Throwing caution to the wind they began relations with several faraway races — seeking technology and trade unknown to them before. They wanted to know everyone and everything. Including the workings of an older race on the edge of the galaxy and near to their expanding borders.

The Minbari.

What would follow would be two years of death, pain and more intertwined battles and engagements than the Earth Alliance had ever seen. A blunder of some great magnitude would bring about the Earth-Minbari War — the near genocide of the human species.

...and now you can re-enact those battles.

In this book you will find twenty scenarios to play through the chronology of the War, older Fleet Lists for both the Earth Alliance and the Minbari Federation matching the vessels of that time period and over a dozen new (or failed prototype) ship variants. There are several famous commanders, unique personalities and even some unique ships — like the fearsome Black Star — to test your skill with or against in the War Campaign or in friendly games of your own!

The theatre of war has been set, the battles have begun that will spell out the future of the entire galaxy. In your control, will Captain Jankowski get away with his foolish attack on the Grey Sharlin? Will you be able to destroy the Black Star as Sheridan did? When you are in command...will you be able to do any better than they did?

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 Tyzmm Fighters

Need to protect a convoy but don't want to use counters? Or perhaps you have a Raiders fleet that could use some upgunned Q-ships?

This box set for A Call to Arms contains 1 Space Liner, 2 Tankers and 4 Frieghters at an all new low price - perfect for games that do not always involve the largest military-spec warships in the galaxy!
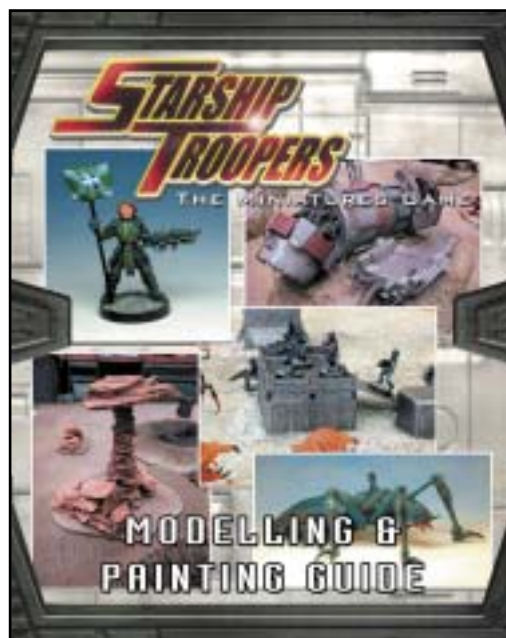
Within the pages of this book you will find loads of handy hints and guides on how to make and paint our exciting range of Starship Troopers miniatures along with tips on constructing scenery to make your games really look like they are taking place on another planet.

Mongoose brush maestro Adrian Walters takes you through building and painting an M8 Ape marauder suit and the hulking tanker bug, as well as looking at the more familiar Mobile Infantry Cap Trooper and Arachnid warrior bug. If you ever wanted to know how one of the very top professionals goes about his business now is your chance!

Marketing manager Brian Lasiewski takes an in-depth look at what it took to put together the stunning display terrain that the Mongoose Infantry teams take to gaming conventions, and shows just how easy it is to replicate the magic. Brian also has advice on starting your own Terrain Club and what you can achieve with the help of a few friends.

Matthew Sprange also has a new Heroic Trait rule for Mobile Infantry standard bearers and Adrian shows how easy it is to convert one if you don't have one of our cracking limited edition miniatures.

With full page photo features on models like the brain bug and Reliant Gun Platforms, this guide is packed with colour pictures showing you how to get the very best out of your gaming.

BATTLE OF TURK'S DRIFT

The Biggest Battle Report Yet! | Matthew Sprange and Ted Chang

It all started with The Big Red One in the last issue, the beginnings of an entire company of Mobile Infantry. Office workhorse, Ted Chang, was looking over my shoulder as the article was finished and remarked his Arachnid army had grown quite large. We totted up the value of his force and, with a few tunnel assets, it came to 6,000 points – about the size of the Big Red One! An unspoken challenge hung in the air. A battle report was imminent.

Turk's Drift was a small colony town on a forgotten dust ball of a planet, far on the edge of Federation space. The civilians had been evacuated after increased Arachnid activity and it was down to The Big Red One, Bartlett's Buccaneers, to halt their advance.

We adjusted our forces as needed and chose our tactics. Mass carnage was expected.

DEPLOYMENT

Matt: Before anything else happened, I plonked down my Reliants. They went forward on one flank, as I was confident their firepower could handle anything short of multiple tanker bugs. I just knew that Ted would have three plasma bugs – as we were both Priority Level Three, I had to grab that first turn so I could begin attacking them before they pounded my forces into oblivion. I picked up the dice…

Ted: And promptly rolled a one. Yes! I got to set up first and take the first turn – I would be on the MI before they knew what was happening. The Deep Defence set up suited me this time round. It would guarantee my plasmas targets every turn and ensure the MI could not escape round the sides of my hordes as they rushed in…

Twenty warrior bugs went underground, along with all the tankers and brain bugs. One nest was placed opposite the

THE BIG RED ONE

Matt: Very few choices here – both Ted and I were planning to use all our models! I pinched a Reliant from the Studio army, promoted a trooper to Corporal and re-jigged the platoons a little. After that, the Mobile Infantry were ready to go. Wanting to use the Reliants, I opted for Defence tactics.

Captain Bartlett
Plasma Munition, Close Combat Expert, Dirty Fighter, Fire King, Sniper — 310 pts

Colonel Lyman, Military Intelligence Agent
Id Sending, Rupture, Warning — 180 pts

First Platoon (Power Suits)

Lieutenant Moss
True Grit — 170 pts

Senior Sergeant Young (NCO)
K9 Corps — 155 pts

Power Suit Squad
8 Troopers, Sergeant: Sniper, 2 Morita Longs — 340 pts

Power Suit Squad
8 Troopers, Sergeant: Armourer, 2 Triple Thuds — 375 pts

Power Suit Squad
8 Troopers, Sergeant: Jumpball Player!, 2 Javelins — 410 pts

Second Platoon (Power Suits)

Colour Sergeant Cregg (NCO)
Fast Mover, Standard Bearer — 145 pts

Power Suit Squad
8 Troopers, Sergeant: Rallying Cry, 2 Javelins, 2 Pee-wee Atomics — 1,000 pts

Power Suit Squad
8 Troopers, Sergeant: Medic, Corporal, Morita Long, Triple Thud — 400 pts

Third Platoon (Marauder)

Lieutenant McGarry
M9 Chickenhawk, Protagonist, SICON Military Intelligence, Stay Frosty — 320 pts

Senior Sergeant Seaborn (NCO)
M8 Ape, Sense Presence — 265 pts

Gunnery Sergeant Ziegler (NCO)
M9 Chickenhawk, Blizzard, Twin-Fifty, Stay Frosty — 300 pts

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 (attached to First Platoon)

Three Reliant Weapons Platforms
4 Twin-Fifty Autocannon — 240 pts

Ammo Dump — 50 pts

Total: 5,995 pts

THE ARACHNIDS

Ted: Up to now, I had been chopping and changing my Arachnids, only using 2-3,000 points at a time. Now, I would get to use all of them! With such a massive force to command, it only seemed right that Attack tactics were chosen.

Five Warrior Bugs	1,625 pts
Endless Tide x 13	
Three Tanker Bugs	750 pts
Three Plasma Bugs	900 pts
Four Hopper Bugs x 2	400 pts
Three Hopper Bugs	150 pts
Nine Blister Bugs	270 pts
Brain Bug	300 pts
Ego War, Enhanced Shield, Id Sending	
Brain Bug	300 pts
Enhanced Rupture, Enhanced Shield, Id Sending	
Five Firefries x 2	200 pts
Bug Central	300 pts
Tunnel Entrance x4	200 pts
Nest Entrance x2	150 pts
Tunnel Markers x9	450 pts
Total: 5,995 pts	

Reliants. Bugs coming out of this would get hammered but its presence alone would worry Matt. One nest was placed near the centre to act as a 'decoy' for any incoming fire and Bug Central was hidden round an outcropping – I didn't want to lose that!

As I started placing warrior bugs, I was conservative at first, trying to keep away from those Reliants. I had a change of heart though and thought – go for it! The warrior bugs went down in two huge swarms on either side, with the blister bugs set up opposite the Reliants. I knew I had first turn and the plan and the plan was to melt the gun platforms away with

Deployment
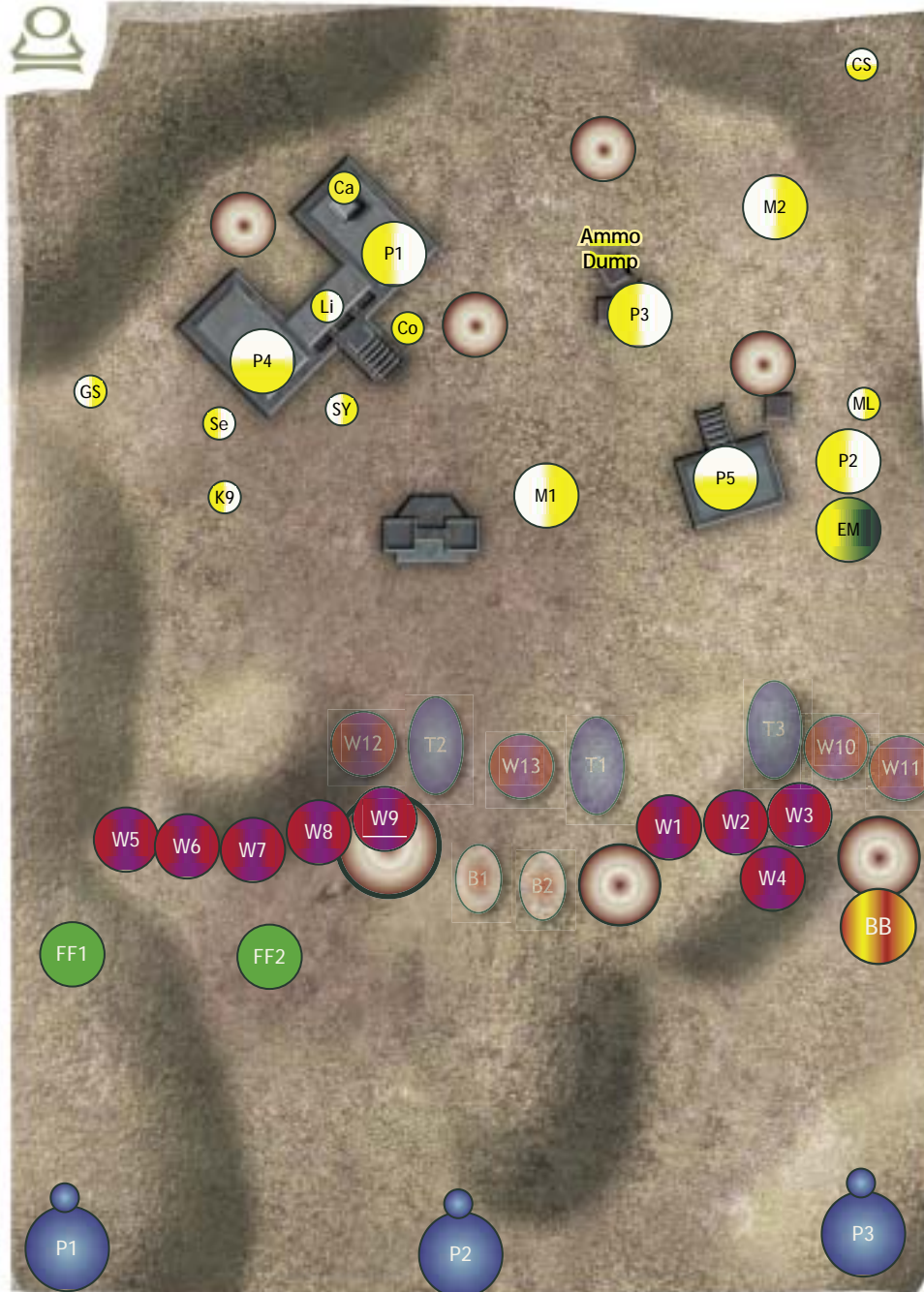
MI Map Key

High Command
Captain Bartlett — Ca
Colonel Lyman — Co
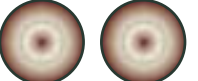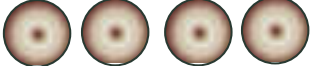
First Platoon (Power Suits)
Lieutenant Moss — Li
Senior Sergeant Young [NCO] + K9 — Se K9

Power Suit Squad — P1

Power Suit Squad — P2

Power Suit Squad — P3

Second Platoon (Power Suits)
Colour Sergeant Cregg [NCO] — CS

Power Suit Squad — P4

Power Suit Squad — P5

Third Platoon (Marauders)
Lieutenant McGarry — ML
Senior Sergeant Seaborn [NCO] — SY
Gunnery Sergeant Ziegler [NCO] — GS

Marauder Squad — M1

Marauder Squad — M2

Emplacements
Four Reliant Weapons Platforms — EM

Signs & Portents

Arachnids Map Key

W1 W5 W9 W13
W2 W6 W10
W3 W7 W11   Warrior Bugs
W4 W8 W12

T1 T2 T3   Tanker Bugs

P1 P2 P3   Plasma Bugs

H1 H2 H3   Hopper Bugs

FF1 FF2   Firefries

Bug Central

Nest Entrance

Tunnel Entrance

B1 B2   Brain Bugs

BB   Blister Bugs

T1   Unit in tunnel

Arachnids Turn 1
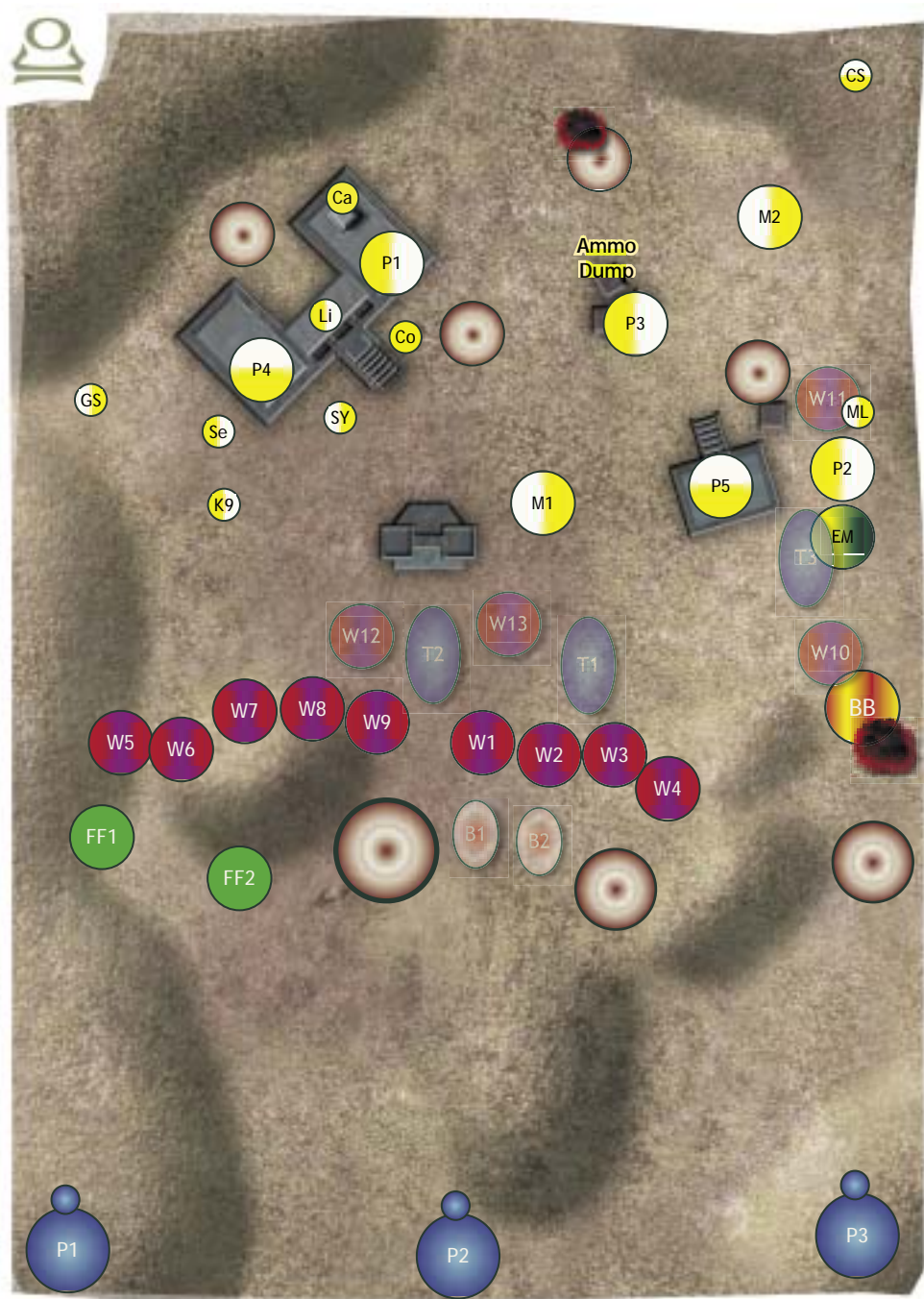
acid if the plasma bugs missed them – hopefully, this would leave the whole flank open to an advance. The firefries, being vulnerable to Morita fire, were screened by the warrior bugs – they would follow up behind the warriors, where they could leap out and attack suitable targets. The tunnel markers were placed far forward and I kept the hopper bugs off the table, to sweep on as reserves later (as permitted by Attack tactics).

