

Palladium Books® Presents:

THE RIFTER®

Your Guide to the Megaverse



April 2000 Issue

Rifts® Space & Magic

Rifts® City of Arzno™ Part 2

Rifts® Comic Strip **Breaux**

The Conclusion of Siege Against Tolkeen™

Heroes Unlimited™: Gestalt Heroes

Beyond the Supernatural™ Adventures

Palladium Fantasy RPG®: New O.C.C.s

Palladium News & Coming Attractions

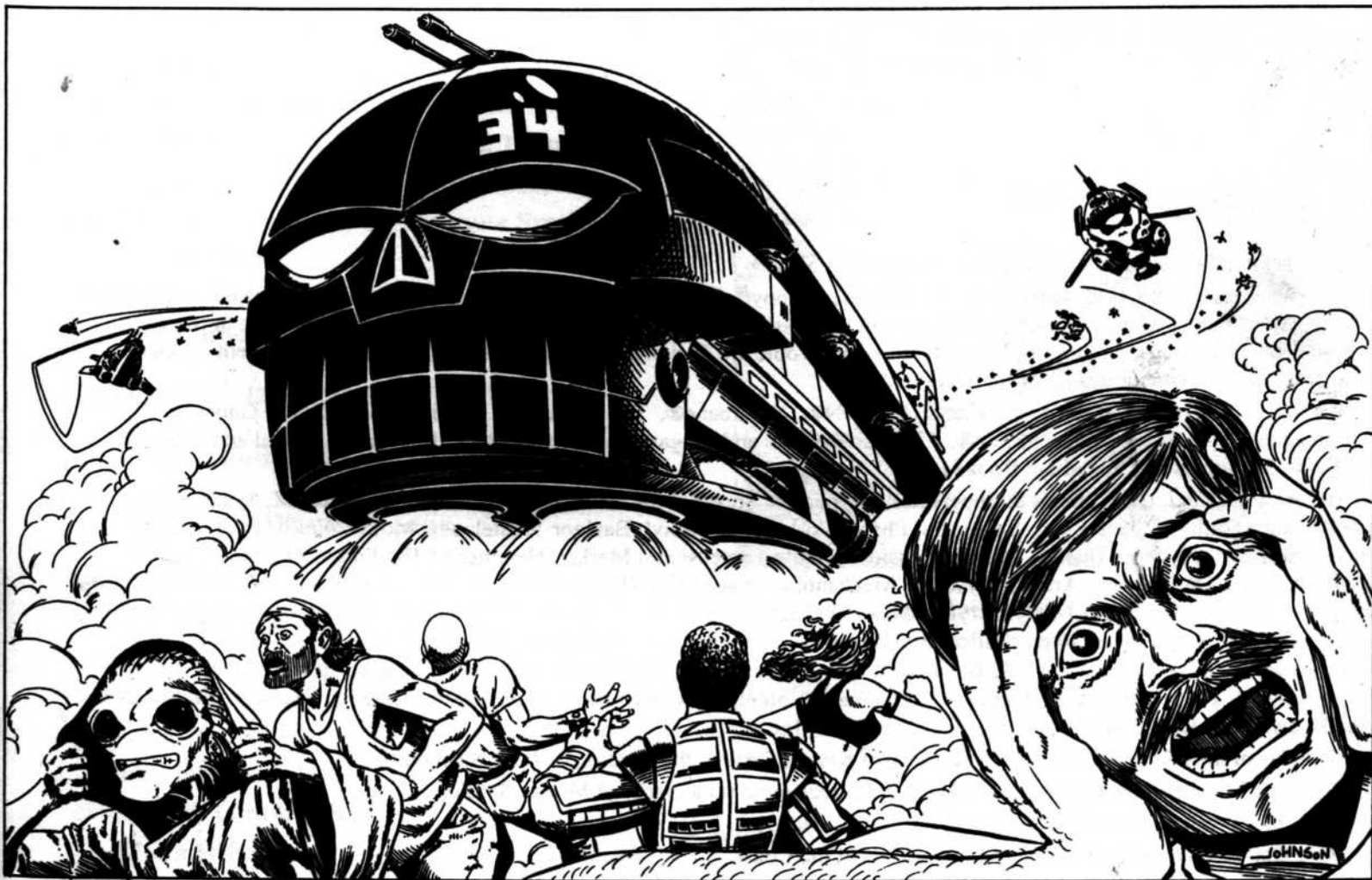
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Violence and the Supernatural

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

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

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



The Rifter® Number Ten
Your guide to the Palladium Megaverse®!

First Printing — April, 2000

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The Rifter™ #10 RPG sourcebook series is published by Palladium Books Inc., 12455 Universal Drive, Taylor, MI 48180. Printed in the USA.

Palladium Books® Presents:

THE RIFTER®

#10

BRANDT - 97

Sourcebook and guide to the Palladium Megaverse®

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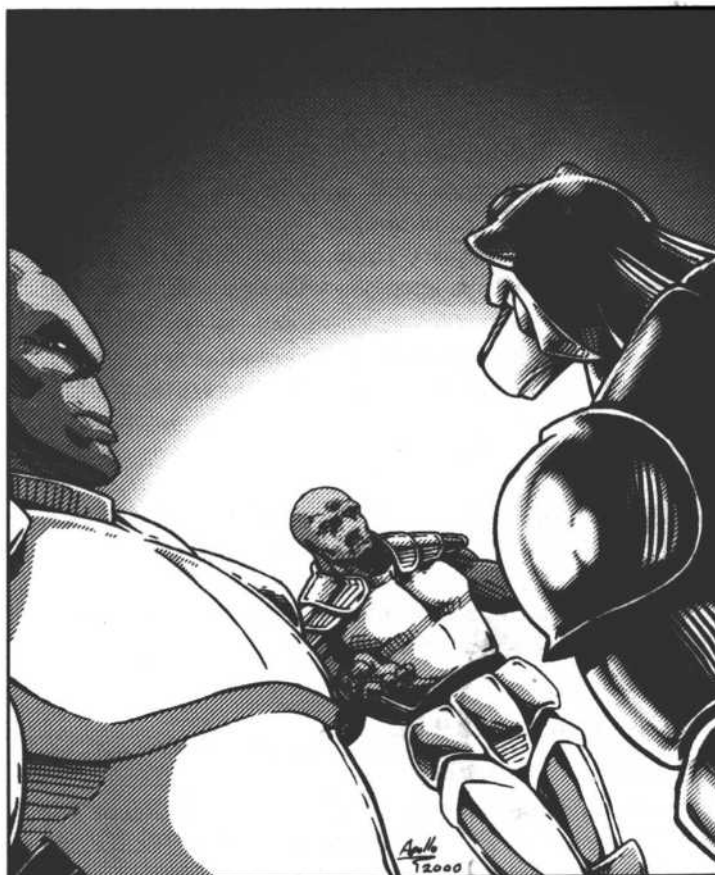
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Drunken Style Studio



Rifts® Comic Strip: **Ramon Perez**

Cover Logo Design: **Steve Edwards**

Credits Page Logo: **Niklas Brandt**

Keylining: **Kevin Siembieda**

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

Special Thanks to all of You, for making the Rifter® a success — **Wayne Smith**
Our apologies to anybody who got accidentally left out or their name misspelled.

Contents — The Rifter #10 — April, 2000 —

Page 6 — Art

Due to space limitations, this cool “page” of artwork by *Freddie Williams II* was shrunk down to a quarter of its size in *Century Station™*. We thought it would be nice to reprint it here in the size it was originally intended. It depicts the notorious villain, *Daddy Longlegs™*, and his Longlegger power armor suit.

Page 7 — From the Desk

of Kevin Siembieda

Publisher Kevin Siembieda, waxes on about why role-playing games should be fun, and some of the exciting project coming soon from Palladium Books.

Page 8 — Palladium News

This issue's news starts off with Kevin & Maryann Siembieda's *convention circuit up-date* — namely **Marcon** (in May) and **Gen Con** (in August). These are the only two conventions the Siembiedas will be attending later this year, come and visit if you can.

Ryan Beres joins the Palladium staff, but more importantly, get the details on Wayne Smith's reaction to **The Rifter 9 1/2**.

Page 10 Coming Attractions

Big plans for *Heroes Unlimited™* and *Palladium Fantasy*, with a number of exciting sourcebooks planned for both.

And for **Rifts®**, more on *Coalition Wars: Siege on Tolkeen™* (pretty much on schedule), a new *RiftsworkZ* portfolio of art by John Zeleznik, and other projects.

Page 15 — The Rifter 9 1/2,

April Fool's Day Special

If you are wondering what this special, limited edition of **The Rifter®** is, here are all the details. Limited to only 10,000 copies so get your copy while you still can. Available in fine game, hobby and comic stores everywhere, or directly from Palladium Books.

Page 17 — Knights of the Dinner Table™

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

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

Page 19 — The Palladium Fantasy RPG®

The Magic of Science

Greg Diaczyk offers his thoughts and ideas for technology in the **Palladium Fantasy RPG®** setting. To this end, he presents the Tinker O.C.C. explosives, machines and gadgets. **Note:** It's fun to see the direction other people take our games, and this is

one such example. Greg's completely *optional* ideas may work for him, but the Palladium World is so rich in magic, diverse cultures and the supernatural, that modern advancement in the way of science has been stymied. People rely on the old ways and use magic as their preferred “technology.” In the official setting, technology as we know it has been supplanted by magic and the supernatural.