I saved the best to last – I really relished Matt's face as I put down three plasma bugs on my baseline!

Matt: So, I was now staring at an entire Arachnid attack force. Loads of bugs, loads of tunnel markers, presumably loads of bugs still not on the table to be used as reserves – and not one, not two but three plasma bugs, ready to pound my poor troopers! Oh yes, I was wearing a huge happy hat now. There was no way I could deal with three plasma bugs and as Ted had the first turn, I could only pray they missed.

The Reliants were manned by the squad whose sergeant had the Armourer trait – I thought that might come as a surprise to Ted if he relied on the guns running out of ammunition. However, I felt that was not enough and joined the squad with Lieutenant McGarry in an M9, where his Stay Frosty trait might just catch Ted out. I did consider placing Captain Bartlett with them as well to take advantage of the Fire King trait but thought that was too many points in such a small area – one plasma blast could take them all out. Instead, the captain went on the roof of the main buildings, joined by the sniper squad. If things went wrong in the battle, this area would be where I made my last stand. The other building was occupied by the squad carrying two Pee-wee atomics – where they had line of sight to all three plasma bugs!

The M8 Marauder squad held the centre, just in front of the Javelin-armed squad on the Ammo Dump and to the right of the female cap troopers squad, who took position in a fortification. The powerful M9 Marauder squad was placed to support all these units, as well as the Reliants. The officers were scattered around behind this frontline where they could plug any gaps that formed. This done, my troopers steeled themselves as tunnel entrances were placed and they prepared to duck under incoming plasma fire.

TURN ONE

Ted: So it begins!

So many bugs, so little time! The tunnel markers rocketed forwards, the brain bugs slowing slightly as they raised their psychic shields. However, I decided not to mess about any more than that – I could not wait to unleash the plasma bugs!

The first aimed for the Reliants. But fell short. So did the second. Getting a little frustrated, I aimed the third at the Ammo Dump, hoping for a big Boom – unfortunately, it overshot, damaging my own tunnel entrance!

Humph!

Still, I had a plan to follow. Unfortunately, I was too excited and too frustrated and did a very silly thing with my blister bugs. Charging them forward, I was intending to get them all into range of the Reliants, then melt the gun platforms under a huge wave of acid. Unfortunately, I did not pre-measure the distance and two strayed into reaction range. Ever seen what four Twin-Fifty autocannon can do to blister bugs? When the smoke cleared, only one survived and that only because it was outside of the fire zone. The fact that the Reliants could not run out of ammunition because of their sergeant added insult to injury – those Reliants would be a very hard nut to crack if the plasma bugs did not do better next turn.

Okay, so I had now developed a healthy respect for the Reliants – I decided the warrior bugs would avoid them for now. Avoiding the reaction range of the Marauders in the centre of Matt's line, the two groups of warrior bugs merged to form one gigantic uber-swarm! React against that, Matt!

What had I missed? Ah yes, the brain bug's bonus actions! My first thought was to bring a tanker bug up in front of the Reliants where it could clobber a few of them and put Matt on the defensive straight away – I immediately regretted putting all my tunnel entrances down at the start of the game. Should have kept one spare…

MI Turn 1
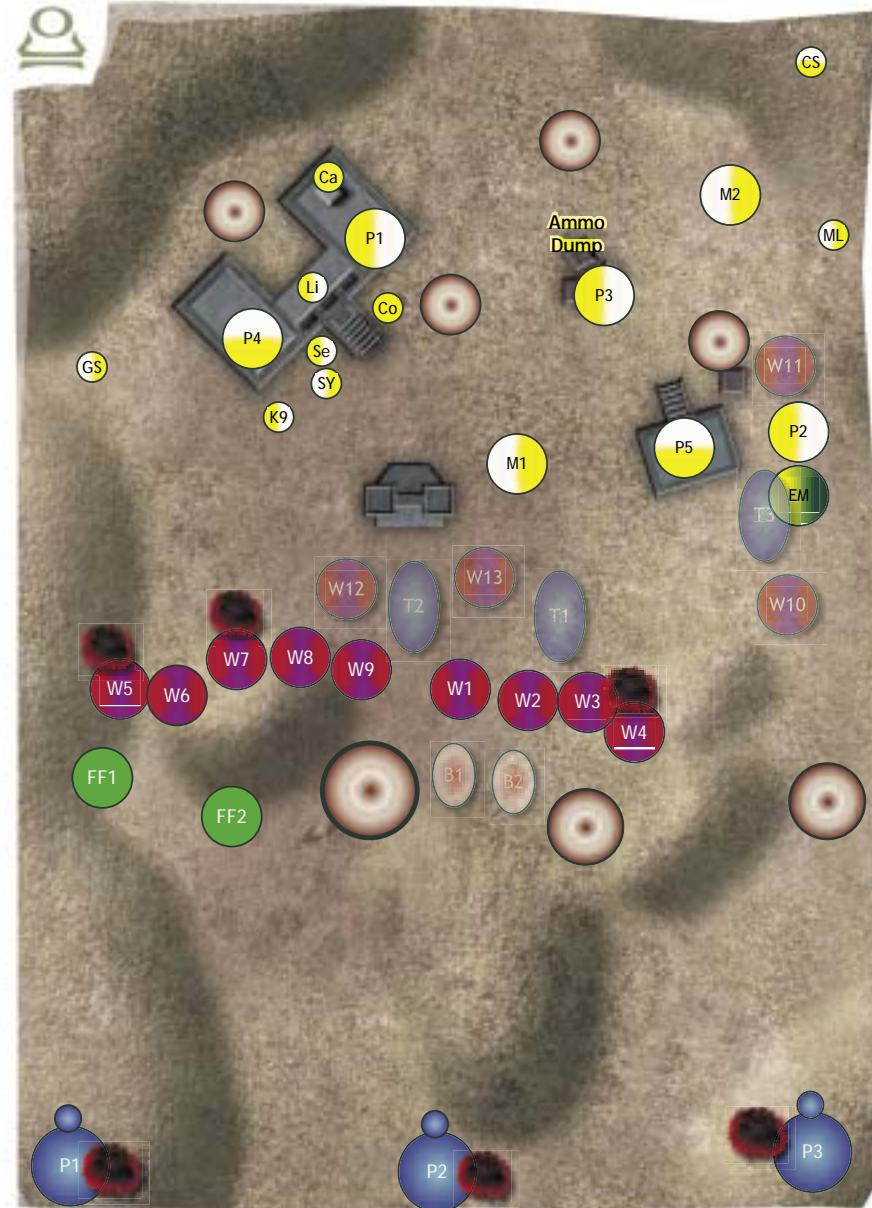
Instead, I contented myself with moving the tanker and a tunnelling warrior bug unit further under the Reliants, threatening their position and hopefully forcing Matt to make a few tough decisions. Not an amazing turn but Arachnid forces tend to start slowly.

Matt: And I. . . live? Oh, Ted, three plasma bugs? There are some things you just don't come back from.

Okay, I did well to survive a pretty ineffectual first turn from Ted but I already had multiple problems to deal with; the plasma bugs, the Reliants compromised by tunnellers, the impending warrior swarm, more tunnellers reaching tunnel entrances next turn – and where were the hoppers that Ted usually enjoys so much? I could pretty much guess…

What to do against all this? Only one thing for it. Atomics!

The first priority was silencing the plasmas. Even while being forced to split fire zones, the squad with the Pee-wees created a nuclear firestorm that instantly annihilated two of the plasma bugs. There is nothing like seeing two mushroom clouds rising on your opponent's back line! The last plasma bug I would have to live with for now, as there were other things to deal with. However, the first problem had been greatly reduced.

I made the difficult decision to sacrifice the Reliants – they were ordered to hold their position, no matter what. Lieutenant McGarry, however, detached from the squad and jumped up the slope. He obviously knew what was coming! The Reliants tore into the warrior bug swarm, accounting for six of them when the Shoot actions were over. However, Ted just smiles and puts their corpses to one side. I

think I know what he is up to there. If he has Endless Tide, that could change things significantly…

The M9 Marauder squad, I realised, had a direct line of sight (and range!) to the last plasma bug. Faced with a choice of hitting more warrior bugs that would just come back a turn later or knocking out the last of Ted's artillery, I let ripped with Blizzard and Javelins. As it turned out, the Holepunch missiles were excessive, as the Blizzards alone tore it apart. Across the line of Mobile Infantry, there was a collective sigh of relief.

The Apes open up on the warriors but two Shoot actions of Derringers and Morita Specials gives me nothing more than two dead bugs! Many more were driven back but it was still a poor effort. The female troopers split their fire, their sniper nailing the remaining blister bug, while the rest concentrated on the warrior bugs – killing one. The squad at the Ammo Dump with Javelins targets the tunnel entrance behind them, to no effect. The officers, both Marauder and power suit-clad, fire at the warriors, killing a few here and there.

Destroying the plasma bugs was great (with the blister bugs dead, I had already knocked off about 1,000 points from Ted's army) but the rest of my fire was not too hot. I had a feeling the next turn was going to hurt. A lot.

TURN TWO

Ted: Hmm, neither one of us had a spectacular first turn, but losing those plasma bugs so quickly was a blow. I had expected a Pee-wee to be around but had not thought Matt would take two (did he have a third?) Then again, maybe he had not expected three plasma bugs. I also had a nagging feeling that the poor first turn had cost me the entire battle as not one trooper was dead! Turn two would make or break this battle for me – at all costs, I had to get at least some bugs passed Matt's frontline where they could do some serious damage.

Winning with Arachnids is all about timing, getting the various components of your force to hit the Mobile Infantry at the same time. Could I pull it off this time?
First thing I did was to bring the tanker bug under the Reliants up to the surface. In range of the M9 squad, it lashed out, destroying one Marauder and crippling another. For its trouble, it gets blasted apart by the combined fire of the M9s and Lieutenant McGarry, before the Reliants even got a chance to help out! Disappointing but fairly expected when that much firepower is close by. The warrior bugs following the tanker rose from the tunnel entrance next, destroying the crippled M9 and killing the sergeant of the Reliant squad. The Reliants and M9s react, blasting warriors apart – but one survives! It hurls itself at the Reliants, killing another trooper before succumbing to their return fire. However, without the Armourer sergeant present, the Reliants begin to run out of ammunition.

More warrior bugs are able to reach the same tunnel entrance behind the Reliants. Reaction fire kicks in once more and they hunker down. However, poor saving throws means only one survives. I leave him where he is, on the tunnel entrance – with a 2+ save (with the cover bonus), he is relatively safe and as he is in reaction range of several units of troopers, he will cause Matt some serious problems in his turn.

The tanker tunnelling up the centre of the table thunders onwards and, spurred on by a brain bug, surfaces behind the M8 Marauders, bringing one down. Reaction fire just patters off its thick carapace – with a tanker bug right in his centre, Matt was in serious trouble. This was more like it!

As the last tanker bug continued underground, warrior bugs rise up behind the one on the surface to support it. Their attacks bounce off the M8 Marauders but they manage to

claim the life of one trooper on the Ammo Dump. They would have got a trooper armed with a Javelin too but two hits from their claws slid off his armour! Perhaps with a little over-confidence, I leapt a swarm of firefries onwards to attack the NCO in the M8 suit. They failed miserably and lost two of their number from its reaction fire. Could have been worse. Note to self: use Firefries against M9s, not M8s…

Now I felt it was time to bring out the coups de grace – hopper bugs! They sweep onto the table from reserves, on both flanks, targeting the Marauder NCO, the Reliants and a few other unfortunate models nearby. Net result was one girl with a Triple Thud, a Javelin from the squad that had fired the Pee-wees (had I just taken out another atomic-armed model?), a damaged M8 and a destroyed M9. The swarm attacking the Reliants all fell to reaction fire but not one was killed on the other flank. Now Matt had eight angry hopper bugs in the midst of his army – good luck dealing with that!

The uber warrior bug swarm surge forward and three die to reaction fire – I can live with that! They were now beginning to stream past the Mobile Infantry's front line where they would be in a position to cause massive damage. I still had a bonus action from one of the brain bugs and the hopper bugs got the benefit of it, damaging an M8 and killing the NCO with the K9 pooch.

To end this turn, I had some real fun – all the warrior bugs that Matt killed in turn one came back, due to Endless Tide! Three get a bit close as they swarm out of the nest entrances and are killed immediately. Still, not to worry, they'll be back next turn!

Arachnids Turn 2
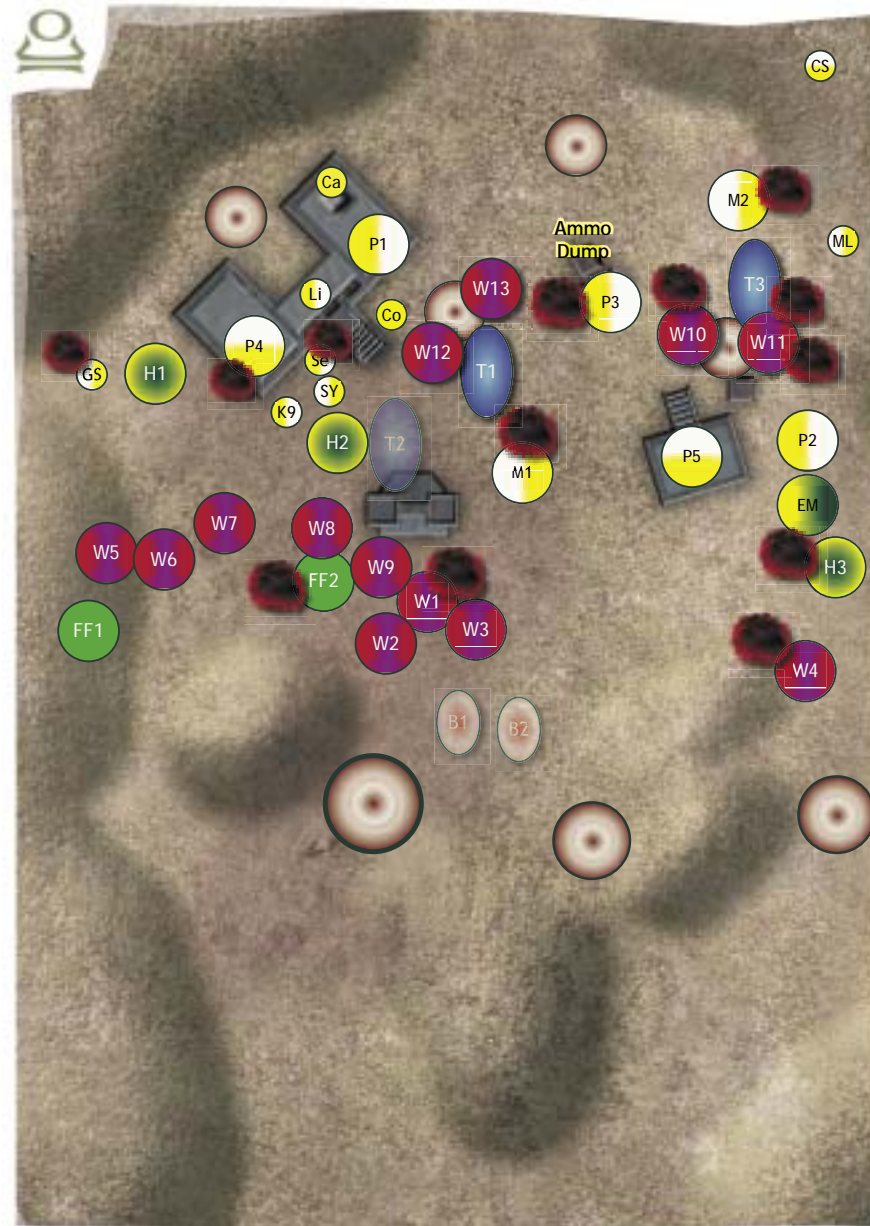
Matt: Okay, that was dire. My forces were being overrun all over the place and even my planned place for the 'last stand' had bugs swarming around it – on turn two! To top it off, several Arachnid units were close enough to start getting reactions when I began moving my own forces.

I gritted my teeth. Every trooper would have to dig in and start fighting! At least there could not be many more surprises coming…

Lieutenant Moss promotes a Reliant trooper to squad leader then shoots down not one but two hoppers (think about that for a moment, the dice roll needed…) Lieutenant McGarry promotes the last M9 then fires a Javelin at the tanker bug threatening my centre. He also, by splitting his fire, kills the warrior bug lurking in the nearby tunnel entrance, thus freeing up that flank from its reactions.

Captain Bartlett aims at the hopper bug on the roof of the building opposite him and kills it before leading his squad to destroy the warrior bugs supporting the tanker bug.

Well, the officers of the company certainly made their presence felt there! What else could I do to halt the impending disaster?

The Reliants chatter away, killing most of the warrior bugs in front of them. I took a gamble with the female trooper squad – by splitting fire, I thought I could take out all the warrior bugs that were within reaction range. I succeeded in one fire zone but the others made it through the hail of fire to assault their fortified position, killing three of the girls. Nuts! I thought that was a dead cert and now I had warrior bugs in reaction range of even more of my units.

The M8 NCO turns to support the squad being attacked by hoppers but the flying bugs dodge out of the way. In return, the hoppers nearest him leap and tear his suit apart. I was now regretting not giving my SICON Agent Ego War, as he was in a perfect position to use it and, with so many bugs swarming around the centre, I could have solved a lot of my problems in that area. Instead, he tried to Id Send the tanker, failed, dodged a reacting hopper, missed it with his carbine, ducked its next reaction then dodged a warrior bug's claws! No one is that lucky for long – surely his days were numbered!

The M8 Marauder squad charged the tanker bug, crushing its skull with their claws. However, this attracted the attention of the warrior bugs, drawing them ever closer.

The remaining M9 opened up on the bugs attacking the SICON Agent (yes, he was in the fire zone – someone obviously doesn't like Military Intelligence!). When the smoke cleared, the hopper was dead but the warrior bug and agent are untouched!

Last to go was the squad who fired the atomics. I had been trying to avoid them as any action from them would trigger

MI Turn 2
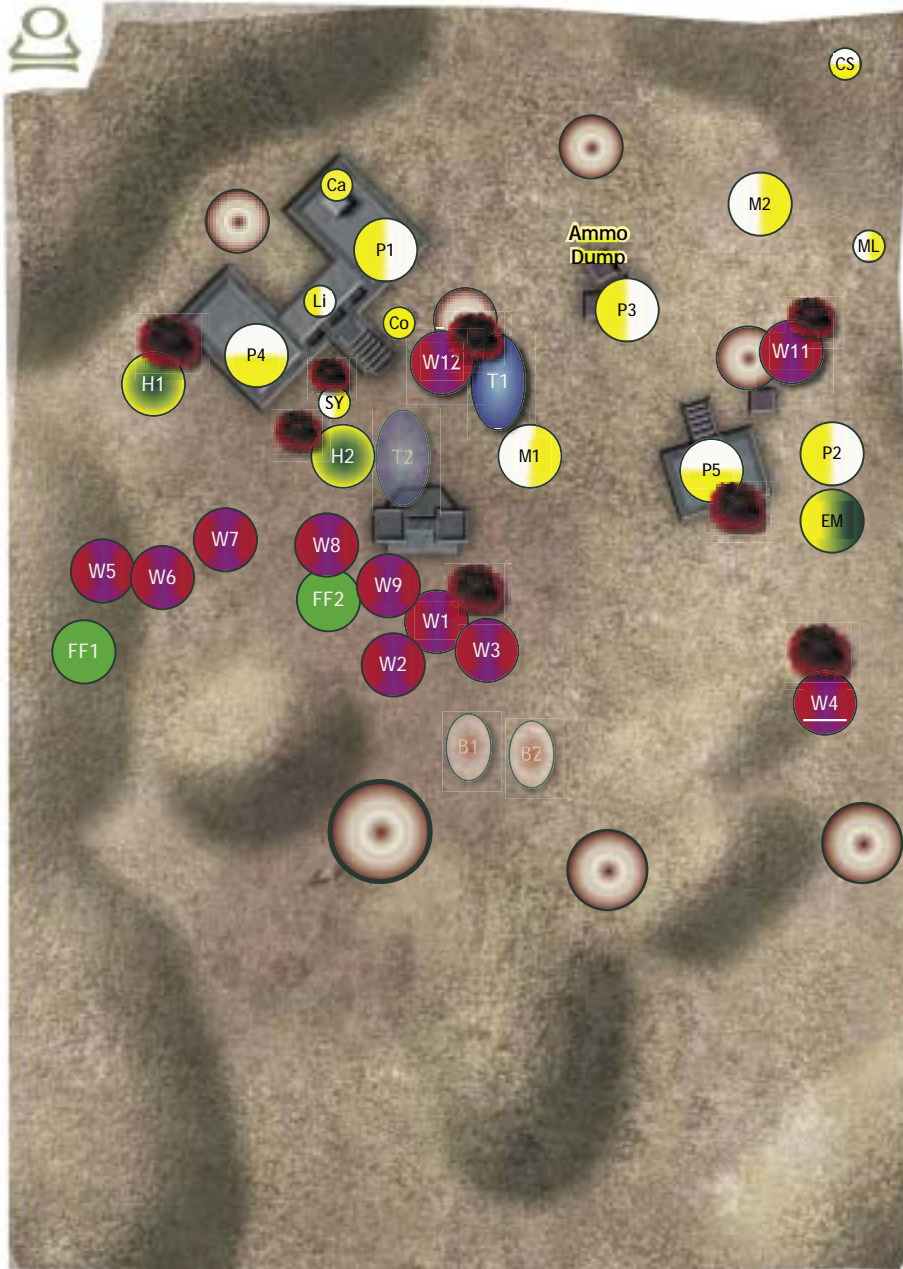
a reaction from the hoppers. They opened up on the bugs swarming in front of the building, to little good effect.

Fortunately, as Captain Bartlett had shot the single hopper that had made it to the roof of the building, the reacting bugs could not reach them without flying.

Overall, I was in serious trouble. My only hope for Ted's next turn was that my reaction fire would prove accurate.

TURN THREE

Ted: Well, that was punishing – the Mobile Infantry obviously still had some fight left in them! However, I felt they should have done more to stand a chance of winning this battle. With so many bugs in and amongst his army, I had a pretty free reign this turn.

The warrior bugs attacking the female troopers switched targets and bolted for the Reliants. Though reaction fire killed two of them, they go on a rampage, killing all troopers but one who was unable to react (Reliants with a single crewman count as pack weapons and he was armed with a Triple Thud – also a pack weapon!)

The last tanker (if you don't count the brain bugs, this was the last of my 'big guys', a tribute to the efficiency of the Mobile Infantry in taking out creatures like this) surfaced at last. It clobbers one M8, bashes the other then turns to fire at the Ammo Dump. Three troopers are melted and the Ammo Dump shudders…

Arachnids Turn 3

The hoppers made a classic attack, decapitating four troopers, including Lieutenant Moss, before sweeping round to hide behind the buildings, out of sight of any Mobile Infantry unit. The firefries followed up behind them, leaping forward and burning what left of the Mobile Infantry on one of the buildings while return fire nails only one of them.

The massed warrior bugs in the centre charge the last standing M8 Marauder. In deference to Matt, it fought like a demon but in the end, sheer numbers were on my side and it got dragged down under a flailing mass of claws. The SICON Agent is killed by the single warrior bug close to him, though that gets shot by the sniper troopers on the roof of the last building under their control. With more warrior bugs rising from tunnel entrances, I now had a free run throughout the Mobile Infantry deployment area – the M9 Marauder is crippled, warrior bugs swarm the last of the female troopers, leaving only the sergeant alive and the last trooper manning the Reliants is killed.
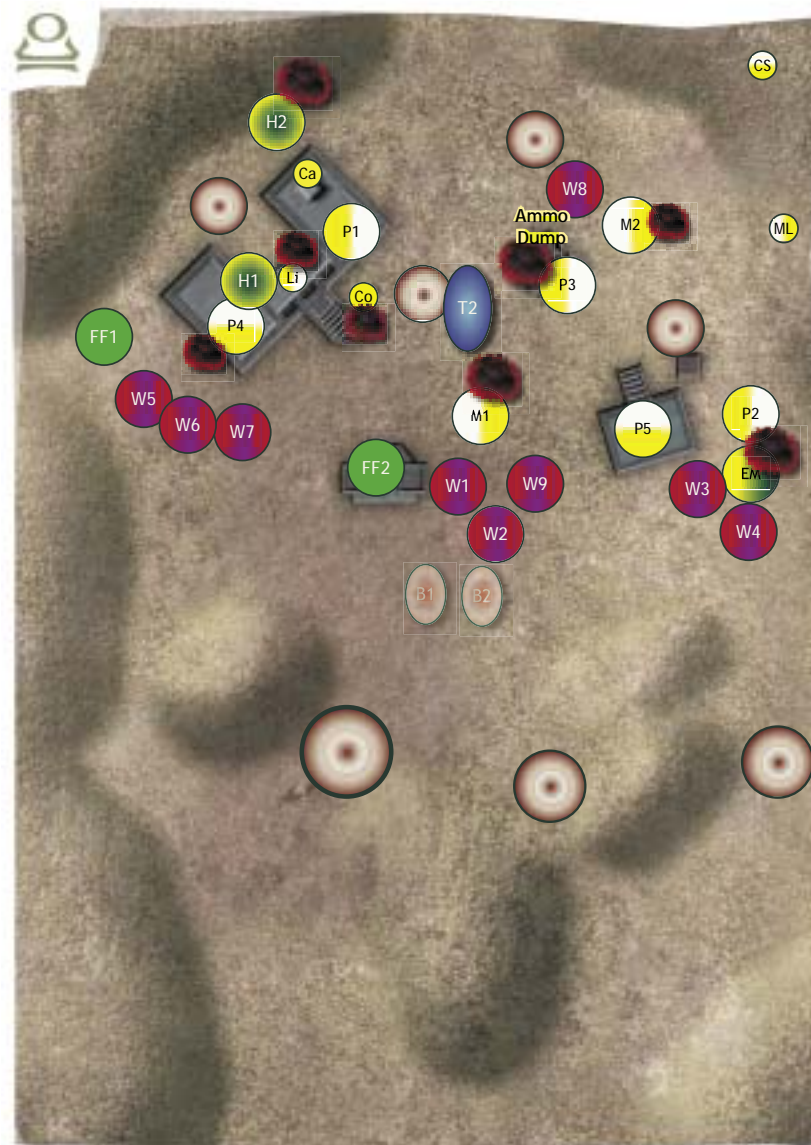
Matt: Well, I have lost, haven't I? Games of Starship Troopers usually come right down to the wire but at this point I felt as if a miracle was needed to just avoid a massacre.

Only one intact squad was left – the snipers led by Captain Bartlett. They leapt off the building to the cliffs behind, destroying all the remaining hoppers as they went. This was obviously my new place to make a last stand. The remaining models, a couple of NCOs and a few odd troopers on the left flank, did their best to halt the tide on that side of the battlefield. A few warrior bugs went down but that was all…

TURN FOUR

Ted: A short turn, this one! I knew the squad Matt had retreated to the cliffs would be tough to pin down but the rest of his units were in the open. I started to march all the warrior bugs on my left flank to the snipers but the rest swept on, killing almost every trooper left. Only the standard bearer who had been standing in the same place all game survived. Two more warrior bugs fell to reaction fire but I put many more on the table as Endless Tide recycled last turn's casualties.

Matt: Without that miracle, things had gone from bleak to hopeless. Unless my snipers got very lucky, I had nothing left that could reasonably take out the last tanker bug and there were just too many warriors to deal with. Colour Sergeant Cregg, Captain Bartlett and the sniper squad all Ready then use their jump packs to leap off the table, retreating to lick their wounds.

At least I managed to save the company colours…

VICTORY AND DEFEAT

Ted: Well, that was refreshing! Overall, everything went to plan. I was silly with my blister bugs and the plasma bugs were just… well, disappointing. We both had luck throughout the game, both good and bad, so the dice were not a major factor.

I think that putting a tanker or two on the table at the start might have saved at least one plasma bug to continue pounding the Mobile Infantry, though after the second turn I would have run the risk of hitting my own units as much as Matt's – not that this matters much when you have Endless Tide!

One note about that, incidentally. Endless Tide is not the key to loads of warrior bugs without recompense – your opponent gets mission points for each and every one killed. You cannot even rely on the idea that if you wipe your opponent out, you automatically win. In theory, even if I destroyed Matt's entire force (which is effectively what happened, points-wise, when he retreated the last of his forces), he might still have won if he had killed more points of bugs than his force was worth.

For example, I might have earned 6,000 points for destroying his army but if he had killed 6,500 points worth of bugs (possible, if enough warrior bugs are destroyed), then I would have lost. Sound odd? Think of it like this; I might have won from a tactical point of view by destroying his army but I would have been forced to commit (and lose) too many forces to achieve that objective at a strategic level. In other words, I might have destroyed this army but it would mean that I would not have enough forces later in the war and would eventually lose.

In the event though, not enough bugs were killed and victory was mine. All mine!

Matt: This battle was a catalogue of errors, and I made them all! Where do I begin?

I set up way too close to the Arachnids' deployment zone. There was no need to place forces that far forward, the Reliants would have been more effective further back (they have a 30" range) and the M8 Marauders would have been better positioned a few inches more distant from the bugs. I was too paranoid about the plasma bugs and placed my forces forward so there would be more space between them.

I also all but ignored the hordes of warrior bugs, preferring to concentrate on the plasma bugs and, well, just about everything else. In the end, as is always the case when you ignore them, it was the warrior bugs sweeping into my deployment zone that tipped the balance. Shooting up the big tankers and plasmas is a lot of fun (and very satisfying) but it is not always the key.

Most of all, however, I made the cardinal error when playing Mobile Infantry – I forgot the *mobile*. Only at the end did one squad (the snipers, led by Captain Bartlett) relocate. In the best case scenario, the Mobile Infantry should be hitting one flank of the advancing Arachnids and slipping one or two squads past their line to hit them in the rear and force their player to divert forces to deal with them, further relieving pressure on the main Mobile Infantry line.

By comparison, Ted's tactics were almost flawless – an error right at the start with the blisters but he dealt with that and continued on to make life difficult for me at every point. In the end, I was reacting to his moves rather than being pro-active.

That is a recipe for disaster in Starship Troopers.

The Arms Buyer's Almanac, 2127: Energy Weapons

New Weapons and Equipment for Gangs of Mega-City One

Matt Sharp

Pistol Weapons

Splut Gun

It has long been a tradition for small arms to be named after the person that invented the weapon – from the 18th century Gatlin machine gun to the 20th century Kalashnikov assault rifle and beyond. However, weapon designers in Mega-City One are not so well regarded, simply nameless drones in the employ of a faceless multinational corporation who have little or no change of gaining public recognition. In any case, designs for interesting looking weapons have an alarming tendency to leak into the hands of the criminal underworld, to be reproduced in clandestine weapons factories and distributed through the black market. Often, these cheap knock-off versions appear on the market long before the legitimate multi-corps have managed to get their own systems into the distribution system. Black marketeers are even less likely to give credit to designers than their legitimate counterparts. However, the forces of the Justice Department and perps alike need to give new weapons some sort of name, for ease of identification at least. Many weapons in Mega-City One, therefore, are named after the kind of noise they make when fired – anything from the spit gun ('ptoo!') to the Elecra zap gun ('ZAP!'). The pulse laser pistol is one example of such a weapon. When they unveiled their brand new, top secrets designs for a powerful energy-based handgun in 2105, the weapon techs at Mauley Munitions were less than pleased to discover that their revolutionary pistol had been available on the black market for some six months and was already known by the less than appealing name of the splut gun.

A short but heavy pistol, the splut gun appears to consist of little more than a handgrip with a short, wide barrel. Although it is a laser weapon, it is very different to the more conventional laser pistol. Instead of firing a beam of destructive laser light, the splut gun directs a concentrated pulse of energy at its target, very much like a miniature lazooka. These 'laser bullets' can be devastating at short range, but unfortunately the weapon has a tendency to overheat, although several failsafe systems ensure that there is no chance of the gun exploding. On any shooting attack that results in a fumble, the splut gun overheats and stops working. The weapon cannot be used again during the current fight, but will have cooled down sufficiently to be used in later battles. The splut gun roles 3D3 for damage, rather than the usual D6. A critical hit is inflicted if the dice total comes to 6 or more, as usual.