Artwork is by Kent Burles.

Page 24 — More Palladium Fantasy RPG®

The Changeling Metamorph

Mark Hall presents the *optional* O.C.C. of the Changeling Metamorph, a sort of rare, super-changeling who can assume all types of transformations beyond the capabilities of a normal Changeling.

Artwork by Apollo Okamura.

Page 26 — Heroes Unlimited, 2nd Edition

The Gestalt Power Category

Jay Fitzloff has created an entirely new, *optional* Power Category for **Heroes Unlimited, 2nd Edition**. A rare and bizarre class of superbeing that is more than he or she may seem. *Much more.

Artwork by Drunken Style Studio (DSS).

Gestalt NPCs — Heroes & Villains start on page 35. Written by Wayne Smith. Illustrated by Freddie Williams II.

Page 40 — Beyond the Supernatural™ Adventure Trouble in the Midwest

Blake Trzpuć gives us a frightening adventure for **Beyond the Supernatural™**. Ideal for low to mid-level characters.

Art by Drunken Style Studio (DSS).

Page 46 — Beyond the Supernatural™ Adventure Dark Consequences

Russel Brin whips up another little adventure for **Beyond the Supernatural™**.

Art by Kent Burles.

Page 48 — Nightbane® RPG

On the Fringe of the Night

Offers *optional* fringe group O.C.C.s for the **Nightbane®** RPG setting. David Solon Phillips takes a look at how modern day *militia groups* might respond to the Nightlords and their minions.

Art by Drunken Style Studio (DSS).

Page 57 — Rifts® Lone Star Comic Strip

Holy Moses! Is this the end of ... oops, don't want to give away the story in this action packed installment of the Rifts® Comic Strip. The plot thickens and trouble mounts as our heroes come face to face with one of Doctor Desmond Bradford's genetic experiments.

Part Five of Seven chapters by *Ramon Perez* (Penciler, Inker, Letterer, and Writer). That's right, "seven" chapters instead of six! Ramon just couldn't keep the story to the six chapters we had originally planned, so we are going to extend the strip for an extra issue. Somehow, I don't think anybody is going to complain.

Page 65 — Rifts®

The Territory of Arzno (Part Two of Two)

Jason Richards and Nathan Taylor present the independent City of Arzno, Arizona. Built from scratch and defended by the *Arzno Mercenary Corps*, it has become something of an oasis of civilization in a dangerous wasteland. Part two presents TW Armor, gizmos and vehicles used by this southwestern community. Plus the optional Weapon Mage O.C.C. and a few Hook, Line & Sinker™ style adventures.

Artwork by Wayne Breaux Jr.

Page 79 — Rifts®

The Environment of Space

Ewen Cluney explores the pitfalls of playing in outer-space for Rifts® characters. Definitions, observations, and rules all topped by a over 40 spells designed for use in space and space travel! Ideal for use in *Phase World*™.

Artwork by Wayne Breaux Jr.

Page 93 — The final chapter of David Haendler's

Siege Against Tolkeen

After 10 issues, this epic tale comes to a satisfying end. We hope you enjoyed the story while it lasted.

Artwork by Apollo Okamura.

Page 107— Hammer of the Forge

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

The Cover

The cover to *The Rifter* #10 is a concept painting by *Wayne Breaux* depicting the character *Shock*, cutting looks with crackling energy. We thought it was kinda cool and fit with the superbeings presented in this issue.

Optional and Unofficial Rules & Source Material

Please note that most of the material presented in *The Rifter*® is "unofficial" or "optional" rules and source material. They are alternative ideas and things one can include in his

campaign or enjoy reading. They are not "official" to the main games or world settings. For example, the story, *Siege Against Tolkeen*, is likely to be very different from Kevin Siembieda's "official" World Books coming in 2000. As for optional tables and adventures, if they sound cool or fun, use them. If they sound funky, too high-powered or inappropriate for your game, modify them or ignore them completely.

All the material in *The Rifter*® has been included for two reasons: One, because we thought it was imaginative and fun, and two, we thought it would stimulate your imagination with fun stuff that you can use (if you want) or which might inspire you to create your own wonders.

The Rifter® is a registered trademark

We are proud to announce that *The Rifter*® is now a Registered Trademark owned by Palladium Books, hence the circled "R" instead of the TM. Yes, we realize that none of you guys and gals probably give a hoot, but we're pleased and wanted to make note of it.

We are looking for

contributors to *The Rifter*® #13

Somebody on-line came up with the idea of making #13 a "theme" issue, focusing on *the number 13, bad luck, superstition, and horror*. We love the idea and want people to think about submitting material that fits the bill! Submissions can be serious or humorous. Short to medium size are best — that means 5-16 computer pages of material, please. And don't just focus on horror, think about how this might be applicable for *Rifts*®, *Heroes Unlimited*™, and *Palladium Fantasy*, too. So put on those thinking caps and get writing. (Of course all submissions are created and submitted entirely on speculation. Possible publication is left to Palladium Books' sole discretion and payment is the usual pitiful rate of ten bucks per printed page of text.)

Deadline: November 1, 2000 (October is even better).

www.palladiumbooks.com — Palladium On-Line

Coming Next Issue ...

The Rifter™ #11

- G.M. advice on handling practitioners of magic.
- Adventure for *The Palladium Fantasy RPG*®.
- Material for *Heroes Unlimited*™.
- Insight on *Nightbane*®
- More *Knights of the Dinner Table*™.
- More of the *Ramon Perez Lone Star* comic strip.
- The next chapter of the *Hammer of the Forge*™.
- Material for *Rifts*®
- The latest news and developments at Palladium.
- Source material for the *Palladium Megaverse*®.
- New contributors and fun.

CENTURY STATION

LONGLEGER



From the Desk of Kevin Siembieda

Let's have some fun

Going to conventions and talking with gamers, I am often asked, "what is the secret of Palladium Books' continuing success." Of course there are many reasons that all go hand in hand. To consistently produce good games and supplements one must consider scores of things, from the obvious writing, art and packaging to advertising, marketing and a hundred little details. However, I think one of the big reasons is "*fun*."

That's right, fun. I think some game producers, writers and even some self-proclaimed "serious gamers," lose sight that these are *games*. Entertainment. As such, they are supposed to be "fun." They are supposed to excite and tantalize. Make the players laugh, get silly, jump out of their seats, ooh and ah, be heroic and have fun. A good role-playing game or supplement does all of that while bringing friends together and helping them to unleash their imaginations while creating a fabulous adventure story. Yep, there's nothing like role-playing, especially when you have a good Game Master orchestrating the event and a bunch of good natured friends to share the wonder.

Funny thing though, I see a lot of games, sourcebooks and even submissions to **The Rifter™** that seem to forget this. Books and manuscripts that are all too often dull, dry, poorly presented, and/or the same old, same old (i.e. a rehash of ideas — no interesting twists, nothing compelling). They lack what I call the "Wow-Factor."

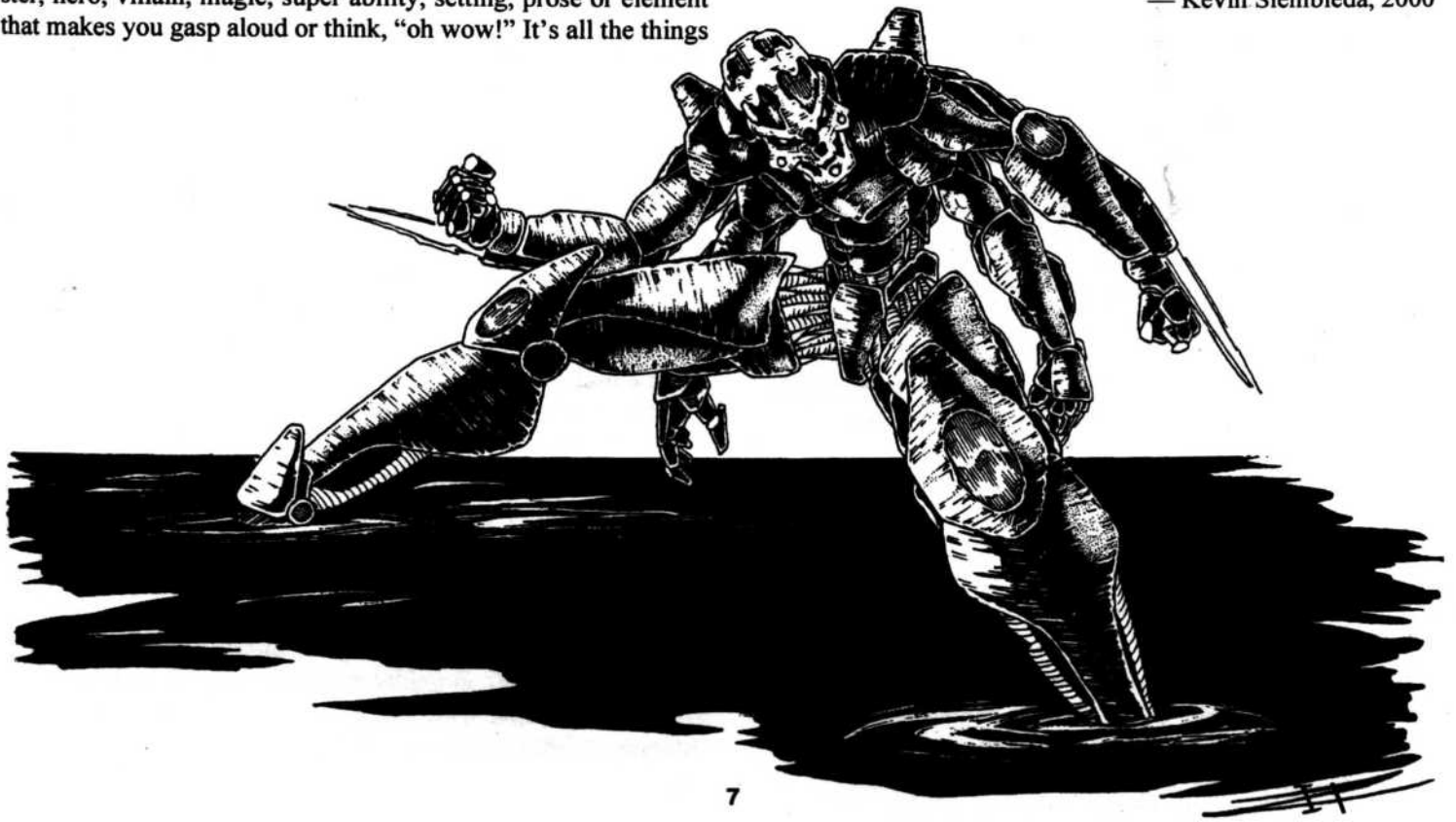
What's the Wow-Factor? Come on, you know. It is the monster, hero, villain, magic, super ability, setting, prose or element that makes you gasp aloud or think, "oh wow!" It's all the things

that get your adrenaline pumping and your imagination whirling — ideally helped along with strong writing, cool ideas and dynamic artwork.

I suspect some writers and publishers get so caught up in the hard work of writing and publishing (like I said, there's a lot to keep in mind), that they forget about the "fun" part and fail to present good ideas. And more importantly, ideas presented in such an exciting way as to illicit a well deserved "wow." I'd like to think Palladium is the master of "wow." The house of ideas. Truly an endless Megaverse® of adventure and wonderment.

If I'm blathering on, it is a bit of the proud game designer, writer and publisher coming out of me. You see, while all of Palladium's books always try to have Wow-Factor, I think we are really on a roll this year. I thought Bill Coffin's work on **Century Station™** was simply awesome (I wish all real comic books were this good), and nothing says "fun" like **The Rifter #9 1/2**, our surprise April Fool's Day Special — the silly side of the Palladium Megaverse™. It is jam packed with goofy, outrageous and fun ideas one doesn't normally see in games. On top of that, I know what's coming down the pipeline with **Rifts®**, **Free Quebec™**, **Coalition Wars™: Siege on Tolkeen** and upcoming sourcebooks and plans for **Heroes Unlimited™** and **Palladium Fantasy**, among other things. I think you guys and gals are gonna love what we have in store for you, and this is only the beginning.

— Kevin Siembieda, 2000



News



See you in Columbus, Ohio — May 26-28

Kevin & Maryann Siembieda will be Gaming Guests of Honor at Marcon, Memorial Day weekend — May 26-28!

We've attended this cool science-fiction and gaming convention in the past, so we can confirm that it is a fun event and well managed. It is located in Columbus, Ohio and held at the *Columbus Hyatt Regency, Ohio*. We hope to see many of you there.

For more information contact:

Marcon

P.O. Box 141414

Columbus, Ohio 43214

— or —

on-line: www.marcon.org

e-mail: info@marcon.org

(614) 470-5448 telephone information line.

In addition to numerous panel discussion, Maryann and I always try to make ourselves available throughout the day to meet and chat with fans. This one of only three conventions we expect to be attending this year, so come on down and join the fun. Tell 'em Palladium sent you.

More Comings and Goings

Jim is gone

After eight years at Palladium Books, editor and old college buddy, **Jim Osten** has left Palladium. Jim leaves with a splash with his first written short story appearing in **The Rifter 9 1/2, April Fool's Day Special**.

Before the rumor-mills start churning, Jim and I remain friends and all of us at Palladium Books wish him our very best. We are sure Jim's future is a bright one. And who knows, maybe you'll see more of Jim's contributions in the pages of **The Rifter™**? At this point, we do not have a replacement for Jim in mind. We are currently wading through our stack o' resumes and considering our options.

Ryan, new staff artist

Ryan Beres has been hired as Palladium's full-time "Staff Artist" and Warehouse Supervisor.

By the time you read this, Ryan should have made his big move from the Spokane, Washington area to Detroit, Michigan. Hey, we had no choice but to hire him, his artwork keeps improving at lightspeed, he has an endless amount of enthusiasm and ideas, and he's an all-around good guy. You can expect to see a lot more of Ryan's terrific artwork in the months to come. Oh, and you can meet him in person (along with *Ramon Perez* and *Scott Johnson*) at Gen Con®! Assuming we can get the size booth we need.

By the by, a few new faces may also be joining the ranks of Palladium Books over the next year. Our thanks to the scores of people who have submitted resumes for our consideration as we expand to become a (moderately) bigger and better RPG publisher.

Palladium will be at Gen Con® 2000 — Booth #307 —

That's right, Palladium Books *will* be at Gen Con® 2000.

We got word just in time to strip into this issue of **The Rifter®**. Palladium can be found at **Booth 307**, right near the front entrance of the hall and kitty-corner from the WoTC castle. Hook a left when you enter and we should be just a little way down the aisle.

We have big plans for our "Double" Anniversary celebration. It is **Palladium Books' 20th year** in business and **Rifts® 10th year** anniversary and we want to celebrate with you.

Free with every purchase over \$20:

A big, sturdy, commemorative canvas tote bag.

20th Anniversary poster by Ramon Perez and Joachim Gmoser.

Plus meet, talk with and get autographs from: Kevin and Maryann Siembieda, Ramon Perez, Scott Johnson, Ryan Beres,

Ben Lucas, Wayne Smith and other Palladium madmen.

What is Gen Con? It is a huge gaming convention where over 20,000 gamers will be coming to downtown *Milwaukee, Wisconsin* August 10-13, 2000 for a ton of fun. We hope to see a lot of Palladium Books gamers there.

Check our web site — www.palladiumbooks.com — for up to the minute convention information and other stuff.



Wayne Smith Dazed & Confused

— or — “No, no. I had no idea.”

Okay, here's the skinny. I (diabolical mastermind that I am) and the Palladium staff (sans Wayne Smith) hatched this scheme to do an entire **April Fool's Day** special issue of **The Rifter™** without the regular editor-in-chief, Wayne Smith, knowing anything about it. The special issue, **The Rifter™ 9 1/2**, would be filled with all kinds of wacky, fun and useful stuff for gamers, but the inside joke for us was keeping it all secret from Wayne. Yeah, to do an entire issue of **The Rifter™** from start to delivery without Wayne ever knowing it existed. He wouldn't know anything about it until **The Rifter™ 9 1/2** arrived at our warehouse! It would be our greatest, super-whammy April Fool's Day joke ever!

Putting the whole scheme together required split-second timing, an orchestrated effort, tight lips and precision teamwork. To pull it off, I had to turn to my staff and a collection of trusted freelancers.

Despite what you might think, getting the issue together was the easy part. Once submissions came in, I reviewed and tweaked them at home. I also wrote my portions of the book at home and we pasted-up the issue at the office over a weekend when Wayne was sleeping in and goofing off. Sending out manuscript pages to artists to illustrate, as well as, contracts and getting them all sent back to Palladium's offices was a little tricky, but Maryann, Steve and Alex all kept a vigilant eye out for them and scooped them up before Wayne could catch a glimpse.

The really tricky part was the last 3-4 weeks. First, we had to promote the Special Issue. This involved doing a “real” press release sent to all of Palladium's distributors and a “FAKE” press release for Wayne and the rest of the office staff without **The Rifter #9 1/2** description or the real date for **The Rifter #10** (Wayne expected it to be out early in April; not at the end of the month when it would really ship).

Second, Steve Sheiring had to solicit orders by fax and telephone without Wayne hearing anything or finding an order on the fax machine, or message on the answering machine. Steve was taking a lot of calls from “behind closed doors.”

Ultimately, it was *the Internet* that posed our greatest challenge. Information super-highway, indeed! You see, once the distributors got the information, they contacted the stores, and the stores started to post information and tell their customers about it. Some customers e-mailed Palladium for more information or posted something about how cool it “sounded” or to ask exactly when it would ship! After the first one appeared, Maryann, Bill Coffin, Scott Johnson, Ryan Beres and Shawn Merrow (and a few other co-conspirators) had to watch the Internet like hawks, deleting messages and sending back private responses. Things got really tense the week before the release.

We had a few close calls too. Poor Ryan Beres, during a visit to Palladium, accidentally left one page of computer print-out from the **Giga-Damage** article by Bill Coffin. Of course, Wayne saw it and asked, “So what's Giga-Damage?” I blew it off as nothing, and other events at the moment distracted Wayne, and he forgot about it.

I had Alex dump all the garbage cans after paste-up and personally toss the refuse directly into the dumpster out back (no evidence!), while I hid the original art. Somehow a Xerox copy of the credits page with **Wayne Smith's Rifter #9 1/2** boldly plastered on the top of the page got left out! I don't even know how it got there (appearing two weeks after the book went to the printer's). Fortunately, I happened to find it before Wayne did. Whew.