Zit Gun

The zit gun is a common sight among up-and-coming street gangs. Essentially, it is a variation of the laser pistol, although it is slimmer and much more streamlined. Most zit guns resemble a handgun fitted with a silencer and a telescopic sight, and indeed it is often used in a similar role although it easily outclasses such a weapon, in range and accuracy at least. This pistol fires an infrared laser beam, which is invisible to the naked eye and is almost completely silent; it therefore makes an ideal clandestine assassination weapon, particularly as a laser beam leaves little or no ballistic evidence for the Judges to trace.
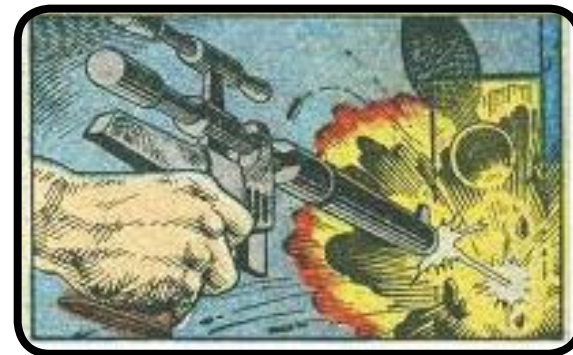
Rifle Weapons
Scatterblaster

A recent development of a very old idea, the scatterblaster is essentially a more sophisticated version of the stump gun that fires small pellets composed of energy rather than conventional matter. A scatterblaster strongly resembles a stump gun with a very large-bore barrel. It is highly prized as a relatively cheap and effective energy weapon, as well as its intimidating appearance, but the scatterblaster is really little more than an advanced stump gun and tends to fulfil the same battlefield role – it is powerful at close range but its effectiveness tends to drop off dramatically against more distant foes. Just

like a stump gun, the scatter blaster is also available in several variations – a double-barrelled version as well as a smaller, carbine-sized incarnation. Although this squat, chunky weapon is referred to as a 'sawn-off scatterblaster', it cannot be modified from the larger version in the same way as a stump gun – sawing the end of the barrel of a scatter blaster will destroy its complex focusing systems, rendering it useless.

Captain Noel Juan and his subordinate Private Weirzbowski!-Weirzbowski!, both members of the League of Extraordinary Violence, investigate an Undercity ruin

Weapon	Range	SD	Dam	Cost	Reputation Required	Special	Rep Bonus
Splut Gun	8"	1D	3D3+1	6,500 cr.	20	Blast	+8
Zit Gun	12"	1D	1D+2	2,500 cr.	10	-	-
Scatterblaster	12"	1D	1D+2	1,200 cr.	10	Blast	+1
Double-Barrelled Scatterblaster	12"	2D	1D+2	2,600 cr.	15	Blast	+5
Sawn-Off Scatterblaster	6"	1D	2D3+3	1,200 cr.	10	Blast	+1
Sawn-Off Double-Barrelled Scatterblaster	6"	2D	2D3+3	1,600 cr.	15	Blast	+5

Monty's Offer of the Month

This month Monty is focusing in gangs of Mega-City One with his *Tough On Crime* special offer. You can pick up Gangs of Mega-City One, 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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✂

Signs & Portents

Argent's Crusaders: Raiders With A Cause

A Special Campaign Raider Fleet List

Bryan Steele

'I may be a crook, thief, pirate and murderer…but at least I am still a humanitarian.'

Argent O'Timothy, Raider Commander

Not all Raiders are solely in it for the money. Alright, most are…but not all. Even those that are in it for the money are not always in it for the money 100% of the time – such as Raider Commander Argent O'Timothy.

Argent became an EarthForce AWOL defector at the age of twenty-three, when one of his superiors used his father's untimely – and very painful – death at the hands of the Dilgar as an example of why 'we follow protocols.' The officer claimed that Captain Frank O'Timothy and his men were virus-bombed at a location that Intelligence forbade them from entering… so that it was their own pride and folly that brought that horrible disease upon them, not the Dilgar themselves. This angered Argent enough that he stole a ship and fled quickly to the Raider base in Beta Durani.

There he taught others to hate the corruption and unforgivable *coldness* of the EarthForce officers, becoming quite a powerful speaker and leader. From becoming wing leader to a ship captain, all the way to managing fleets for himself…he was soon in charge of what he called his 'Crusaders.'

Unlike holy crusaders, he merely wanted to get rich – and hopefully cripple the EarthForce officers that did not feel for every soldier that he did. His crusade was one for personal vengeance and satisfaction, not enlightenment.

When Sheridan openly began his slow march toward Earth and the removal of President Clark, Argent secretly became his guardian angel from afar. Wherever Clark's forces would gather on his end of the galaxy, Argent's Crusaders were there to cause enough damage to hopefully keep them out of Sheridan's way. When the word hit that Clark's orders were to open fire on civilian targets, Argent pushed it a bit further… sending his special freighters into Clark's blockades in order to wreak as much havoc as they could before retreating.

When the thorn that was Clark removed himself from everyone's sides, Argent went back to his old raiding ways until the Drakh attacked Earth in 2266. Once again, Argent took up a secret banner against these *Drakh*. Having been informed that they seemed to pass and disappear into Centauri space, Argent surmised that the controversial Centauri must have been hiding the devils – so he began to take his guerrilla raiding war to them, doing his best to make them pay (literally) for what they were allowing to happen under their noses.

Until his death in 2273, Argent O'Timothy was a secret patriot, a champion for the forgotten grunts of this galaxy… and a terror of the galactic market feared by anyone with a cargo hold full of goods or a pocket full of credits.

Using Argent's Crusaders in A Call to Arms

The following fleet list is a slightly specialised version of the Raiders fleet list found in *A Sky Full of Stars*. For narrative reasons it gains and loses some interesting benefits from the common list. It has some ships that, while absolutely balanced to join a common Raiders fleet, were designed to be used with Argent's Crusaders.

Narrative fleet lists, like this one or the ones found in *The Earth/Minbari War Supplement*, are generally focussed on bringing a particular flair to your campaigns and friendly games… and should be cleared with all players and the campaign or tournament organiser before assuming you can use them in such things.

So, enjoy what we have put together here and give those commercial shipping lines hell!

The Argent's Crusaders Fleet List

The following forms the entire fleet list for the Argent's Crusaders

Priority Level: Patrol
Breaching Pod Wing (4 flights)
Delta-V Wing (6 flights)
Delta-V2 Wing (4 flights)*
Double-V Wing (4 flights)
Modified Freighter

Priority Level: Skirmish
Defence Post
Strike Carrier

Priority Level: Raid
Assault Freighter*
Battlewagon

Priority Level: Battle
Endgame Dreadnought*

Space Stations
Raider Base

Auxiliary Craft

Flights of smaller craft may be purchased separately and used as units in their own right. Some ships are noted as carrying one or more flights on board. These flights may be deployed at any time before or during the battle and do not

cost anything extra - the cost of these flights is included in that of their parent ships.

Any ship carrying one or more Delta-V flights may replace any number of them for Breaching Pods. Breaching Pods swapped in this way will carry a Troop from the ship - they do not include Troops of their own in the way Breaching Pod Wings do.

Argent's Crusaders Fleet Special Rules

The following special rules apply to all Argent's Crusaders fleets.

EarthForce Salvage:
Due to O'Timothy's knowledge of EarthForce designs and penchant for striking at corrupt Earth Alliance resource points, Argent's Crusaders Fleets may choose up to two Fleet Allocation Points from the Earth Alliance Fleet List of Battle-level or lower.

Selective Scavengers: Argent's Crusaders use the same campaign rules for *Scavengers* as regular Raider Fleets do (found on page 153 of *Sky Full of Stars*), but add +2 RR Points for any Earth Alliance ship compared to that table.

Argent's Crusaders Initiative: +0

New Personality – 'Commander' Argent O'Timothy

Never thought to be much of a patriot, this notorious raider commander from Beta Durani Prime is the only son of a Dilgar War hero, Captain Frank O'Timothy. After his father was killed in the last days of that war, Argent joined EarthForce just long enough to learn how to pilot – which was when he stole his first fighter and fled into the shadows of criminal life. Over the passing years he has become one of the most powerful raider cell commanders on Beta Durani and has hundreds of bandits and space pirates on his payroll.

From time to time, Argent's forces have emerged from hyperspace to attack those who have set their sights on Earth – and were quite active during the Earth Civil War. His vessels attacked several of President Clark's established regrouping points disguised as common raiders, but secretly O'Timothy loves his people and cannot stand to see them mistreated in such a way for long.

Using Commander O'Timothy in A Call to Arms

To include Commander O'Timothy in a scenario, use the following information.

Fleet Lists

Commander O'Timothy may be used with a Raider fleet in any game set after 2245.

When placed in a ship, Commander O'Timothy raises its Priority Level by one, so a Raid level ship will become a Battle level ship, a Battle level ship will become a War level ship and so on.

Commander O'Timothy may be placed in one of the following ships. Variants may be used if you wish to include them in your games.

Raiders

Battlewagon
Strike Carrier
Endgame Dreadnought

O'Timothy in Battle

A ship with O'Timothy as one of its officers gains the following benefits in battle.

Command: So long as O'Timothy's ship is on the table and not Crippled or reduced to a Skeleton Crew, the fleet gains an extra +2 bonus to its Initiative rolls. This is not cumulative and may not be added to the bonus granted by ships with the Command trait.

Raider Aces: Any ship O'Timothy is placed upon has the effective Crew Quality of any fighters it carries by raised by +1. In addition, their mastery over attacking larger ships with their fighter weaponry gives them all the Precise trait while firing at non-station spacecraft.

Terror of the Space Lanes: Ships having to roll a Crew Quality check opposing the ship O'Timothy is on board suffers a -3 penalty to its roll.

New Ships
Assault Freighter

Argent O'Timothy is a certified genius when it comes to tactical designs. Like the Modified Freighter that he and so many other Raider organisations use, this new 'Assault Freighter' combines O'Timothy's love of boarding actions with the trickery of the decoy ship. By packing the cargo pods of a modified freighter with fully functional breaching pods, he has created a cheap way of bringing a number of troops to bear on a crippled target very quickly. Modified Freighters are often ignored in a battle when other targets are presented, the hopes being that the surprise of breaching pod after breaching pod erupting from this reinforced hull will be enough to win a bigger prize every time.

Speed: 5
Turn: 1/45°
Hull: 5
Damage: 28/8
Crew: 30/9
Troops: 8
Craft: 8 Breaching Pods*
Special Rules: Carrier 4, Shuttles 4
In Service: 2250+

*These may not be launched or placed in patrol before the first turn of any scenario

Weapon	Range	Arc	AD	Special
Medium Pulse Cannon	10	T	4	-

Delta-V2 Combat Fighter

Delta Industries made untold profits with their widely known and recognised Delta-V – no matter the notorious reputation it acquired from its primary purchasers or its knack for coming apart under the slightest amount of fire. It was affordable and available to all – that was its strength. At nearly double the cost of its predecessor the 'V2' is actually a well-made and well-armed 'combat fighter.' Based on the same design, the V2 is a much needed revamping to the old chassis. Keeping its signature 'chip fighter' look and the ability to use the same launching and docking methods of the older model, the V2 is superior in all other ways. Stronger weaponry, more condensed armour plating and superior manoeuvrability sets the V2 apart as a new era for raiders.
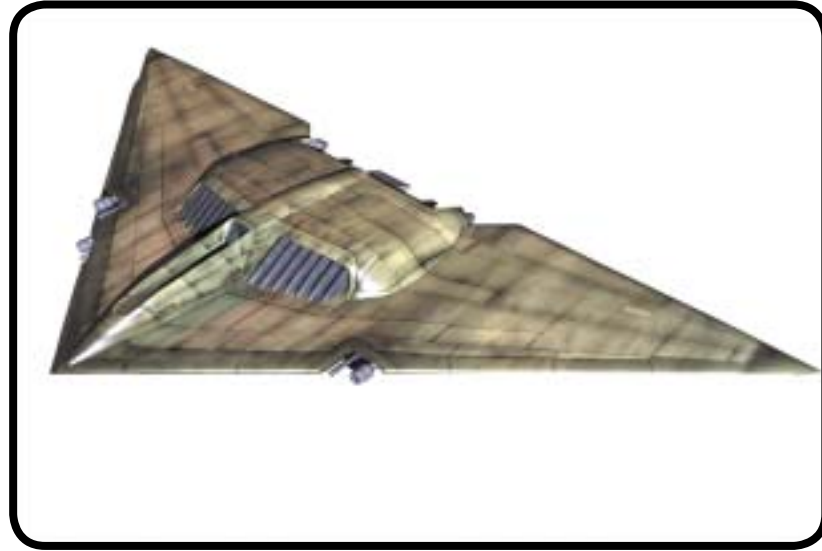
Speed: 8
Turn: SM
Hull: 4
Damage: –
Crew: –
Troops: –
Dogfight: +1
Craft: –
Special Rules: Atmospheric, Dodge 2+, Fighter
In Service: 2260+

Weapon	Range	Arc	AD	Special
Light Particle Gun	2	T	2	Weak
Ultra-Light Pulse Cannon	2	T	2	Twin-Linked, Weak

Endgame Dreadnought (Raider, Unique Nova Variant)   Battle

A work in progress that took close to ten years to assemble from stolen or salvaged Earth Alliance parts, Argent O'Timothy called this labour of love his 'Endgame' – hence the name of the vessel. Comprised of a staggering number of Nova Dreadnought components and several weapon systems from salvaged hulls, the *Endgame* is a cobbled together warship capable of unbelievable amounts of firepower. It can bring several missile racks, pulse cannons, plasma weaponry and even a powerful laser emitter to bear on an enemy if given the proper firing lane on several opponents. Common foes could never hope to withstand the sort of barrage the *Endgame* can pour out – slow but heavily armed and armoured, it has become a primary focal point for any force to destroy when they battle O'Timothy's Raiders.

Speed: 5
Turns: 1/45°
Hull: 6
Damage: 48/14
Crew: 40/11
Troops: 6
Craft: 4 Delta-V flights*, 4 Double-V flights*
Special Traits: Interceptors 2, Carrier 4, Fleet Carrier, Jump Point
In Service: 2249+

*Can alternately be replaced with Breaching Pods, or Delta-V2s in any game taking place in 2260+

Weapon	Range	Arc	AD	Special
Medium Laser Cannon	20	B	6	Beam, Double Damage, Super AP
Heavy Pulse Cannon	12	B	8	Twin-Linked
Medium Pulse Cannon	10	F	10	-
Medium Pulse Cannon	10	A	6	-
Missile Racks	30	P	4	Precise, Slow Loading, Super AP
Missile Racks	30	S	4	Precise, Slow Loading, Super AP
Particle Beams	5	P	8	Anti-Fighter, Twin-Linked, Weak
Particle Beams	5	S	8	Anti-Fighter, Twin-Linked, Weak
Light Plasma Cannons	6	P	4	AP
Light Plasma Cannons	6	S	4	AP

Building Your Own Endgame Dreadnought

The unique combination of an Earth Alliance Nova dreadnought and the fighter capabilities of a Raider Strike Carrier, the *Endgame* is a labour of love for any historic Raider player. Besides the normal conversion tools necessary to perform the modelling aspect, you may also want to get some form of super glue accelerant for the 'harder to hold' glue joins during the process.

The parts you will need to create the *Endgame* come in the Earth Alliance Nova and Raider Strike Carrier blisters. You will need three of the four weapons arrays sprues, body and antenna from the Nova and the four halves of the two largest sections of Delta-V rings from the Strike Carrier.

The first step is to cut the small section behind the first set of weapon attachments off of the Nova's body. The section should only be a few centimetres long and should end right before the small nubs used for the side weapon arrays. Use the saw to first remove the front most end of the Nova – it will be much easier to hold for the second cut this way.

Once the section has been removed, give it a stern look and throw it out – you will not need it! *(Throw nothing away – keep it in a bits box! Bits are always useful – the Editor).* File both sides of the cut flat and set them aside. Now clean and glue together the four halves of the Delta-V rings. On the larger of the two you will need to cut/file off the little attachment box on the central disc. It will need to be as flat as the Nova's cut to fit perfectly. Once the four halves have become two rings and you are happy with how flat the disc is, glue the two rings together at the disc.

When that glue is dry, you will want to drill a pinhole through BOTH discs at the same time. This can be an arduous task and if you have access to a power craft drill or something similar, I suggest using it. Once the pinhole is complete, set the pieces aside.
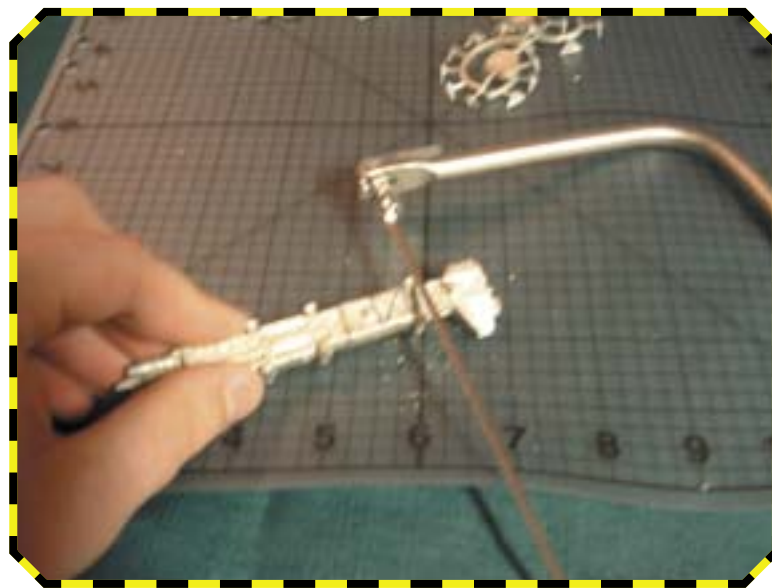
Now, grab the back half of the Nova body. Figure out where the centre of the flat cut is and drill a small pinhole – maybe a quarter of an inch deep – in it. Dip a piece of wire into a bubble of glue to coat the sides without being too thick and sink it into the hole. Now slip the Delta-V rings over the wire (using the hole you made earlier) and glue them in place. Use a touch of modelling putty or glue if you have to fill any gaps.

Once the glue is dry and the rings are secured to the back half of the Nova, snip any remaining wire down to less than a quarter inch showing past the rings. Dip the newly shortened wire in bright red or yellow paint.

Take the front section of the Nova and position it so it is lined up properly with the back half and use the spot of paint on the wire to mark where it sits on the Nova's front. Drill over that spot, deep enough to accept the wire and have both sides sit flush against one another. Glue and putty the Nova half to the rest of the model. If you wish to, you can also glue the whole model to its stand at this time.

While the glue and putty is setting on the body of the ship you can move over to the weapon arrays you will be attaching to it. Of the four weapon sprues that come with the Nova, you will want to grab the one with the shorter-barrelled turrets and two of the long-barrelled ones.

First thing you will want to do is make one of the sprues into what will become the missile turrets later. Grab one of the long-barrelled sprues and cut the barrels as close to the turret itself as you can. File down any nubs or uneven ends from the cut – you want the 'business end' of these turrets smooth. Now, glue them to the first set of four weapon attachment nubs behind the Delta-V rings – facing outwards.

Separate and clean the short-barrelled turrets and glue them at 'action angles' on the set of four nubs behind the soon-to-be missile turrets. Clean the flash off of the long-barrelled turrets (make sure you get the area between the barrels – flash loves to hide there) and glue two of them facing forward on the two side nubs at the front of the ship, and two more facing rearward on the side nubs directly behind the Delta-V rings. Don't forget to attach

the communications antenna up front on the 'face' of the ship and set the whole project aside to let the glue dry completely. As that the *Endgame* went through several stages of construction and re-construction in its narrative background, feel free to alter its model here and there if you wish to – its owner did!

Once assembled your ship will need to be primed and prepared for painting. Painting the *Endgame* is understandably similar to painting any Earth Alliance ship. It should be undercoated in a flat black, taking care not to get too much on the actual Delta-Vs attached to the rings. The Deltas will be a much lighter colour and are small enough that painting too many coats on them could rob them of their details.

Once blackened, the ship will need to get a heavy drybrush of metallic silver – preferably an iron grey or steel colour – to bring out the minor details running up and down the Nova sections. Pay attention to make sure you get some metallic
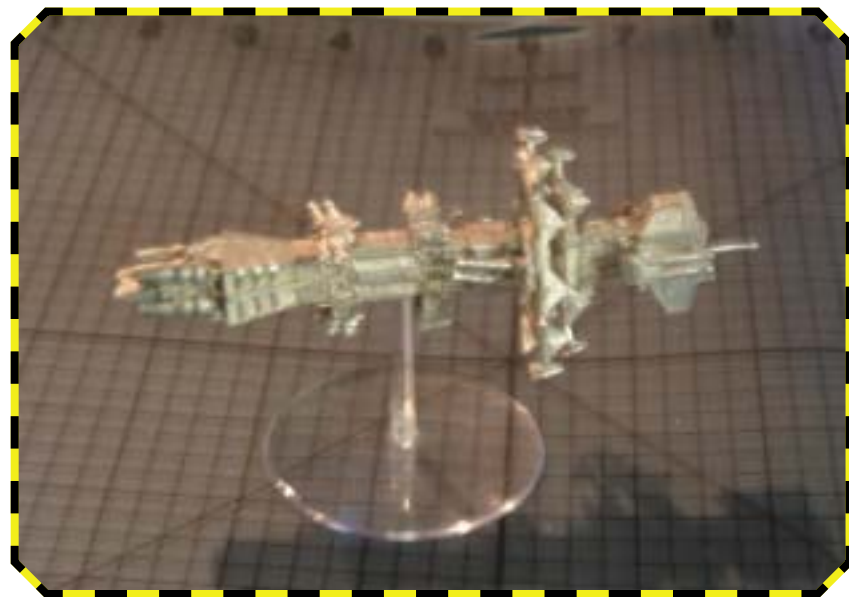
behind the turrets and between the Delta-V rings. It is easy to miss some spots, especially around the posts holding the fighters, so be aware. Add some other metallic colours to weapon turrets, engine ports, parts that stand out to you and so forth to break up the outlook of the ship.

The Delta-Vs themselves should get a light tan basecoat, to be topped off with metallic cockpit/engine areas. Do not add any metals on the fighter gun ports at this time – you will get to them later.

Now you can brush on a generous amount of dark grey or black inkwash. Do not be afraid to add more than you think you need – the *Endgame* is a Raider ship and should probably look worse for wear and filthy. Be careful to get the fighters, but do not let it pool upon the fighters at the bottom – it could make those fighters too dark in comparison to the upper ones later.

Once the inkwash is thoroughly dry, your *Endgame* will be ready for detail work.

Adding a few white highlights to some of the 'windows' along the sides of the vessel, some shining metal components to break up the darker recesses and blue energy cores to the engine thrusters are a good start. Adding yellow and red specks to the edges of some weapon turrets can give the ship an 'action' feel. Just be sure not to do too much – the specks might begin to dominate someone's attention while they look at the model.

Drybrush a little black and dark brown wash on the weapon turrets and engine thrusters for a sooty effect, especially on the longer barrelled turrets – which will look a bit boring without it. The flat panels on either side of the front most part
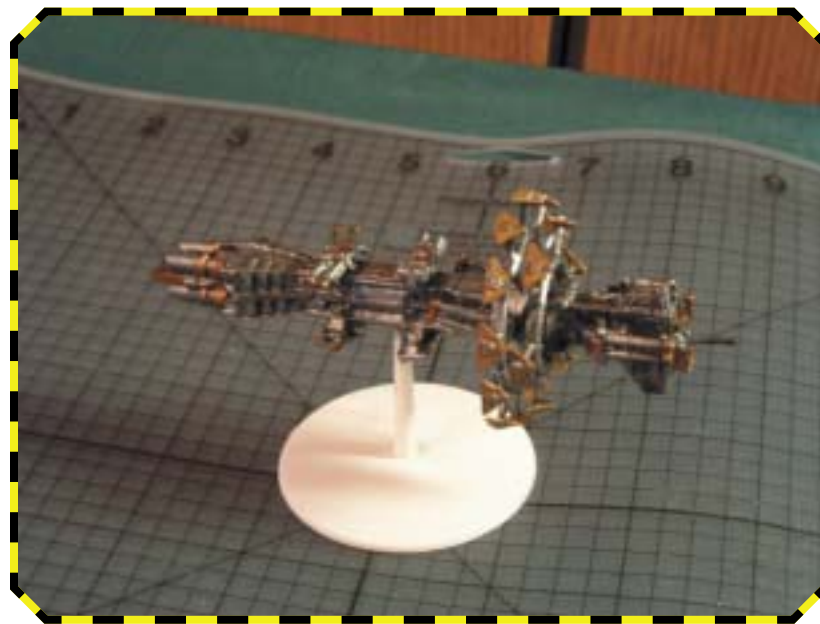
of the ship and the 'bars' on the sides of the rearmost section can be painted in any sort of dark colour – I used brown with maroon highlights – to separate the ship from its Earth Alliance cousins. Put a red spot on the end of the forward antenna, but not so much that it looks like a glob of paint.

For the missile racks, colour the filed off surface black. Then, making sure to keep a black outline, fill it in with red or orange. Adding diagonal 'hazard' stripes of red or white should give the stocky little turrets the image of being some form of weapon system – specifically shuttered launch tubes. You also may want to add a very thin black line where the two shutters would be closing – but it will require a very steady hand and an extremely small brush. When you are done with the turrets, they should stand out at a glance but not so much as to draw *all* the attention from the rest of the model. The Delta-Vs should be next. Now a dark tan, splotch lighter tan and a muted yellow (mix with brown if need be) on the 'wings' and undersides of the fighters, careful not to get any

on the docking posts they are attached to. When you are done 'splotching' the fighters, run a quick light brown inkwash over the backs of them. Not only will this mute the splotching a bit, but it will also define the cockpit area a bit better.

After going through and adding all the final touches you want to, making sure to give your *Endgame* its own brand of style, paint the base and stand black and label it as you have your other ships. Allow it to dry and give it a good coating of sealant. I suggest a layer of gloss sealant for protection, then a quick glaze with the matte sealant to take down the shine on what should be dull metal surfaces and your *Endgame* is ready to fight for Raiders everywhere trying to survive a war raging around them!

Campaigns: Refits and Other Duties

Argent's Crusaders Fleets use the following tables for Refits and Other Duties when playing campaign games.

Argent's Crusaders Refits

2d6	Refit
2	**Jump Engines:** The ship gains the Jump Point trait if it did not have it before and has at least 20 Damage points. If the ship already possesses the Jump Point trait, it gains the Advanced Jump Point trait instead.
3	**Turbo Weapons:** Choose one weapon system. It immediately gains the Double Damage trait but has its Attack Dice reduced by half (rounding up).
4	**Enhanced Interceptor Network:** If the ship has Interceptors as a trait, it gains a +1 bonus to its Interceptor score. If Interceptors are not present, the ship gains Interceptors 1. This may only be applied once.
5	**Hardened Structure:** The ship is specially braced to ward off the effects of the most devastating hits. Reduce its Damage Threshold number (the point it becomes Crippled) by two points.
6	**Long Range Targeting Systems:** Choose one weapon system. It has its range extended by 50%. However, when using this extra range, halve the number of AD used (rounding down).
7	**Additional Weapons Fitted:** Choose one weapon system that has at least 4 AD. It gains an additional 2 AD. This may only be applied once per weapon system.
8	**Advanced Sensor Arrays:** The ship gains a +1 bonus to any attempt it makes to target an enemy with the Stealth trait. This may only be applied once.
9	**Reinforced Hull:** Add +10% to the ship's Damage score but reduce Speed by –1.
10	**Supercharged Thrusters:** The ship gains a +1 bonus to its Speed score.
11	**Extra Hanger:** The ship immediately gains an extra hanger and a Delta-V flight, regardless of whether it possesses one already or not.
12	**Flight Computer:** The ship gains the Flight Computer trait if it did not have it before.

Argent's Crusaders Duties

2d6	Other Duty
2	**EA Defector Joined:** An Earth Alliance ship has succumbed to one of Argent O'Timothy's propaganda manifestos and had joined the Crusaders. You may immediately add any Earth Alliance ship (or wing) of your choice of Skirmish or lower Priority level to your fleet roster.
3	**Lightning Raid:** Without warning the Crusaders have struck at a supply ship or convoy of the enemy. Immediately subtract 3d6 RR points from one enemy fleet and add half that number to your own (round down).
4	**From Out of Nowhere:** The Crusaders have been hiding in a polarised dust cloud before the next battle, surprising the enemy. The next battle in which you are the attacker (if possible) will have a +3 bonus to Initiative on the first turn.
5	**Did You Lose This?:** You have managed to sabotage the jump systems of one of the enemy ships. Choose an enemy fleet. One randomly determined ship cannot be involved in any battles next campaign turn.
6	**Veteran Fighter Pilots:** A squadron of mercenary pilots offer to join your ship. Increase the Crew Quality of one Fighter Flight on board to 6.
7	**Lightning Strike:** The fleet prepares on the fly and picks up incredible steam as it slams into the next target, carrying on through with maximum damage potential without them having a chance to raise a defence against you. Choose on enemy fleet – it immediately loses 2d6 RR points. An enemy fleet may only be targeted once per campaign turn in this manner.
8	**Veteran Gunners:** The elite gunners of a defecting Earth Alliance ship have turned out to serve aboard this vessel in the current conflicts. Add a +1 Attack Die bonus to all weapon systems of the ship. This may only be applied once.
9	**Raiding Force:** The ship carries a raiding force against an enemy fleet of your choosing. Deduct 2d6 RR points from the enemy fleet and add them to your total as you pillage and wreck his supply lines.
10	**Diverting Raids:** Launching fast and deadly attacks on a series of seemingly unrelated and unimportant targets; the Crusaders have crippled the communications and supply lines to one enemy's forward fleets. Choose another player's fleet. In its next battle, it will have one less Fleet Allocation Points available.
11	**Superior Strategic Position:** A routine patrol uncovers a Strategic Target previously thought to be worthless. Immediately generate a new Strategic Target on the campaign map and mark it down as being under your control.
12	**Assistance Rendered:** A timely rescue mission to an allied ship in distress is well rewarded. You may immediately add any one ship of your choice of Skirmish or lower Priority Level to your fleet roster. This ship may be chosen from Narn, Brakiri, Drazi, or Vree fleet lists but it may not come from a fleet that you are currently fighting against in the campaign.

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Mines

MINEFIELDS FOR THE STARSHIP TROOPERS MINIATURES GAME

CARL WALMSLEY

The use of mines presents Mobile Infantry commanders with a whole range of new tactics. Whether it is shielding a vulnerable flank, protecting a strategically important location or funnelling bugs towards a particular area of the battlefield, a carefully placed minefield can be just what is required.

MUNITIONS

The MI currently employs the M-913 Splinter Mine and the M-918 Plasma Mine as part of its war against the Arachnids.

M-913 Splinter Mine: This compact munition is packed with enough high explosive to tear through steel or shred a warrior's carapace. The blast radius is limited, allowing for the deployment of M-913s relatively close to a defending unit without endangering them.

M-918 Plasma Mine: A development of the M-908 Plasma Munition, the M-918 delivers a super-heated blast of plasma hot enough to melt a tanker bug's armour. It has a large blast radius, which can result in the destruction of several enemy units upon detonation.

NAME	RANGE	DAMAGE TYPE	TRAITS
M-913 Splinter Mine	Placed	3xD6	One-Shot!, LZ (1"), Piercing/1
M-918 Plasma Mine	Placed	2xD10	One-Shot!, LZ (3"), Flame

DEPLOYING MINES

An MI player may choose to buy and place mines during the deployment of his forces. He may also choose to buy a number of decoys: these are special tokens used to confuse the enemy and mask the true location of a minefield. The cost of deploying mines and decoys in a battle is as follows:

NAME	COST
M-913 Splinter Mine	10
M-918 Plasma Mine	20
Decoy	5

The MI player should place any mines and decoys that he has paid for at the same time he sets up his forces. He may only place mines in his own deployment area. The location of each mine or decoy should be marked on the battlefield using the tokens provided with this article. The MI player may not purchase more decoys than he has mines.

Note that MI players must be careful with the deployment of mines so as to avoid overlapping Lethal Zones. Otherwise, the detonation of a single mine can cause a chain reaction that might destroy an entire minefield!

As mines are always placed *before* a battle begins, they may not be used in conjunction with the abilities of an MI Ammo Dump.