We all thought the jig was up when an e-mail snuck through to Wayne. One morning I heard Maryann shriek and she summoned me into her office. “Oh my god,” she gasped, “look!” On her computer screen was the question, “So what's this **Rifter #9 1/2** all about? Is this a rumor or is it really coming out in April?” Or something to that effect. The terrible part was **WAYNE** had seen it and answered the guy!!!! We were so close to pulling our prank off and now it was ruined with only a week to go. Our hearts sank. Then we read Wayne's response:

“**Rifter #9 1/2?** Where did you ever hear a thing like that? No way. Number ten will be out in April. There is no #9 1/2.”

Talk about dodging the bullet. We had been so clever and so good at covering our tracks that Wayne honestly had no idea it was real! The question was, could we make it another seven days?

To make a long story short, we did.

The Friday morning **The Rifter #9 1/2 April Fool's Day Spectacular** arrived at the Palladium warehouse, Maryann had taken Wayne to breakfast. When they returned I called Wayne into my office to discuss a “problem.” Maryann and Steve stood stoically behind me (cameras hidden in their hands). I stood up, tossed a copy of the book onto my desk, and sternly said, “Can you explain this, Wayne?”

The shocked look on his face was priceless! He was speechless for the first five minutes, managing only to say, “What?” and “What the ...” while laughing. Wayne later said that he was momentarily horrified because (ironically thanks to the e-mail he had answered) he thought somebody had ripped us off and done a boot-leg edition of **The Rifter** with his name emblazoned on the top of it, no less!!

The minute cameras started clicking, he knew something was up and laughed about it for the next hour as I recounted our exodus into silliness and he read snippets from the book. We

laughed about it all day long. It was awesome. Wish you could have been there. We should have video-taped it!

Wayne's funniest comment was, "Kev, you're lucky I have a strong heart."

We hope all of you enjoy reading *The April Fool's Day Spectacular of The Rifter™* as we did creating it.

Coming Attractions

Big Plans for *Heroes Unlimited™* & *The Palladium Fantasy RPG®*

It may seem like a lot of *Rifts®* material is coming out right now (and it is), but fans of *Heroes Unlimited™* and *The Palladium Fantasy Role-Playing Game®* can look forward to several new releases for both of these lines.

Heroes Unlimited™ Sourcebooks Century Station™

Century Station™: If you love comic book heroes and villains you have to take a look at this adventure sourcebook. Bill Coffin delivers a tour de force with *Century Station™* in what is his most inspired and pulse-pounding book yet.

Superhuman heroes, mutants and villains with striking personalities, memorable origins and cool ideas. All of whom fit snugly into the tumultuous environment of *Century Station™*.

And what an environment for adventure it is! A vast, sprawling city besieged by secret alien plots, mutant rebels, supervillains, organized crime, political corruption and maneuvering, government intervention (and experimentation) and stark contrasts. Yet at the same time it is a city of hope and high ideals. The home to some of the greatest heroes on the planet and a bastion of super-science and bold heroics. In short, *Century Station* is a place of adventure the likes of which role-playing has never seen before. Don't take our word for it, check out a copy for yourself.

Like we said, if you love comic book heroes, you will love *Century Station™*.

- The sprawling megalopolis that is *Century Station*, mapped and described.
- 40 heroes plus lawmen and other forces.
- 51 villains and their insidious plots.
- Criminal Masterminds and Syndicates.
- The Sector™ and alien hate-groups.
- 101 adventure settings and ideas.
- Powerful artwork and more.
- Written by Bill Coffin.
- \$20.95 — 224 pages!
- Available Now!



HU2 *Century Station™* *Gramercy Island™*

Bill Coffin explores the inner sanctum of *Century Station's* notorious *Gramercy Penitentiary™* with special attention to the *Superbeing Containment Wing!* Here some of the most dangerous and insane supervillains are locked away to keep the world safe. See who they are and the schemes they are hatching from behind bars — prison breaks, gang activity, and corruption of officials among them. Or to quote one criminal mastermind behind bars, "Just because you're imprisoned doesn't mean your life on the outside comes to an end. Well, not if you're me."

Additional information includes the special (sometimes experimental and questionably inhumane) devices and measures for containing superbeings, the layout of the Penitentiary, prison security, potential weaknesses, riot control, prison gangs, prison society, manhunts and treachery. Not to mention more about *Century Station* and its heroes, villains, and adventures. And more great ideas and artwork.

Note: Final size and release date not yet determined. Probably Fall, 2000. Written by Bill Coffin.

Heroes Unlimited™, 2nd Ed. “Hardcover” Limited Edition.

Everybody loves these limited edition collector's items, and one of the most requested is **Heroes Unlimited™** — so as usual, the voices of our fans are heard and Palladium responds.

HU2 Hardcover will see the usual 600 signed and numbered copies of this big RPG.

- A classy blue leatherette (imitation leather) cover.
- Interior pages are sewn and will not fall out.
- Double page artwork by *Ramon Perez* for end sheets.
- Signed and numbered by Kevin Siembieda and Ramon Perez.
- \$40.00 retail plus \$5.00 for postage and handling.
- Cat. No. 5500
- August release! And that's a promise.

HU2: Mutant Underground™

Who speaks for the intelligent animals, genetic creations of science, freaks and frightened superbeings branded as “mutants?”

Where does the creation of an experiment gone wrong go when it escapes its creator?

How do they live?

What forces shape them into heroes or monsters?

When will the governments (and people at large) accept these “super freaks” and “experiments” as viable living beings and not property?

Mutant Underground addresses these and many other questions, and much, much more. This **Heroes Unlimited™** adventure sourcebook will present superpowered mutants, animal mutants, weird side effects to super abilities, the secret organization known as the *Mutant Underground*, adventure ideas and more.

Note: Final size and release date not yet determined. Probably Summer or Fall, 2000. Written by Kevin Siembieda.

Things in the works

- **Ninjas & Superspies™ sourcebooks!** Believe it or not, two sourcebooks for **Ninjas & Superspies™** are in the final stages of completion. We don't want to hype this too much until we get them in our hot little hands and put them on the definite schedule. (There have been too many disappointments in the past and we don't want to see that happen again. But boy, oh boy are we excited!)

Ninjas & Superspies™ books have always been compatible with **Heroes Unlimited™** — or suitable as a stand-alone realm of Oriental mysticism, martial arts and superspy adventure.

Note: Probably a Summer and Fall release. Final size and release dates not yet determined.

- **HU2: The Nursery™.** I'm dying to finally dive into this long awaited **Heroes Unlimited™** sourcebook. Some art-



work has already been done for it and years of notes are waiting for me. End of the year?

- **HU2: Hardware Unlimited™** — gizmos, weapons, vehicles and more rules and ideas on how to make them, and the fun of the Hardware character.
- **After the Bomb® Role-Playing Game!** Yes, **After the Bomb®** as a complete, stand-alone role-playing game, with new world information and adventure ideas. And with a little luck, some new adventure modules too. No release date yet determined; probably a 112 page RPG book and probably a 2001 release.



Palladium Fantasy Sourcebooks

The Eastern Territory™

Coming this Summer (June or July) is the adventure sourcebook **Eastern Territory**. Writer Steve Edwards, with Kevin Siembieda, outlines this “pioneer” territory and the flood of settlers, carpetbaggers, con-artists, bandits and mercenaries who see the Territory as a “Land of Opportunity.” New towns and villages are appearing overnight and several communities are erupting into major ports, cities and kingdoms. All events

that are both exciting and have dangerous ramifications. The Western Empire is looking at this explosive growth as competition and opportunity. Timiro and Bizantium see it as an opportunity for new trade and the Wolfen Empire sees it all as a mass invasion that steals their southern lands and threatens their very existence.

As if that weren't enough, there are new and dangerous creatures and monsters, ancient secrets, bandits, trouble and adventure galore.

Art by Scott Johnson, Kent Burles and others.

Matthew Stawicki cover (tentative).

\$20.95 — 224 pages

Summer release. We are shooting for June, but it may slip into July.

Library at Bletherad™

Bill Coffin explores the secrets and wonders at the legendary Library at Bletherad. An island treasure nestled in the troubled seas of the Eastern Territory and Wolfen Empire. A place said to hold clues to ancient and forgotten knowledge, places of magic, treasure troves and forbidden secrets — provided one knows where to look. Art by Kent Burles, Scott Johnson, and others.

\$20.95 — 224 pages

Summer release. We are shooting for August.

The Land of the Damned™

Coming this Fall. The first of several books to explore the Land of the Damned and areas around it. Written by Bill Coffin.

'Nuff said, for now.

Will we ever see Wolfen Wars or Old Kingdom?

We hope so. Both projects are still things Kevin Siembieda wants to do. Finding the time between writing other books, managing the company and working on important business opportunities plays havoc with his time. So these book probably won't see release this year.

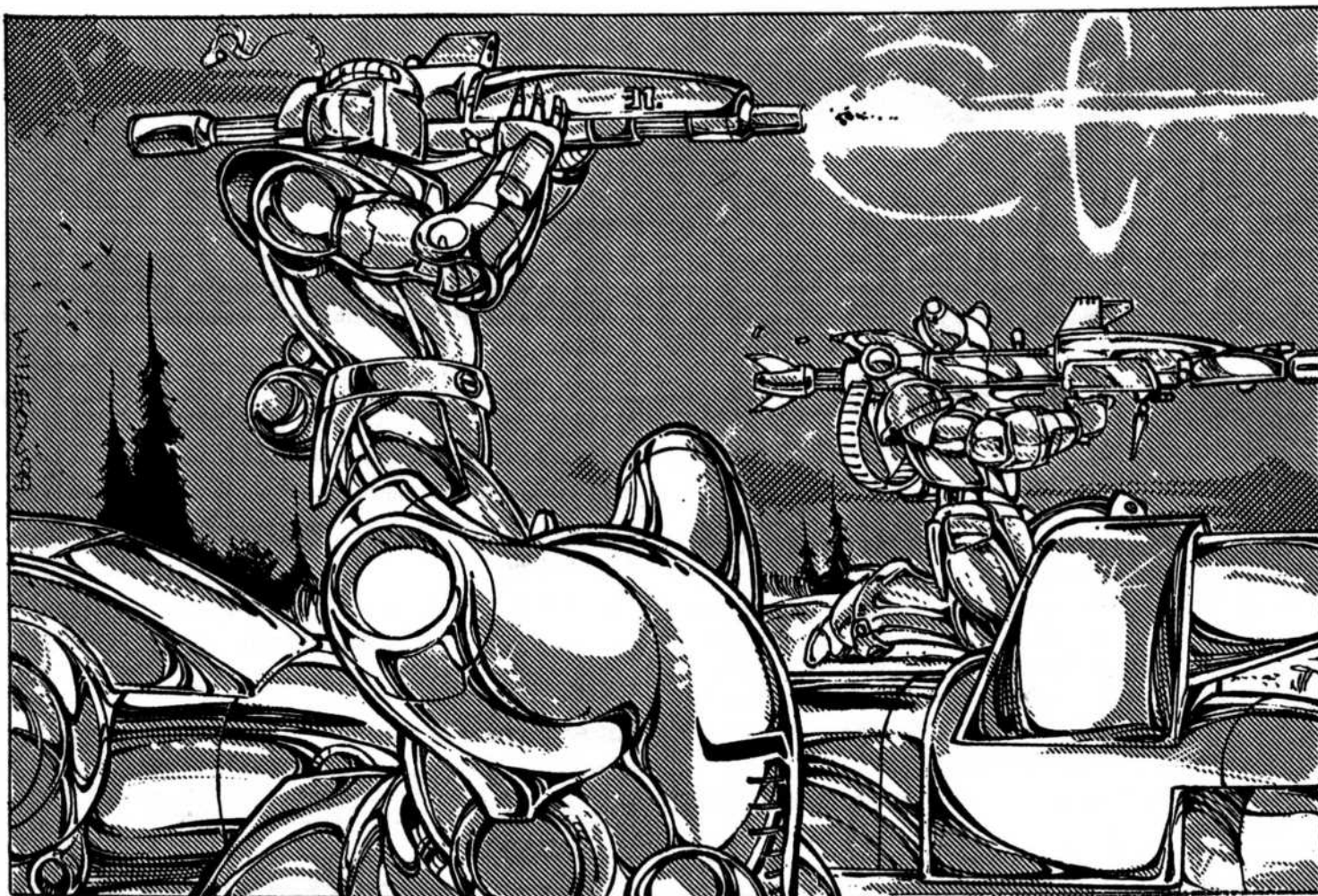
Rifts® Free Quebec™ at the Printer's

Free Quebec is finally at the printer's. Let us all rejoice! Yeesh, this terrific world book was delayed and delayed for one reason or another. I apologize to all of you who have waited so long, but believe you me, if I could have gotten it out sooner I

would have. I don't think too many people will be disappointed, 'cuz this one has it all.

Should ship from Palladium the end of April — and should be in stores the first or second week in May.

- Background on the nation and city of Free Quebec.
- Old Bones, full of intrigue and treachery.
- Emphasis on the Quebec Military.
- New Glitter Boys, V-SAM and other power armor.



- Combat vehicles and weapons exclusive to Free Quebec.
- Cyborgs unique to Free Quebec.
- Coalition and Free Quebec war plans.
- Hints and information about the Siege on Tolkeen.
- War! Effectively Coalition vs Coalition as the CS faces off against Free Quebec.
- Artwork by Perez, Wilson, Breaux, Johnson, Beres and others.
- Over 200 pages, written by Kevin Siembieda and Francois DesRochers.
- \$20.95 retail. Don't miss it!



Coalition Wars: Siege on Tolkeen™

The first of six pulse-pounding sourcebooks ranging from 96 to 200+ pages ships the end of May.

Each tells a different part of the story of the **Siege on Tolkeen**.

Each describes some new place, conflict and/or event — complete with avenues of adventure.

Each progresses the story and the war, bringing the reader one step closer to the *final conflict*.

New villains, heroes, magic and monsters are introduced as the face of North America is forever changed, and an entirely new set of problems and subplots are set into motion.

A few fans have asked if we aren't stretching this story out too long. No way! Just wait until you see what Bill and I are cooking up for you. We honestly believe there has never been anything like it. A truly epic war saga with surprising twists and turns, all culminating in an earth-shattering conclusion.

- Written by Kevin Siembieda and Bill Coffin.
- Art by Ramon Perez, Mike Wilson, Wayne Breaux, Beres and others.

The first book will set the stage with data on Tolkeen's defenses, weapons, magic, and notable leaders, as well as the Co-

alition's Troops and war plans. This book will launch the all-out, winner-take-all war.

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

The final book is the big, grand finale in December, 2000!

Siege on Tolkeen™

Chapter One: Sedition

The stage is set, with key villains, heroes and antagonists set into place.

- Regional overview and key Tolkeen defenses.
- Notable outlying towns and communities and their significance in the escalating war.
- CS strategies and plots.
- CS traps, Tolkeen traps, and treachery in general.
- Adventure ideas, surprises and much more.
- Written by Kevin Siembieda and Bill Coffin.
- 160 pages.
- \$16.95 retail and should hit store shelves end of May or mid-June. We may delay this book a few weeks till June so it is not clustered together with the release of **Free Quebec™**.

RiftsworkZ Two™

The art of John Zeleznik

Another gorgeous art portfolio of John Zeleznik's **Rifts®** covers, plus a little seen **Skrappers** concept painting of a **Blhaze Alien** (a black and white version appears on page 56 of *Skrappers*).

- Six large prints suitable for framing. **Rifts® Sonic Boom**, **Warlords of Russia™**, **Mystic Russia™**, **Rifts® Australia**, **Rifts Canada™**, and **Blhaze™ Alien** (Skrappers concept painting).
- Each print is a large 11x14 inches.
- Comes with a signed certificate of authenticity.
- Signed and numbered by John Zeleznik.
- Comes in a classy, plastic envelope.
- Limited to 2000 portfolios. Collector's item!
- \$29.95 retail.
- Available in July.

Also Coming for Rifts®

Rifts® Australia Two

Rifts® Australia Three

Rifts® Antarctica

Rifts® Anvil Galaxy™ (Phase World® sourcebook)

The Rifter® Sourcebook Series continues on ...

THE RIFTER #9 1/2

April Fool's Day Special



What?! You haven't even heard of it?! That's because it has been a top secret project that just shipped to the stores (should be on shelves in time for April Fool's Day).

If you don't get this hilarious "one-shot" special you are missing out on a real treat.

The **Rifter #9 1/2 Special** is filled with fun and funny source-material for *Rifts*®, *Heroes Unlimited*™, and *The Palladium Fantasy Role-Playing Game*®. The whole thing is a hoot to read, and most of it is actually useful stuff for gaming.

Highlights include:

- **Giga-Damage** by Bill Coffin. The next BIG thing in gaming.
- **Defective Super Abilities** by Steve Sheiring and Kevin Siembieda. Not all super abilities work quite the way one might want them too. Why do dogs howl when your sonic hero runs through the neighborhood or light bulbs pop when your character touches a lamp (a hair-raising experience)? Find out.
- **The Food Manipulation Super Ability** by Steve Sheiring and Kevin Siembieda. Never underestimate the power of beans, bananas, fruit pies or Twinkies! Read this and you'll know why.
- **Unlikely Gods** like Geshbourn the God of Lost Causes and the Goddess of Cooking by Julius Rosenstein & Siembieda. For *Rifts*® and *Palladium Fantasy*.
- **Where's Wayne HU2 Adventure** — Wayne Smith has been kidnapped by the dangerous and unstable supervillain group known as the *Motown Maniacs*. Unless Wayne can be found and rescued, **The Rifter**® will be late for the first time ever! Only you can help!!
- **Wacky Superhumans** like Squish™, Rocket Dog™, Frank & Beanz™, Razorfish™, Vaudevillain™, and a dozen others! *Heroes Unlimited, 2nd Edition* villains and heroes by a bunch of us.
- **"The" Tourist O.C.C.** — something of a superbeing in their own right, this is a dimensional traveler to be feared! Travelers with strange powers and magical objects like Bermuda Shorts, Hawaiian Shirts, Cameras, Luggage and more! Written by Rodney Stott. Suitable for use in any Palladium role-playing game. Three *Rifts* adventures are suggested.