TRIGGERING MINES

Whenever *any part* of a unit – friend or foe – makes contact with a mine or decoy token, the token should be turned over immediately. If the token is a decoy, it is removed from the board without any further effect. If the token is a mine, the appropriate Lethal Zone template should be placed directly over it and the effects of the detonation applied. This may result in several units being affected by the blast. Once a mine has been detonated, the corresponding token is removed from the game.

It is possible to try to clear a path through a minefield by targeting mines directly with a Shoot action. Mines and decoys are considered to have a Target characteristic of 6+ in such instances. Mines and decoys do not get a Save, nor do they have a Kill characteristic. A mine or decoy that is successfully hit is triggered in the same way as if a unit has made contact with it.

A model that is hit by an exploding mine but that manages to save against the damage, flinches back in the direction it came from.

MINE RINGS AND TUNNELLING

With the tunnelling abilities of many bugs, it is possible for the Arachnid forces to tunnel beneath mines and avoid them. A defence against this is the Mine Ring.

Diagram One
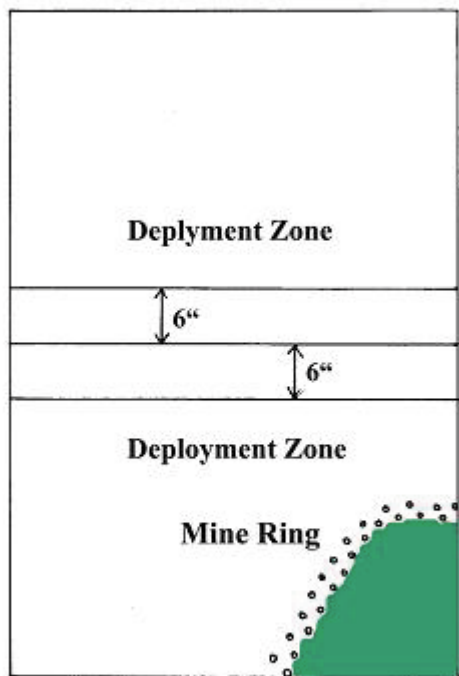
The Arachnid player is not allowed to place any Tunnel Assets within the area protected by the Mine Ring

If the MI player creates an unbroken line of mines stretching from one table edge to another, it is considered a Mine Ring. An unbroken line is where no single mine or decoy is more than 3" from another mine or decoy. The Arachnid player may not place any tunnel assets inside a Mine Ring before the start of a battle. In this way, Mine Rings are an effective way for the MI to protect an area of the battlefield. See Diagram One for an example of a Mine Ring.

If an Arachnid unit creates a tunnel entrance touching one or more mines or decoys, these tokens are immediately triggered. All models emerging from the tunnel entrance are caught within the blast as the mine(s) explode and may, potentially, be damaged. There is also a 1 in 6 chance for each mine triggered that the tunnel entrance will be destroyed. If this happens, the Tunnel Entrance is returned to the Arachnid Player's pool before any models can come out of it.

Signs & Portents

MINE TOKENS

The backs of all Mine and Decoy Tokens should look the same, depicting a mine

Decoy Token

Splinter Mine Token

Plasma Mine Token

Mine Tokens, Instructions for the use of: 'Listen up, you apes - QUIET WHEN I'M TALKING! - SICON has authorised this page to be printed and cut out in the correct Mobile Infantry way. Print out this page onto thin card or photo paper as many times as required. Affix each mine front face - THAT WAS NOT AN ORDER, YOU GRUNT! - to the appropriate back.

Career Sergeant Throat

On Deadly Ground

A Scenario for the Starship Troopers Miniatures Game

CARL WALMSLEY

Forced to withdraw after their position was overrun, a unit of MI has fallen back to an area that is heavily mined. With an overwhelming force of bugs closing in, the MI troopers will have to try to keep the mines between themselves and their enemies so that a retrieval boat can pick them up.

This scenario will work best with players fielding forces of 1,000 to 1,500 points each.

Mobile Infantry Briefing

The bugs have you outnumbered, but still have to cross a minefield to get to you. You need to think carefully about your strategy and the deployment of mines before the battle begins. Your priority is to secure a safe landing area for a Fleet retrieval boat.

- At least one third of your force's points value must be spent on mines and decoys

- You may select any Priority Level you wish

- You may not choose any Fleet Assets

- You must place all of your forces on the board first

- You may choose whether or not to take the first turn

Arachnid Briefing

The Mobile Infantry are on the run and it is now time to move in for the kill.

- You have 25% more points to spend on your army, at any Priority level you wish

Beginning at the end of Turn 5, the MI player should check to see whether he has established a secure landing zone. If so, he is victorious – his forces evacuate and Fleet obliterates the bugs from the air. If a secure landing area has not been established, the battle continues with another check being made at the end of turn 6 and, if necessary, at the end of turn 7. If the MI Player cannot secure a landing area by this time, the Arachnid player is victorious – Fleet withdraw leaving the MI to fight to the last.

MISSION LENGTH

5-7 turns

SPECIAL RULES AND VICTORY CONDITIONS

In order for the Fleet retrieval boat to extract the MI models, a secure landing area needs to be established. This is an area of ground 12" x 12", that can be anywhere in the MI deployment zone. It must be entirely clear of both mines and Arachnid models for the retrieval boat to land there.

Signs & Portents

SCENIC MAYHEM!

THIRTY-CRATER MONTY
MAKING A LUNAR LANDSCAPE FOR STARSHIP TROOPERS

Darell C. Phillips

One of the joys of tabletop gaming is seeing your painted armies arrayed on decent-looking tabletop scenery. One of the obvious choices, because of light weight and low cost, is creating a board using Styrofoam, or 'EPS' (expanded polystyrene), sheeting as a base material. What we will discuss today is a method of constructing one (and through the magic of literary style, every time you read this it will curiously always be 'today'). Funny thing, that. If only bread stayed as fresh as a magazine article, but I digress.

The first step in the project, fellow bipeds, is to obtain source materials. There are various sources for sheet Styrofoam, but a reliable source can always be found at a home-improvement store. The next phase, therefore, would be what *kind* of Styrofoam to pick. Open-cell Styrofoam material, usually in a white color/colour, (just acknowledging a certain spelling sensitivity here) is commonly found and the least expensive. Closed-cell sheets are stronger, and don't show the small 'beads' that are there when you squint at the white stuff (watch that white-stuff; it might give you crow's feet). The closed-cell material is usually found to be offered in either blue or pink colours. This fact, if investigated properly, might be explained as to which gender of employee is on shift at the Styrofoam plant when it was made. It just goes to show that colour can be a very important thing (and even maybe how it's spelled?) Oh, and it costs more than the white material

can be pulled off to reveal the raw material. Sanding of the coloured stock is possible, but a bit messy (which is why I passed on it for this). If the Styrofoam you source does have a peel-off protective cover, make sure to remove both sides. At first, it would seem logical to leave the bottom layer attached, but I noticed that there was a noticeable warp induced to the sheet. The warping ceased when the bottom layer was removed. If you find raw, uncoated material, you won't have any problem with that, of course.

As far as the thickness of the sheeting, I found that my home-improvement store carried at least 1", 1-1/2" and 2". The thicker pieces do not cost that much more, and they allow more room for ravines and other features. For example, a two-foot by four-foot by two-inch thick sheet is just over $5.00 USD, which is a very affordable material to work with. Around $25.00 USD can get you enough for a four-by-six foot board, including additional pieces that may either be glued down or left as repositionable.

(at which factory there isn't as much arguing, so production time is less and the savings can be then passed directly on to you, the consumer). And now that you know one of the most amazing facts in life (the universe and everything), you can't tell this to anyone! Just show them the cover of this issue, tell them to get their own copy of it, and then 'wink' at them, OK? Oh, and thanks a bunch.

Now comes the hard part; which colour to pick? I could suggest a psychological relationship of colour to gender preference, but then I wouldn't want anyone confused pray that I might read about some very strange wedding announcements. Let's keep it simple, shall we? If you want to work with a finishing method that I will shortly describe, grab some generic white styro. I have found that while the closed-cell Styrofoam is better in ways to work with, it is coated with a protective layer that is resistant to my surface 'etching' technique. While the white material also can have a protective coating, the brand I buy has a plastic layer that

Before etching of the surface of the board, I wanted some terrain features made that could be used by the players to block line-of-sight on the table. I thought that since this was going to be a lunar landscape I would want to have some impact craters randomly about the surface, as well as a few hillocks and ravines (think here of referencing these as 'positive' and 'negative' to the surface level). For the first impact crater, I wanted something to give the board some 'personality'. I decided it would be fun to make a crater that would be big enough that a battle could be waged inside of, so I decided on a diameter of about eighteen inches. Since each board is two feet wide, it doesn't allow for a much larger one, unless it was to span over and into an adjacent board. This is something to consider before you start carving your Styrofoam. When I did my desert boards, I made much of the topography fit so that each board's edge had to flow into the adjacent board in only one way. It looked fine, but did not have the option to reassemble them into different optional patterns. On the lunar boards, I wanted to make each one a stand-alone topography. That way there would be many ways

to match the edges and they would always 'fit', no matter what was tried. What you need to decide at this juncture is which way you want your boards to fit together- as a generic or a dedicated placement.

To give this particular surface detail some height, I used a separate section of two-inch sheet to cut it from. If you do not have a platter with an eighteen-inch diameter to trace around with a magic marker, a pencil and length of string works just fine. Basically, the string had small loops at the ends and I centred the pencil. You get the idea. Cutting out a circle this large out of a rectangle isn't too hard to figure out. If you want to get things a bit messy with bits of styro about, you can grab a loose hacksaw blade (without the handle attached) and saw it out. Another method, but trading the mess of bits for the smell might be to use a cheap soldering iron and just melt your way around. Be sure to use proper ventilation of course. You might have heard that you are a 'carbon-based life form', but carbon isn't always a good thing (especially the 'breathing it into the lungs' part).

The slanted outside edge of the crater wall could be made by sawing off messy bits with that hacksaw blade, or a better way. One indispensable tool for forming sheet foam terrain is a very affordable thing found at most craft stores. It's best described as a 'wire foam cutter', and it is battery powered much like a flashlight. The cost is cheap (around $10.00 USD). But as they say, 'batteries sold separately' (usually two D-cells are needed). Slant it at around 45-degrees when carving around the circle. Again, I suggest proper ventilation be used. It helps to 'jiggle' the wire a bit to give a random edge to the slope, too. I like coffee to assist in this technique, but I've used tea to good effect as well. Folks really can't tell the difference in the final product.

For some of the hill features, I just cut them out of the same two-inch stock as the large crater (putting the coffee and tea to further good use). For the sub-level ravines, I needed a way to cut into the sheeting, not unlike scooping ice cream. The wire foam cutter already mentioned is made with a straight wire, and is not designed to be bent or formed into other

shapes. For those that don't want to make a mess by digging out their ravines with a knife (but also willing to invest in a very useful tool), there are wire-based foam carving tools that have a changeable frame as well as a wire that can be shaped into many, well- shapes. The one I found on the internet costs $30.00 USD, but the power source is another $75.00 USD. You would have to want to justify this for the amount of terrain you might want to build, or make the tool yourself. Another option is to 'pool' with other gamers (such as a gaming club) and split the cost of a manufactured set of tools. Based upon the number of boards that I have already made and plan to still build, I felt it was a justified investment.

One of the nifty things a formable-wire foam cutting tool will let you do is carve recesses (like ravines) into sheets of foam. A nice side benefit is that the piece of 'waste' can then be flipped over to be glued (or left movable) on the board surface as a jaggy little hill. If you don't want people to see that the hill is a 'recycled hole' with the same shape but negative, then carve it a bit more and change it's shape. Waste not, want not, I suppose.

The same method of 'ice cream scooping' the foam is used to hollow out the crater centre (after carving the outside slope in the outer wall with the straight-wire tool). Working from the centre of the circle, scoop out the bulk of the material inside, being careful to not cut too deeply. If you didn't want to be as careful as I'm noting here, you could pre-glue the crater to the board piece before carving it out. Then you would have another two inches to play with before you dug through the bottom. I wanted the centre of the meteor 'impact' area to be raised, so I was careful to leave a central peak in the middle.

As I mentioned, I did decide to permanently attach this crater to the board, and did so with craft spray adhesive. I then created several more craters, but these were medium-sized (around a ten-inch diameter). The thing that was a bit more difficult with these was planning them as 'multiple impacts', with overlapping crater edges. Just take your time, and sketch out a plan before you start carving if you want some of these. The main hint here is to decide which crater was 'formed' by

impact last and have it 'erase' the crater wall of the other one when you carve its features out. Remember, when you want a crater to be superimposed over another, one of these craters has to have been formed at a *later* time than the one it is on top of (and thus erasing part of the detail of the first crater).

Now it's time to add my *secret surface etching technique* to the foam terrain. Remember, it's a secret. Well, it *was* a secret. Just remember after reading this next part to be sure and look into the little blue light that is clipped onto this page. If you currently do not see a 'little blue light' device attached, then consider yourself one of the lucky ones. The instructions said something about removing the device before being compelled to jump off a… hmm? Oh, the technique? Yeah.

What I wanted was a random 'moon-like' impact effect that might have been caused by many small meteorites, displayed on my terrain boards. Many know that using enamel spray

The trick is, a little goes a long way. Dip the brush into the acetone, and 'flick' it overhand, towards the board. You will hear a bit of sizzling for a few minutes, and then the acetone will evaporate. Treat the procedure like microwave popcorn, and wait until the noise nearly stops. If you did it correctly, you won't have any gaping holes in your terrain board and it will have a random pattern of 'peppered' surface craters. If you are a bit concerned about your odds of success the first time you do this procedure, then I would suggest to practice on some scrap Styrofoam.

The final pieces that I made for my lunar board mark it for use with *Starship Troopers Miniatures Game*: Bug Holes.

paints will have an effect on Styrofoam, but the problem is that it usually works all too well. It will eat the styro, and cause it to sag and melt. It can be used, but there is no way to control it with any great degree of success. The method I use employs something even harsher to Styrofoam- acetone (don't worry about the little blue light; I'm sure it just fell off the magazine- you're safe). Please read the cautions on the container, but acetone can be found in common hardware and paint stores. It's not acid, but don't try to tell that to styro. It'll melt through styro faster than Alien slobber through three levels of deck plating. The trick is to get a cup (no, not a Styrofoam cup!) and a disposable brush (about one inch wide). Wear gloves, and do this in a well-ventilated area, preferably outdoors. And yes, acetone is one of the three ingredients that 'Judge Doom' used in his stuff called 'The Dip' in 'Who Framed Roger Rabbit'. Yes, he wore gloves, too.

No, I said that too quickly. I meant to say that they are loosely placed *impact craters*. Yeah, don't worry, you Mobile Infantry players. All they are is *meteor impact craters*. Yeah, that's all Sicon intelligence reports that they are. It's nothing to worry yourselves about. Anyway, for these pieces I used a two-foot by four-foot sheet and drew twenty-six four-inch circles and four six-inch ones. *Hey, you MI guys. I told you Sicon said they were meteor impact craters, OK?* It's just a pure coincidence that the measurements sound like something the Arachnids use to pop out of the ground from, but it's just that- a coincidence. Sky Marshals do not make mistakes, right? Well, OK there was that one guy. But he's the exception to the rule. I used the same procedure to make these holes, uh *craters*, that I did the large craters. I used the straight wire craft cutter to angle the outside slope. I wanted to make removable 'doughnut holes' (*don't ask me why, trust in Sicon*) in the centre of the craters, so I used the straight wire cutter and made an incision standing straight up and into the side of the curve. Then, reversing the angle of the wire so that it was opposite of the outside slope angle of the crater, I cut a slightly jaggy circular cut inside the crater. Meeting back where I cut into from the inside, I used a few fingers to spread the outside 'O-ring' piece apart so that the entry path was open to remove the wire. This is a bit tricky, because most of your fingers are holding the styro and the cutter, as well as rotating the styro disk around at the same time. Don't cut your way out, or you will have two incisions and a part of your 'doughnut' will fall off. Even so, you could glue it (that's what you do to the single incision, for those that can do it). Next, place the 'doughnut hole' back into the 'doughnut'. I would recommend at this time to flip the two-piece assembly upside down and use a black marker to make an alignment line across the cut, at a 90-degree angle to the cut. Also, make a mark with a number or letter on each part that is the same. This way, when you have sixty loose parts, you can

reassemble them quickly. That is, unless you happen to really like jigsaw puzzles of course. After marking the pieces for orientation and identification, 'scoop' out the top two thirds (or about) of the doughnut, while it is assembled into the other piece. This will make a depression in them and make them usable as craters that can be placed randomly on the terrain.