- **Trickster & Ludicrous Mage O.C.C.s.** A pair of uncommon practitioners of magic for use in *Rifts*®, *The Palladium Fantasy RPG*™, or *Heroes Unlimited*™. Dozens of spells like Card Daggers, Stairway to Heaven, 52 Card Pick-Up, Bubblegum Flight, Cloud of Laughter, Fart Blossom, Water Balloons, and more. By Daniel Denis and Kevin Siembieda.
- **Crazy Accoloth's Discount Alchemy Summer Catalog.** Chain Mail Bikinis, Thumblers, and more by Alli Coffin.
- **Crazy news and coming attractions.**
- **Questions and Answers** to some of the silliest things you can imagine.
- **A Dog Boy Story** by Jim Osten, and silliness of all kinds!
- **Great Art** by Wilson, Perez, Beres, Johnson and others!
- **Collector's Item.** This April Fool's Day spectacular is a "one-shot" that will NOT be reprinted. Only 10,000 copies have been printed (issue number one of **The Rifter**™ has sold over 20,000) and that will be it. We all want **The Rifter #9 1/2** to become legendary, so it is limited to this one and only printing.
- **Available for the unbelievable, heart-stopping price of \$7.95** — available in stores everywhere or directly from Palladium Books for \$7.95 plus a \$1.50 for shipping and handling.

The Magic of Palladium Books®

A Palladium Time Capsule

Back in 1988-1991, Palladium published a 16 page, newsprint tabloid that featured news, coming attractions, a letters page, and special sourcebook features. It was no **Rifter™**, but it was kinda cool.

Well for years now, long-time fans have been begging Palladium Books to reprint, or better yet, collect and reprint the old issues of "MOP" (as we called it). For our 1999 X-Mas Surprise Package we did just that. Over a thousand went out to our X-Mas participants, but we printed a few hundred extras to sell at Game Conventions and to fans who missed the 1999 X-Mas Surprise.

There are roughly 800 copies left for sale. They will be sold on a first-come, first-served basis. No we have no plans to reprint this collection once it goes out of print, so this may be your last chance. Not available in stores (not enough left to sell in bulk quantities, sorry).

- Gaming source-material includes extra stuff for **Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles & Other Strangeness RPG®**, **Beyond the Supernatural™**, **Robotech®** (including a **Lancer's Rockers®** addendum), plus articles, fun and 1999 Rumor Killers.
- Letters Page with questions and answers.
- See what was going on back in 1988-1991 from the viewpoint of us, while they were happening.
- Enjoy old advertisements, news and commentaries.
- A must for all you "completists" out there.
- 128 pages. • \$12.95,

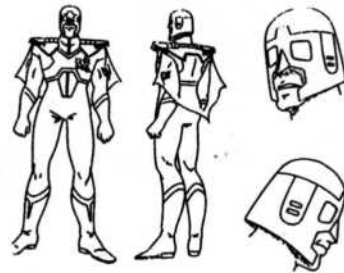


The Magic of Palladium Books®

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An unabashed house organ.



This issue: ROBOTECH™ II: The Sentinel, Mutant Down Under, Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, Freddy Krueger (for Beyond the Supernatural) and more!



The Magic of Palladium Books®

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June #6
June 1990

This issue: **RIFTS®** Preview • **Lancer's Rockers** Addendum • **Beyond the Supernatural™** Support • **Summer Previews**



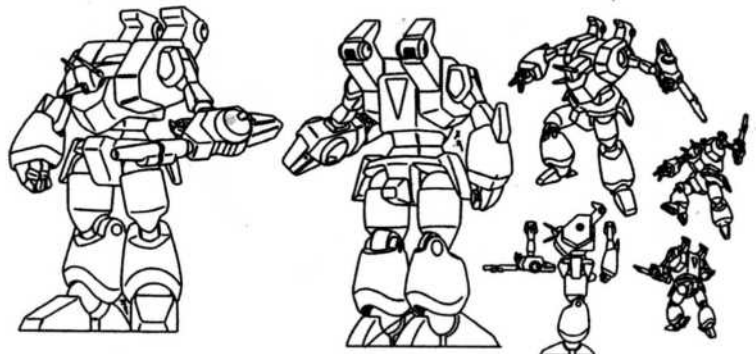
The Magic of Palladium Books®

Special double size issue!
MOP Numbers 7 & 8!!

Free



Special! The Year Anniversary issue containing news, the letters, questions and answers, and the always fun, **REVISED Maps & Diagrams**.



Knights of the Dinner Table™

BY JOLLY R. BLACKBURN
STORY SUGGESTED BY JOE JANKOWSKI

I THOUGHT WE'D TAKE A BREAK FROM OUR REGULAR CAMPAIGN AND TRY OUT THIS NEW BOARD GAME BASED ON THE "SHATTERED-EARTH" RPG I PICKED UP FROM WEIRD PETE LAST WEEK. HE CLAIMS IT'S A PRETTY GOOD GAME.

YOU MEAN THE WARGAME, SCORCHED EARTH?

YES! THAT'S THE ONE!

OKAY WITH ME! I HEARD THAT GAME ROCKS!

I'M REALLY NOT FOND OF WARGAMES.

NOT JUST A WARGAME, SARA!

IN ORDER TO WIN THIS GAME A PLAYER MUST MASTER THE SKILLS OF DIPLOMACY, AND POLITICAL MANEUVERING AS WELL AS THE ART OF WAR.

SADLY THESE TYPES OF GAMES ARE NO CHALLENGE FOR ME.

I FEEL LIKE ALEXANDER THE GREAT WHEN HE LAMENTED THAT THERE WERE NO MORE WORLDS TO CONQUER. YOU KNOW, I'M SURPRISED YOU GUYS ARE UP FOR A WARGAME. I WOULD IMAGINE IT'S GETTING A LITTLE OLD LOSING TO ME ALL THE TIME.

THAT'S IT! FILL YER HAND YOU BOASTFUL BASTARD! I'M GOING TO TEACH YOU A HEALTHY DOUBLE DOSE OF HUMILITY!

SURE THING CUE-BALL! BUT IT'LL HAVE TO WAIT FOR A MOMENT. NATURE CALLS!!! I'LL BE RIGHT BACK.

SECONDS LATER...

LOOK GUYS, LET'S MAKE THIS QUICK WHILE BRIAN IS IN THE RESTROOM! LET'S ALL AGREE TO FORM AN IRON ALLIANCE! WE GANG UP ON BRIAN AND TAKE HIM DOWN! I'VE HAD IT UP TO HERE WITH HIS BRAGGING ABOUT NEVER LOSING. WHAT DO YOU SAY?

SWEET! I WAS JUST THINKING THE SAME THING. LET'S DO IT!

HERE, HERE! THE MAN GOES DOWN!

YOU CAN COUNT ME IN. LET'S TAKE HIM DOWN A FEW NOTCHES.

A WEE BIT LATER...

HA HA!!! WHAT'S WRONG BRIAN? FEELING THE SQUEEZE ARE YA?

NOT SO MOUTHY WITH MY MARK XII NUKES HOUNDING YOUR ASS - ARE YOU?

HOW'S IT FEEL TO BE THE CENTER OF A FOUR FRONT WAR?

IT'S JUST A GAME, BRIAN.

A FEW MINUTES LATER...

BOB! DAVE! PER THE RULES I'M CALLING FOR SECRET NEGOTIATIONS! LET'S TAKE IT OUT ON THE FRONT PORCH. I GOT A PROPOSITION TO THROW AT YOU.

SURE. WE CAN DISCUSS YOUR FUNERAL ARRANGEMENTS.

YOUR WASTING YOUR TIME, THOUGH. WE FORMED AN IRON ALLIANCE AGAINST YOU.

WE'LL SEE ABOUT THAT.

I HATE TO SAY THIS BUT..... DO YOU THINK WE CAN TRUST BOB AND DAVE? WHAT IF THEY JUMP SHIP AND JOIN FORCES WITH BRIAN?

HA! ARE YOU KIDDING? THEY WANT THIS VICTORY AS BAD AS WE DO. THEY'RE JUST AS FED UP WITH BRIAN'S BRAGGING AS WE ARE.

YEAH, I GUESS YOU'RE RIGHT.

LATER THAT NIGHT...

OKAY BOB...DAVE. IF EVER THERE WAS A GOOD TIME TO SEND IN YOUR TROOPS AGAINST BRIAN'S EXPOSED FLANK THIS IS THE TIME. HE DECIMATED ME LAST TURN. I CAN'T HOLD OUT MUCH LONGER.

SORRY, B.A. I ORDER MY TROOPS TO PULL BACK COMPLETELY.

PULL BACK??

ME TOO!

I KNEW IT!! HE GOT TO YOU DIDN'T HE? YOU TURNED ON THE ALLIANCE!!

SORRY, NOTHING PERSONAL BUT I AM ANNOUNCING MY SUPPORT OF OVERLORD BRIAN'S PUSH FOR WORLD DOMINATION!

THE TRUTH IS I'M REPOSITIONING MY TROOPS TO ATTACK YOU NEXT TURN.

BUT FIRST YOU'LL HAVE TO ENDURE MY NUKES, B.A.

MY, MY, YOU BROKE B.A.'S "IRON CLAD ALLIANCE" MIND TELLING ME YOUR SECRET?

SECRET? NO SECRET. I JUST HAVE A WINNING HAND! BOB AND DAVE SAW THE WRITING ON THE WALL.

A FEW TURNS LATER...

SORRY GUYS! YOUR USEFULNESS HAS COME TO AN END. I ORDER MY ELITE GUARD TO SEIZE THE TACTICAL NUKE CARRIERS DAVE LOANED ME AND TURN THEM AGAINST HIM. THEN I SEND IN MY YUCATAN RANGERS TO MOP UP BOB'S REMAINING UNITS. THAT SHOULD TAKE HIM OUT OF THE GAME AND I COLLECT HIS CARDS AND OTHER ASSETS!