For finishing, if you have read any of my previous projects you will know that my favourite paint for Styrofoam is Krylon H2O (not H-twenty, but H-two-oh). I also like their 'Fusion' brand (made for plastics), but it will eat at styro just a nibble. The H2O works really well because it is latex spray paint, and won't harm a tiny cell on that Styrofoam. One thing I noticed to make a nice finish is to apply the first coat liberally, and quickly get the second colour going before the first one begins to dry. This *blends* the paint and gives you an airbrush effect that you normally don't get with spray cans. I think you could skip the primer step that I used (H2O White Primer #2614), but it was only a few dollars to prepare the (yeah) *white* Styrofoam. I picked out 'Gulf Gray' (#2611) for the base colour (I wonder in the UK if it's 'Gulf *Grey*'?) and Niagara Ivory Mist (#2609) for the secondary colour. Of course, don't spray an even coat when applying the secondary paint. Just hit it randomly over the surface, varying the density. In some places, skip it entirely and go with the darker coat, which is the dominant choice. By looking at some of the photos, you can make a bit of an effect of the impact force of the meteor spraying out debris in a light/dark wagon wheel pattern (especially on the larger craters). Let this dry thoroughly. Paint the thirty smaller craters first with the 'doughnut holes' out-of-range. After they dry, replace the 'middles' (I sure hope you did that black marker matching-thing with the undersides!) and paint them again. Don't go too heavy here or the paint will stick the pieces together.

For added strength, I like to brush on a clear-coat of water-based sealer by the trade name 'Mod Podge'. They have a 'matte-mat' version that I use (I wasn't stuttering; it's what they call it. I guess they are as spelling-sensitive as I try to be). It is a great product and protects and seals the project. I recommend coating the loose craters, but don't apply it to the outside edge of the 'doughnuts', as that might act like glue a bit. I really don't know what they make it out of, but it's a great sealer. To finish the craters, cut some black poster cardstock and tape to the bottom of each crater to display it alternately as a Bug Entrance.

By this point, if you followed my lead at all, you should have a four-foot by six-foot gaming board with very small, to medium to large craters, all in shades of grey. For those that like squinting at photos, I glued on a few custom-made craters that are about ¾' in size. Now as to what to do with those craters that curiously look like Bug Holes? In a play on words (I refer to the article's title), let's play a little thirty-crater Monty (if I'm pushing that just a bit more, I might even say 'Thirty-crater *Full* Monty'). The idea here is for a Battle of Pluto; an 'Operation Pest Control', where the Bugs are dug-in and waiting for the MI (and Sicon doesn't as yet have a clue). Heck, maybe it isn't even Pluto. If the Bugs infested Pluto, they might just also have liked our new 10th planet (nicknamed Xena, for now). Or even Gabrielle (yup, the newly discovered moon around Xena, of course!). You decide. It's your moon. To drop another clue, the scenario might have had even a longer name: 'Thirty-crater Monty: Operation Trap Door Spider'. Are you getting the idea now? What if a variant of the tunnelling rules were used (for this scenario) that said that even if the MI can normally track movement in tunnels, *what if the Bugs weren't moving?* Then all is quiet on the crater-filled lunar fields when the Mobile Infantry shows up, that's what. The goal would be to cross from one side to the other (either determined to be the short or long side) with a predetermined minimum number of MI at the end, to win (that's alive, you Apes. Carried dead do not count. Nice try.) A percentage figure can determine the level of victory (or defeat). The Arachnid forces would set an 'ambush' and preposition their bug entrances where they thought they would work best. The Arachnids get to see the 'Full Monty' MI with everything of theirs 'exposed', while the Bugs get to 'Flash' the enemy from hidden underground positions when they choose to reveal their 'trap doors'. Welcome to Xena...

The Desert Oracle

Episode Two

Ty Falco

Chapter Nine

Glycon gripped a long staff made from hazel. Symbols of watching eyes were carved and painted along its length. He uttered a command word and the staff came alive with power, pulsating with magical energies. Concentrating carefully, the enigma used the staff to call forth a seer stone spell. His mind became a blank slate, waiting for details to be drawn on it. The image of a giant materialising in the sand, gripping a man in white appeared. Glycon was pleased. As the image played forward in his mind, Glycon's mood went from satisfaction to disbelief, and finally to anger. Falconius had escaped. Worse yet, looking into the past had drained Glycon's strength and used precious power from his beloved staff.

After a long rest Glycon pondered the situation in his twisted and corrupt mind. Someone had helped Falconius. A firestorm had been cast to thwart his giants. A man with a magic carpet had saved him. He would need to use considerably stronger measures than he had anticipated to kill the spy. Perhaps he would not bother with stealing his soul. Outright destruction of his entire being suited Glycon's mood. He decided to dig deeper into his book of shadows to find the blackest, most foul spells he could cast to bring about Falconius's destruction.

Chapter Ten

Silvanus guided the magic carpet through the desert with expert precision. It was one of his favoured modes of transportation. He had found the rug in a trading caravan's junk pile many years ago. He often used his ability to detect magic to check assortments for magic items. The carpet had glowed with a magical aura and Silvanus had got it for next to nothing. The cool air of the desert night rushed through his hair and caressed his face like a loving, ghostly hand. Falconius was half-asleep behind him. They would need

to stop soon to rest. Silvanus had no idea where the oracle Keriwena might be living but he had a good idea who might. A group of orcs resided near one of the major caravan trails that carved its way through the sandy wasteland. They often preyed on caravans passing through and any other unlucky passers-by. Silvanus often traded intelligence with them and a mutual cooperation had formed between them. This group of orcs was the eyes and ears of the desert. If a reclusive oracle were hiding in the desert, they would know where to find her.

Silvanus spotted a series of rocks that jutted up out of the desert sand. He knew from common desert lore that the rock formation was the remains of an ancient mountain chain. Timeless wind and sand had eroded them to a fraction of their former size. Natural caves dotted the rock formation. The orcs had made their home in hand carved passageways beneath the rock formations. Silvanus decided to stop so he and Falconius could rest before going to meet with the orcs. He found a small, isolated cave near the top of the formation and guided the carpet into it. These caves had served him well in the past as temporary resting places or hideouts. Their proximity rendered them inaccessible to all without the gift of flight.

The carpet came to a gentle rest on the cold cave floor. Silvanus took a small metal rod from his pack and touched it while uttering a mystical phrase. The rod began to glow brightly, illuminating the entire cave. As he expected, the place was empty. Falconius was already asleep without so much as a word so Silvanus lay back against the cave wall and closed his eyes to get some much-needed rest himself.

Chapter Eleven

Daylight flooded the cave, rousing Falconius from his deep sleep. The cave was warm and bright. Silvanus was awake and eating some dates and dried meat.

'Where are we?' Falconius asked, rubbing the sleep from his eyes.

'We're in a cliff cave over the main caravan route through the desert.'

'What are we doing here?'

'I have some acquaintances who live under this rock formation that may be able to help us find the oracle.' He passed some food over. 'I figured we would rest here for a while and then pay them a visit.'

'Sounds like a good plan to me.' He bit into the dried meat and made a face. 'What is this stuff?'

Silvanus smiled. 'Dried camel meat.'

Falconius restrained his stomach and continued chewing the tough, flavourless meat. He was too hungry to be picky. After they were finished eating, Silvanus offered him a wineskin filled with date wine. The sweet but rich drink was quite refreshing. Silvanus said that he brewed it himself. They packed up and settled onto
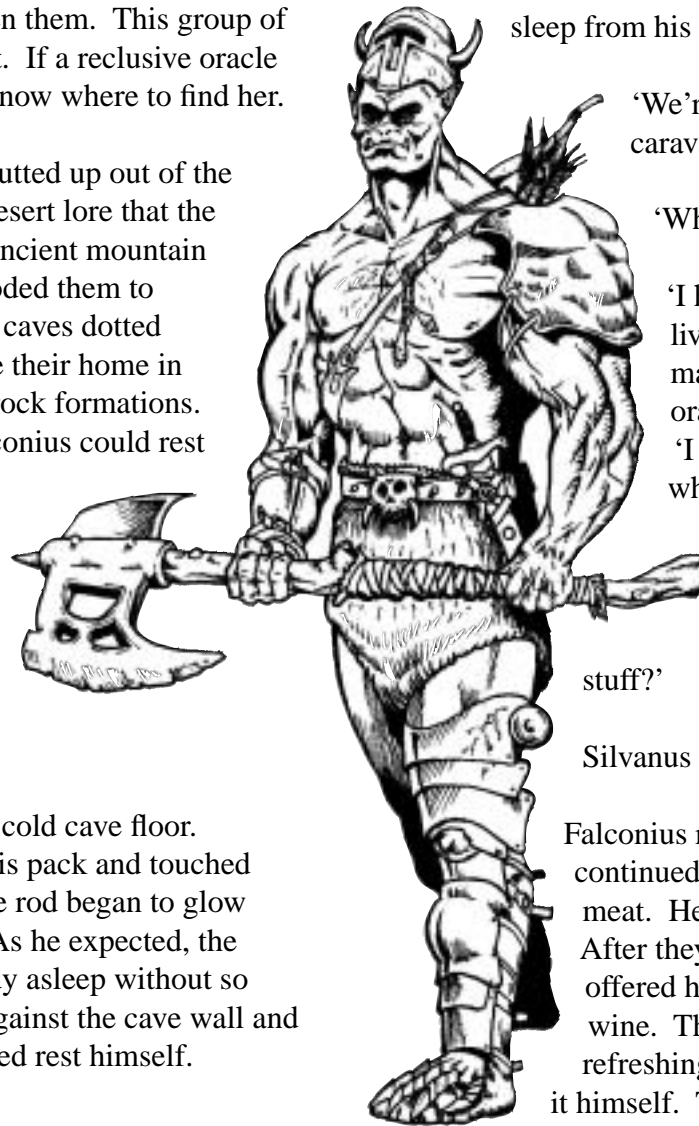
the flying carpet for the trip to meet Silvanus's contacts. The carpet rose with a steady grace and then silently floated out of the cave.

Chapter Twelve

Aurog watched the silent carpet gradually descending from the cave. It carried a stranger dressed in white and a familiar face-Silvanus. Aurog and Silvanus had known each other for years. They traded in desert secrets and sometimes went on missions together. They shared a common dislike for Prince Vadrex and wished for stability in Morgund. The prince had made it known publicly that the orcs had no right to live in the desert. He vowed that once he took over his father's throne, he would make it a priority to destroy them, thus insuring safe passage for all caravans. Aurog had learned all of this and more on various spying missions of his own. The way the orcs looked at it, the caravans were invading their sovereign territory and they had a right to the spoils of war from the intruders. The orc tribes were very poor so any source of income was exploited.

The greediness of some members of the tribe had led to a decision Aurog did not agree with the night before. A foul and depraved enigma named Glycon had made contact with the tribe. He offered a fortune in treasure for the head of Silvanus's companion. If Silvanus was killed in the process, so be it. The majority of the tribe had agreed to accept the offer. Dissent was not tolerated so Aurog had to go along with the plan. He was not going to allow Silvanus to be killed. Silvanus would no doubt protect his friend so Aurog would have to look out for both of them. His plan was to warn Silvanus at the earliest opportunity.

The carpet made a gentle landing at the base of the rock formation. The orcs began to come out of their caves to greet Silvanus and the stranger. Aurog made sure he was the first one to get to Silvanus. 'Silvanus my good friend,' he said smiling broadly. 'How have you been?'

'Well, I've been better,' said Silvanus. 'I had a little trouble with giants recently but it wasn't anything I couldn't handle.'

'Giants? They usually keep to themselves. I wonder what brought them out?' Aurog imagined they had been made the same offer as his tribe had.

'You know giants, always looking for plunder,' Silvanus said with a strange expression on his face.

Aurog looked at the man in white. 'Who's your friend?'

'This is Falconius. He's visiting from Morgund.' Falconius and Aurog clasp forearms in a traditional desert greeting.

'Nice to meet you,' said Falconius.

The rest of the orcs were gathering around Falconius and Silvanus. Aurog stayed close. 'What brings you to see us?' asked Aurog.

Silvanus became visibly uneasy at the growing crowd of orcs. Falconius appeared to be looking around, sizing up the crowd. 'Just looking for some information today,' said Silvanus.

One of the orc leaders in the crowd replied, 'we don't have information for you today Silvanus.' The orcs had formed a circle around Falconius and Silvanus. The hardy desert orcs traditionally carried scythes everywhere they went and they now brandished them menacingly. Two of the larger orcs were standing next to the magic carpet.

'It's a trap Silvanus!' Aurog whispered urgently. 'We have to get out now.' With that the orcs near the magic carpet buried their scythes into it, anchoring it to the ground. The rest of the orcs moved to attack.

'Take out their captains first, then their other officers,' Silvanus hissed.

'How can we tell them apart?' asked Falconius as he readied his hand crossbow.

'I'll point them out to you,' answered Aurog. There was no turning back for him now. His desperate warning to Silvanus had revealed where his loyalties were to his tribe. He raised his scythe to fight beside the two humans.

As Aurog pointed to a particularly large orc, Falconius fired a bolt into his exposed arm. The orc instantly fell over and appeared to be dead. This caused momentary hesitation in the orc ranks but the other officers urged them on. Silvanus's hands began to glow and then a cone of flame shot forth from them, setting the hair and clothing of several orcs on fire. Aurog met the first scythe attack with his own weapon and parried it deftly. As the orcs pressed in, Falconius abandoned his hand crossbow and drew his scimitar. An orc scythe caught him in the shoulder, knocking him down.

Aurog felt a sudden rush of hot air behind him and glanced back at Silvanus to discover that he had burst into flames. His entire body was engulfed. Aurog could not recall anyone in the tribe having magic enough to make that happen. Aurog's nearest opponent had paused to watch Silvanus burn too but to Aurog's surprise, Silvanus did not appear to be in any pain. In fact, he was now moving into the orc crowd, striking opponents with powerful blows while setting them ablaze at the same time. Aurog felt a sharp pain in his leg and went down. The orc he had been fighting raised his scythe for the killing blow. It never landed. A blow from behind sent the orc to the ground, leaving Falconius standing in his place.

By now most of the orcs were on fire and they appeared to be hesitating. The smell of burning hair and orc flesh filled the air while the screams of chaos and combat clouded Aurog's mind. He was desperately trying to staunch the flow of blood from the gaping wound to his leg. He could no longer fight but the orcs had left him to concentrate on Silvanus. Aurog watched Falconius pop up from time to time, taking an orc down here and there. The man was certainly adept at sneak attacks.

The morale of the orcs was broken and the few still fighting started to run back towards their caves. Silvanus shot another cone of fire into their backs, setting more on fire. Falconius appeared nearby and walked up to Aurog with a flask. 'Drink this,' said Falconius. 'It will help you heal.'

Aurog drank the pleasant tasting contents of the flask and immediately started to feel better. Silvanus had stopped burning and had returned to his former appearance with no damage at all from the fire.

'Since when did you become a sorcerer?' ask Falconius.

'I'm not exactly a sorcerer. It's a long story. I'll tell you all about it someday if we ever get out of this mess.'

'I'm sorry for all of this,' Aurog said with eyes downcast. 'Someone got to the tribe and offered them a great reward in exchange for the death of Falconius.'

Falconius shrugged. 'Prince Vadrex is behind this I'm sure,' he said nonchalantly. 'Thanks for trying to warn us.'

'We need to get out of here fast,' said Silvanus. 'The orcs will regroup, get help, and come back after us.'

Falconius walked over to the magic carpet. 'Looks like our transportation is ruined.' He pulled the scythes out of the rug, rolled it up, and brought it to Silvanus.

'I'll have it fixed later,' said Silvanus. 'Bring it along.' He turned to Aurog. 'Can you walk?'

Aurog slowly stood up, marvelling at the lack of pain from his wound. 'I believe I can.'

'Then let's make our departure,' said Silvanus. They quickly moved away from the caves and back out to the open desert. For the moment, no one appeared to follow.

Chapter Thirteen

Glycon fumed as he divined the results of his latest attempt to destroy Falconius. Who can rely on desert orcs anyway? What was he thinking? In any event, he was prepared to sacrifice a little of himself to end things once and for all. Falconius had proven to be amazingly resilient up till now, but things were going to change dramatically in the next few hours. Glycon opened his book of shadows and carefully thumbed through the ancient and wicked tome. He stopped at a page that had drops of an aged, reddish-brown substance on it. He pondered the contents of the page for several minutes and then became resolved in his mind to perform the arcane ritual described.