FINE! THANKS FOR PUTTING ME OUT OF MY MISERY!

WELL, THAT LOOKS LIKE THE GAME.

INDEED IT DOES.

GOOD GAME, GUYS! MAYBE WE CAN PLAY AGAIN SOMETIME.

ANY HOO, I GOTTA RUN. MY ONLINE GAME OF BATTLE JERKS STARTS IN THIRTY MINUTES.

SECONDS LATER...

I JUST HAVE ONE QUESTION FOR YOU GUYS!!

WHAT THE HELL WERE YOU THINKING? I THOUGHT WE ALL AGREED TO GANG UP ON BRIAN AND TAKE HIM OUT OF THE GAME?

YEAH, I'D LIKE TO KNOW WHAT HAPPENED MYSELF.

IT WASN'T OUR FAULT, SARA. REALLY!

YEAH, BRIAN USED THE OLD "BIG STICK" POLICY ON US.

BIG STICK?

THAT'S JUST GREAT! YOU LET HIM BLUFF YOU WITH RETALIATION? YOU SAW HIS CARDS!! THE MAN HAD NOTHING!!

NO, YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND! HE THREATENED TO LITERALLY USE A BIG STICK ON US IF WE DIDN'T PULL BACK OUR TROOPS!

YEAH, HE SAID IF I DIDN'T DO AS HE SAID HE'D FORCE FEED ME A FIST FULL OF FOUR-SIDERS!

NO WAY! REALLY? BRIAN THREATENED YOU?

AND YOU COULDN'T TAKE A FEW BRUISES FOR THE TEAM?

I GUESS THE BIG GUY HAD A "WINNING HAND" AFTER ALL. IT JUST HAPPENED TO BE CURLED INTO A FIST!

The Magic of Science in Palladium Fantasy



An Optional O.C.C. and Form of “Magic”

By Greg Diaczyk

Editor’s Note: One of the striking things one might notice about the **Palladium Fantasy** setting is that the world has a long recorded history, tens of thousands of years. Yet over that time, there seems to have been very little advancement in technology. This article is Greg’s take on science and technology in his own **Palladium Fantasy** campaign, and that’s fine. But in the “official” setting, it is unlikely that technology will advance much at all in the foreseeable future. The reasons for this are unclear. Society’s reliance on magic in all its forms no doubt is part of it, but it may even be that mystical forces are at work, keeping the people of the **Palladium World** from making advancements in science and technology.

The Tinkerer

One of the few magic arts to survive from the Time of a Thousand Magicks, and to persevere the purging after the Great Elf-Dwarf War, was a very unique magic form. It was unique in the sense that no magic energy was needed, no special words were recited, nor was calling upon the aid of a supernatural being required. This magic form came to be known as science.

Science, like many other magic forms, requires years of study and practice. One must completely learn about the world around us and learn how to harness its natural powers to perform the magic of science. Through science, many of the wondrous feats of magic can be duplicated and performed with no cost in magical energy, however the cost to create such wonders may often be great, in the way of materials and services of others.

The ancient Dwarves were one of the earliest races to develop science. They used this knowledge to create vast underground cities, tunnels, structures, and some of the best quality weapons and armor of the known world. Through science, they were able to extract metals, ores and stone from the earth to be refined and turned into viable products. They produced such simple things as a knife and fork for eating, and complex machines that could lift and carry thousands of pounds of weight from one end of a tunnel to another like a horse, but was able to work underground and in the absence of light and air. Eventually some of the other subterranean races like the Kobold and Gnome learned to use the Dwarven sciences to turn their crude caves and tunnels into elaborate underground cities, mine ore, and fashion metal products of high quality. Their natural aptitude and the Dwarves' tutelage made them second only to the Dwarven masters of science. The Elves, amazed at the Dwarves' workmanship, had them teach them the secrets of this science and asked them to help build their kingdoms above ground. The Elves also incorporated much of their carpentry skills and knowledge of using wood as a good building material. Together they literally built the Great Elven Empire.

After the Great Elf-Dwarf War, many of the Elven cities had been destroyed and left in ruins, and the Dwarves as well had many of their subterranean cities demolished and ruined. In the process, much of the knowledge amassed by these two great civilizations was lost. To top that off, the Elves and Dwarves disposed of many of the different types of magic they had used, so others wouldn't repeat the horrors they had unleashed upon each other. Fortunately, science was one of the few magic forms to survive. When the aftermath had passed and man began to emerge and take his place as the new rulers of the Palladium World, the Dwarves started to mentor the humans. They taught them some of the secrets of building large structures like castles and towers, and bridges that could support large wagons and heavy horses. The humans learned quickly and combined the knowledge of their teachers with their own knowledge of the surface world and aid from their Elven allies.

Soon, though, the secrets of long forgot magic were being rediscovered and relearned by many of the emerging races on Palladium. The wonders of science were starting to be overshadowed by the mystery and power offered by some of the returning old forms of magic like wizardry, summoning, diablerie and elemental magic.

Now on the Palladium World, the basics of science are used in every day life, from building houses and castles, to digging irrigation trenches and aqueducts to bring in fresh water. This part of science is represented by the craftsmen of the many people of Palladium, from mason to carpenter, blacksmith to scholar. But there still exists a reasonable following of science as a means to create magic. These men and women tinker around with new ideas, building strange contraptions and performing experiments, to better understand the world around them and to learn about the secrets locked away in nature about science. These men and women are affectionately called Tinkerers, inventors and scientists, for that is what they do. The Tinkerer is the most common among Dwarves, Gnomes and Kobolds, however there are also human and Elven Tinkerers. There are also rumors that Wolfen, Goblin and maybe even Ogre Tinkerers exist, but then again they are just rumors.

These Tinkerers are usually very bright and are gifted with creativity and an artistic hand, and are usually mechanically inclined. Also, like most other practitioners of magic, their art is expensive, more so for materials than for spells or books of knowledge. Since they don't use spells and the books that do exist on the subject are rare and hard to find, most of the cost is in finding and making suitable materials to use in their experiments. Most Tinkerers rely on their keen observations to learn about nature and from that elaborate to come up with theories for their science. Tinkerers by their very nature are also very curious and inquisitive, and spend hours a day thinking up theories and strange and new inventions. However, because of their curiosity and sense of adventure, many Tinkerers explore old ruins and modern wonders in search of new natural phenomena, or to discover old or lost secrets of science. Many also work for rich merchants, kings and wizards, making gizmos and trinkets for sale, building elaborate castles & dungeons, or manufacturing components for special applications.

The Tinkerer O.C.C.

Attribute Requirements: A minimum I.Q. of 11 and a M.E. of 10 is required, but an I.Q. and M.E. of 14 or higher is recommended.

Special O.C.C. Abilities & Skills:

1. Art: Drafting: This skill covers the more practical precision drawings used in architecture and mechanical design. It also includes the use of the various drafting techniques and equipment. Note that the other, more artistic, Art skill can do technical drawing but is -20% to do so. The skill level is 30% +5% per level of experience. Tinkerers receive a +20% bonus to this skill.

2. Chemistry: Don't get this one confused with Alchemy. This skill is more like its modern counterpart, only really primitive. It takes a more scientific approach, as opposed to the magical approach of Alchemy. It covers the creating of black powder and explosives, fire and combustible materials, as well as a knowledge of gases, from toxins to practical fuels and buoyant gases for air ships. It also provides a basic understanding of metallurgy, enough to make stainless steels and high grade steels for use in machines, armor and weapons. This skill also covers the fundamental knowledge of making ceramics, whether it be clay pots or glass bottles. Base skill is 20% +5% per level of experience. Tinkers receive a +20% bonus for this skill. Note a failed roll means an incorrect compound was created and the material isn't what it was supposed to be. In the case of a failure when mixing unidentified chemicals, roll on the following optional table:

- 01-05% The mixture explodes, doing 1D4x10 damage to a 20 foot (6.1 m) area!!
- 06-12% Minor puff/explosion, does 1D6 damage to a 1 foot (.3 m) area.
- 13-18% Causes a toxic gas cloud — save vs. non-lethal poison. If the save fails, the Tinkerer is knocked out for 2D4 minutes.
- 19-25% Starts a fire and must be immediately extinguished or it will consume a 25 foot (7.6 m) area in 1D4 melees!
- 26-89% The compound is stable but is not the desired result.
- 90-95% The compound becomes very acidic, and burns a hole in the container and melts through the table/floor.
- 96-99% The room is filled with a toxic gas cloud — save vs. lethal toxin. If the save fails, the Tinkerer's lungs burn and he

suffers 2D6 damage to Hit Points, and takes an additional 1D6 to Hit Points, per melee, for 2D4 melees.

100% The room fills with a toxic gas — save vs. non-lethal toxin. If the save fails he is knocked out for 2D4 melees. The gas explodes in 2D6 melees, doing 1D6 x 10 damage to a 30 foot (9.1 m) area!

3. Demolitions: This skill is sort of an application of the Chemistry skill. While Chemistry gives the skills needed to make explosives, the Demolition skill is the knowledge to place them where they will be effective and do the most damage. It also includes the ability to disarm bombs and explosive traps. Skill base is 25% +5% per level of experience. The Tinker receives a +10% bonus.