Glycon descended the spiral stairs from his spell-casting chamber. On the ground level of his tower he came to the heavy, locked door that led to his dungeon. He murmured a few words and the door opened up before him. With a gesture the torches along the dungeon stairway lit up with a bright blue fire. Glycon descended the stairs and came to a small open chamber. Several skeletons and zombies stood motionless there.

'Bring me the first two prisoners,' said Glycon, gesturing to the two closest cells. Two skeletons and a zombie turned and went down a corridor that contained a row of iron-barred cells. The zombie unlocked the first cell and the skeleton entered, grabbing an emaciated female elf and dragging her out. The second cell was opened and a small halfling was removed. The undead servants brought their prisoners before Glycon.

'Take them to the spell-casting chamber,' said Glycon. The undead silently complied. There was no resistance from the prisoners who appeared barely alive. Barely alive was okay with Glycon, as it would do for the ritual he had in mind. He followed the group up the dungeon stairs and then up the spiral stairs to the spell-casting chamber.

Glycon began to gesture excitedly as the prospect of raw power tantalised him. 'Bind them to the altar,' he said as he pointed to a black obsidian block with rusty manacles hanging from it. The black surface of the altar gleamed except where it was marred by a reddish-brown substance. Glycon could barely contain himself as the skeletons finished their task. The prisoners lay helpless on the altar as Glycon's eyes glimmered with anticipation.

'Return to the dungeon,' he said, dismissing his undead servants. They shambled off towards the spiral staircase and disappeared from sight.

The victims on the sacrificial alter started to whimper and plead for their lives. Glycon mouthed a few words and then there was total silence from the altar and the area around it. The mouths of the victims were still moving, but no sound was detectable. He returned to his book of shadows and studied the incantation once more. Then he moved about the spell-casting chamber, gathering bottles and other supplies. He placed everything on a table and began carefully measuring out portions of various coloured powders, foul smelling liquids, and parts of a myriad of animals and humanoids. He delicately stirred each ingredient into a large, black cauldron filled with a bright red liquid. With a single word a fire appeared underneath the cauldron. Glycon moved to his book of shadows and began chanting in an ancient, forgotten language.

When steam began to rise in wispy fingers from the cauldron, Glycon produced a small dagger with a black handle, a wavy blade, and a blue sapphire in the pommel. He moved to the cauldron and held his arm over the bubbling brew. He used the dagger to add his own blood to the mix and then said a final phrase to complete the spell. Glycon waited in exquisite anticipation for the great evil that he had summoned to appear. The victims on the altar froze with eyes wide as a black opening materialised at the top of the spell-casting chamber. A sudden blast of cold air ricocheted through the room as a figure emerged from the dark opening.

'Oh great one, I have summoned you here to...' Glycon could not continue. Hovering over him was a tall, old crone. Dark, beating wings suspended her in the air. Her body was gaunt and wrinkled with age. Long strands of greasy, grey hair fell down around her face but left coal-black eyes unobstructed to reach into Glycon's very soul. Huge black talons on both hands twitched as a foul odour emanating from her hinted at internal decay.

'I didn't summon you!' said Glycon with surprise and fear in his voice. He started to back away slowly from the cauldron towards the spiral stairs. The hag was quicker as she manoeuvred in front of him and raked his face with a powerful blow from her talons. Blood obscured Glycon's vision as he stumbled, crashing into the cauldron. As his flesh burned from touching the hot metal, the hag flew down again and kicked the cauldron over, spilling its boiling contents over Glycon's entire body. Extraordinary pain overwhelmed his body and he could not think clearly enough to cast a spell or even to move. A cackling laugh from his attacker broke his resolve completely and he began to plead for his life. The hag pointed a single finger at him and a ray of cold shot out from it, striking him dead centre. His hot, burned flesh turned to
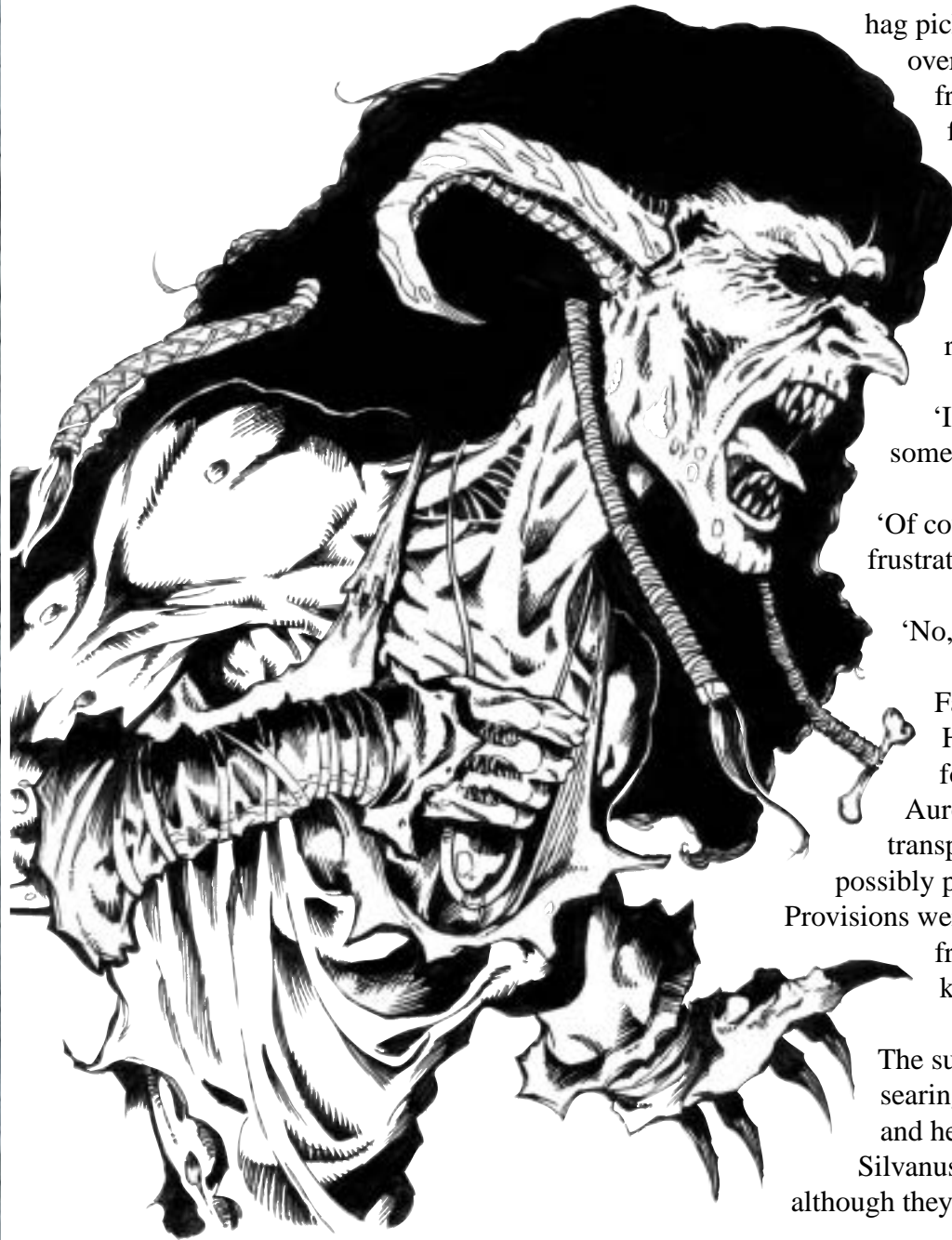
ice and he started to lose the feeling in his limbs. He saw the hag pick up the now cold iron cauldron and raise it high over his head. She let it go. As his skull cracked from the impact, Glycon could sense his life force fleeing his ruined body, headed towards the great, black abyss he had opened.

Chapter Fourteen

'Do you know where Keriwena the oracle can be found?' Silvanus asked Aurog. 'She is rumoured to reside in the desert.'

'I don't know myself,' answered Aurog. 'But some of our elders no doubt have the answer.'

'Of course they won't tell us now,' Falconius added in frustration.

'No, probably not,' said Aurog.

Falconius felt like he had risk all for nothing. He had involved his friend Silvanus in this fool's quest and now Silvanus's associate Aurog was also caught up. They had no means of transportation left except by foot and with the orcs possibly pursuing them that would not be fast enough. Provisions were low; he had no magic potions or other tricks from King Tyrnon's royal armoury left, and no knowledge of the oracle's whereabouts.

The sun beat down on Falconius like a ball of fire searing his body. His thoughts had become muddled and he felt he might be starting to hallucinate. Silvanus and Aurog appeared to be faring better, although they were residents of the desert and more

acclimated to the conditions. They walked in silence for what seemed an eternity. As they topped yet another great sand dune, Falconius spotted the remains of a stone building in the distance. Four intricately carved columns soared into the air in the middle of a large, flat expanse of said.

'Silvanus, what are those columns over there?' Falconius asked as he pointed to them.

Silvanus looked in the direction he was pointing and then let out a sigh. 'There's nothing there but sand.'

'No, I see them quite clearly from here. Aurog, you can see them can't you?'

The orc shook his head. 'Sorry, I can't see them either. You must be hallucinating. Mirages are common, especially for newcomers to the desert.'

Falconius looked again and still beheld the four columns; they seemed to beckon him to come closer. He turned and started for them. He could hear his companions calling for him, but they were unimportant now. He broke into a run for the objects; an unseen force urged him forward. As he approached the columns grew in height and magnificence. He could see diamonds, emeralds, pearls, and other precious gems embedded in the columns. The stones complemented ancient runes written in gold that ran the length of each pillar. He arrived in the centre of the four columns, his pulse pounding in anticipation of something, he knew not what. The sand beneath his feet gave way and he felt himself slip under the surface of the desert. Peace and harmony caressed his mind and allayed his fears as he was transported to another place.

Chapter Fifteen

The scent of sweet peas, roses, and clover brought Falconius back to consciousness. He slowly opened his eyes and beheld a vast cavern lit as bright as day. Tall grasses, flowers, and colourful mushrooms covered the area. A stream passed nearby and the sound of gurgling water brought a soothing touch to the surreal atmosphere. He found himself lying in a patch of tall, soft grasses that felt like a gentle feather bed. Falconius sat up but was somewhat dizzy. He was clearly inside but looked up to see light coming from the top of the cavern. He concluded it was magic and decided not to try to understand it.

'Hello there, Falconius,' said an unseen voice.

Falconius looked around but saw no one. 'Who's there?'

A shimmering light danced before his eyes. A female body and face started to materialise. A lady with a slim, graceful figure, blue eyes, and long blond hair stood before him. She had the appearance of timeless beauty and infinite wisdom. Falconius was reminded of fairy princesses that he had heard stories about as a child.

'I am Keriwena,' said the lady. 'You have been searching for me. I have watched your journey progress.'

Still mesmerised, Falconius said, 'How did I get here?'

'The four pillars in the desert are one of the gateways to my domain. I allow some to see them when they get close.'

Falconius rose to his feet. 'My companions?'

Keriwena smiled reassuringly. 'I have foreseen their futures. They will live to see you again one day.'

He reached into a pouch and produced the ring King Tyrnon had entrusted him with. 'King Tyrnon of Morgund asked me to give you this ring. He said you gave it to him many years ago. The king begs an answer to a final question. He trusts your skill and wisdom as an oracle above all else.' Falconius handed the ring to the oracle who looked it over slowly.

'This is the ring of Tyrnon. I remember it well. He has grown into a fine leader. His question has been anticipated.' Keriwena uttered a few words and an ivory scroll case appeared in her hand. 'The answer to the king's question is inside this case. It is magically protected so that only he can read it.' She handed it to Falconius along with the ring.

'Thank you great oracle. I shall deliver it with all haste.'

'You will be assisted in your return to Morgund. It is vital that you arrive before Prince Vadrex returns from his siege. Many corrupt and evil powers serve him and he will continue to try to stop you from reaching the king.'

Falconius let out a low laugh. 'Of that I have no doubt.'

Keriwena smiled at the spy. 'You are a good and loyal servant of the king. Continue to serve him well. I foresee a great future for you.'

'Thank you my lady. I shall try my best.'

Keriwena uttered a few words and moved her hands in a fanciful pattern. Falconius felt himself dematerialise and fade away.
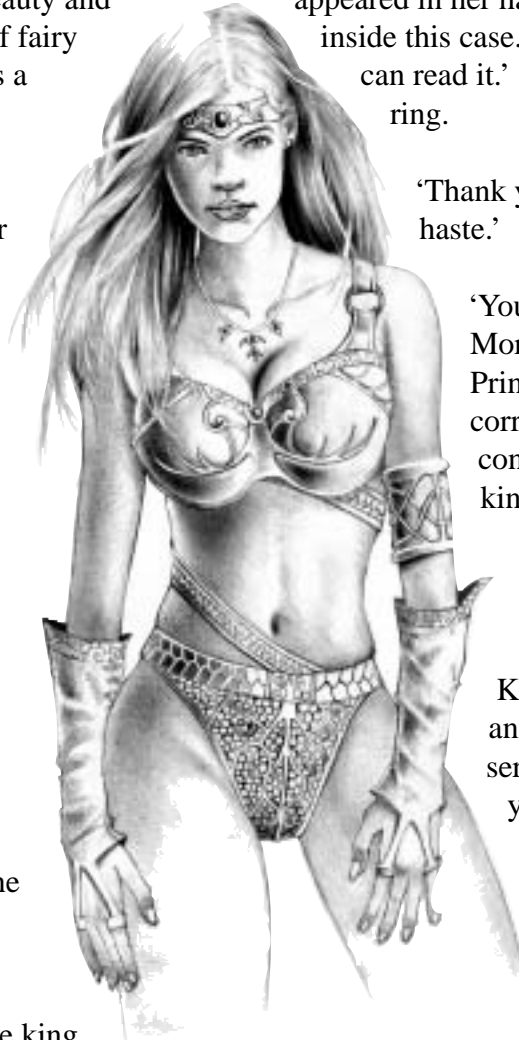
Chapter Sixteen

Falconius appeared in the throne room of King Tyrnon in an instant. He was dizzy and a little incoherent at first, but he quickly recognised the king's bodyguards rushing towards him with swords drawn.

'Wait!' stammered Falconius, raising his hands in the air. 'I have a message for the king.'

The guards hesitated for a second, then continued their advance. The king entered the room from an adjacent chamber.

'Hold fast,' said King Tyrnon. 'He speaks the truth.' The king took his seat on the throne and motioned Falconius forward. 'You may approach.' The spy slowly moved in front of the throne and bowed low with solemn formality.

'My king, the task you assigned me has been completed,' said Falconius. He produced the king's ring and the ivory case from the oracle. The king accepted the items and opened the case. He removed the parchment inside and glanced over it.

'Well, I did not expect that,' said the king in a surprised but not unhappy tone.

'What is it my king?' asked Falconius.

'The great oracle has not named a successor for me; she has named thousands of successors!'

A confused look came over Falconius's face. 'I don't understand. What do you mean?'

The king laughed and said, 'Keriwena says that the people should have the kingdom after I depart from the throne. Morgund is to become a republic.'

'What will you do?' asked Falconius in a neutral voice.

'Why I think it's a fine idea. It was her advice that got me where I am today. We shall become the Republic of Morgund while I am yet living.'

'I shall be happy to serve you and the republic in any way that I can.'

'You've served me well already and shall be rewarded Falconius,' said the king fondly. 'You will certainly help me again in the future.'

'I'll look forward to it,' Falconius replied, bowing again.

'Now if you'll come with me, I have some fabulous new wine we need to try from the Elvish State of Kendar,' the king said as he rose from his throne. They walked out of the throne room together as Falconius marvelled at the fortuitous turn of events. He was about to go from the shadows to the light and felt confident that the future held good things for him and the Kingdom of Morgund.
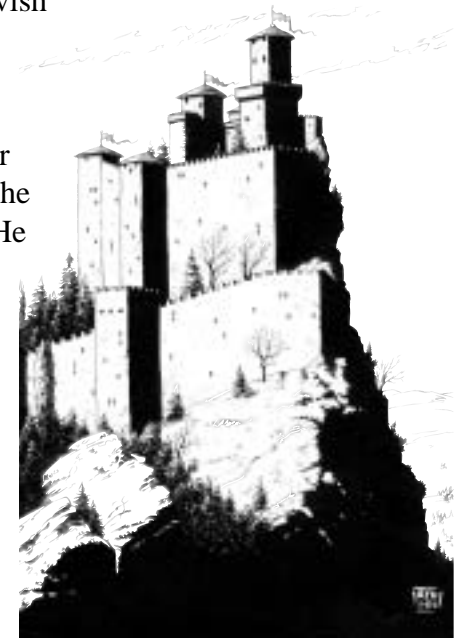
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