4. Metalworking: This is the skill of working with metal, usually with iron or steel, but also includes bronze, copper and more mundane metals. It also covers working with precious metals, casting, forging and special processes in purifying metals. The use of this skill allows the building of weapons, armor, and other metal products like horseshoes, nails, chain etc. It also allows the construction of superior quality weapons. Note that this is identical to the Dwarf and Kobold natural skill of metalworking, and can be used to replace it. This base skill and penalties and bonuses that apply to this skill are:

Base skill is 20% + 5% per level of experience.

Bonuses:

Tinkerer O.C.C. (+20%)

Dwarves (+10%)

Kobolds (+10%)

Penalties:

Creating normal weapons/armor -0%

Creating weapons of superior quality:

-5% Per +1 to Damage

-8% per +1 to Parry

-30% per +1 to Parry & Strike

Creating Armor of Superior Quality:

Light Armor, +20 S.D.C.: -10%

Heavy Armor: -10% per +10 S.D.C. (with a maximum of +50 S.D.C.).

Note: See pages 271 & 272 of *Palladium Fantasy RPG® 2nd Edition* for more details of superior weapon costs. Also see the "Inventions of the Era" section below for other useful inventions and possible technologies of the time.

6. Pilot/Use Invention: This skill allows the Tinkerer to pilot any of his vehicular inventions, whether it's a steam car or a glider. Base Skill is 45% +5% per level of experience.

The Tinkerer can also figure out how to use someone else's invention. This includes alien devices (-40%), and modern technological devices like cars and automatic guns (-10% for really high tech, like energy weapons, aircraft/jets and supercomputers). Base skill is 10% +5% per level of experience.

O.C.C. Skills:

Language: Native Tongue 98% and two other languages of choice (+20% each).

Literacy: Native Tongue (+40%) and one other of choice (+15%).

Art (+10%)

Masonry (+20%)

Mathematics: Basic 98%

Mathematics: Advanced (+40%)

Biology/Anatomy (+10%)

Holistic Medicine (+5%)

Identify Fruit and Plants (+5%)

Carpentry (+30%)

Recognize Weapon Quality (+12%)

Hand to Hand: Basic can be selected at the cost of one O.C.C. Related Skill, Hand to Hand: Expert can be taken at the cost of two, or Hand to Hand: Martial Arts at the cost of three.

O.C.C. Related Skills:

Select a total of 8 other skills at level one, plus two more at levels three, six, nine, twelve and fifteen.

Communication: Any (+10%)

Domestic: Any (+5%)

Espionage: Forgery, Detect Concealment & Traps, and Pick Locks only (+5%).

Horsemanship: General and Exotic only.

Medical: Any (+5%)

Military: Heraldry only.

Physical: Any except Gymnastics, Acrobatics and Wrestling.

Rogue: Any (+5% Pick Locks, +20% Locate Secret Compartments/Doors).

Science: Any (+10%)

Technical: Any (+10%, +15% to Rope Work, Sculpting & Whittling, General Repairs, Gemology).

Weapon Proficiencies: Any (+1 with siege weapons).

Wilderness: Any (+10% to Boat Building).

Secondary Skills:

The character also gets to select 6 Secondary Skills from the previous list at level one, and one additional skill at levels three, six, and nine. These are areas of knowledge that do not get the advantage of the bonus listed in the parentheses. All Secondary Skills start at the base skill level. Also skills are limited (any, only and none) as indicated previously in the list.

Starting Equipment: Two sets of clothes, a pair of boots, hat, belt, bedroll, backpack, 2 large sacks, 1D4 small sacks, water/wine skin, food rations for 1D4 weeks, 2D4 sticks of charcoal and/or graphite (for writing or drawing), two crow quill pens, a bottle of ink, 4D4 large parchments of paper in a leather cylindrical case. A 100-page notebook, small mirror and a tinderbox. 50 feet (15.2 m) of rope, leather utility belt and tool kit (contains hammer, nails, measuring equipment, carving knives, tongs, and other portable tools of the trade for a blacksmith/carpenter/craftsman).

Armor: Starts with a suit of hard leather (A.R. 11, S.D.C.: 30).

The Tinkerer's use of other types of armor is the same as the wizard, but with no concerns to magic.

Weapons: Starts with a dagger, a hatchet (more for cutting wood), hammer (part of tool kit) and one other basic S.D.C. weapon of choice. Additional equipment can be purchased or acquired later.

Money: Starts with 300 in gold, 200 of which should be spent on gadgets and inventions. The rest can be used immediately to buy more equipment or saved for later.

Inventions of the Era

There are many cool technological devices of the era that can be useful in a fantasy RPG setting. Here are a couple of the more practical and useful inventions that are relevant to an RPG.

Explosives

Black powder is the most common type, but a creative player/genius character may be able to develop other types of explosives (oil, gasoline, napalm-like substance (gasoline and soap), magnesium fuses, the list goes on). Also, on the same note and depending upon G.M.'s approval, the character may be able to develop simple types of cannons and firearms.

Damage: As an example, a small amount of black powder, say a pouch filled with 4 ounces of black powder and rocks or metal shards, if a fuse is used and it is thrown like a grenade, would inflict 4D6 to a 5 foot (1.5 m) area. Something a lot larger, say a satchel or small sack filled with the same stuff, would inflict 2D6x10 to a 10 foot (3 m) area. If the same type of stuff was used to damage a wall or blow up a structure, it could easily do 1D4x100 or more if the explosive was placed properly (i.e. at a weak point of the wall). Cost: The price of the container, plus about 2 to 5 gold per ounce for the black powder.

Chemical Weapons

Through the use of the skills Chemistry, Biology, Identify Fruits & Plants, Use Poison and Holistic Medicine, the character could conceivably create chemical weapons with lethal to non-lethal effects, both biological and chemical toxins.

The tinkerer could create the following "magic powders" which are listed in the Alchemist section (p. 254 & 255 of the main book for **Palladium Fantasy® RPG 2nd Edition**): sneezing powder, itching powder, fire dust, heart of flame, goblin dust, moon powder, smoke bombs, etc.

The character could also create sleeping/knock out gas, tear gas and use other simple gases (i.e. hydrogen... and a tinderbox ... BOOM! Another explosive?).

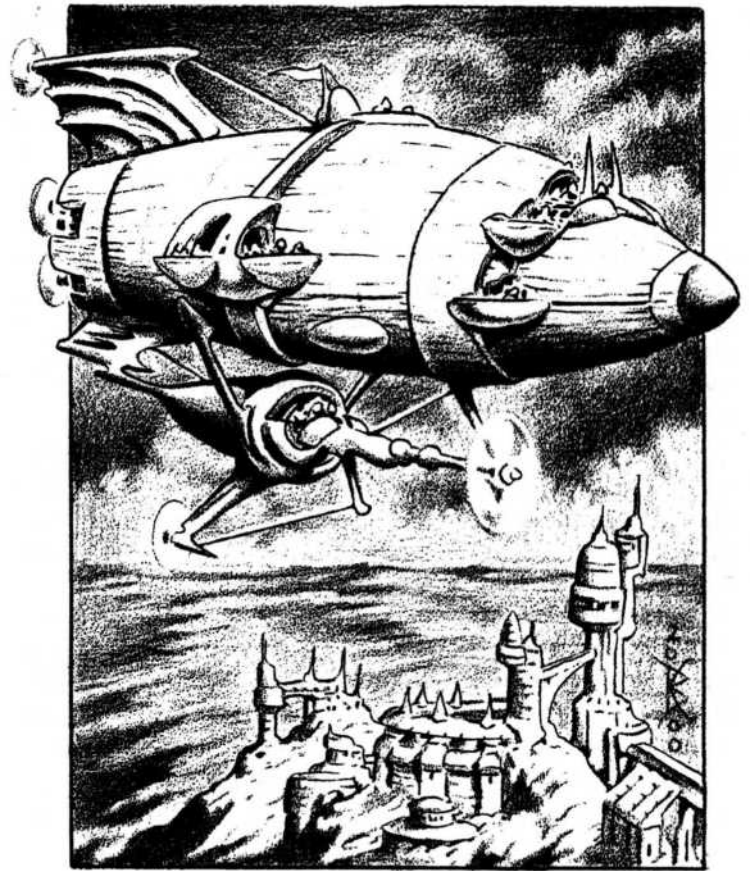
The character can also conjure up acids. They would need to be placed into a glass container with a glass lid, because they will eat through most organic (wood and leather) containers as well as metal containers. Damage per ounce is 3D6 for the first melee, plus 1D4 damage for the next 1D4 melees. Increase accordingly per additional ounce used. Applying a base (i.e. lime, chalk) or pouring lots of water on it will neutralize the acid, stopping the additional damage.

Machines

The character, with the right materials and the right skills (Metalworking, Sewing, Carpentry, etc.) and enough time, can come up with some pretty cool and sophisticated machines and apparatuses. Listed below are some simple guidelines for vehicles and various contraptions that would be within easy grasp of a Tinkerer to design and build. Feel free to create more elaborate stuff, but be sure that the G.M. approves of it and that it fits into his campaign properly.

Gliders: The typical glider will most likely resemble a bird or flying reptile, or triangular construct. They fly on air currents and require no fuel. The typical speeds that can be reached are around 20-40 mph (32-64 km), up to 100 mph (160 km) in a strong wind or in a dive. The cost to build such a thing can vary, but on average would be between 100 to 200 gold for one glider.

Air Ships: Basically a hot air balloon; a more sophisticated version might use hydrogen or helium and could also have propellers for motion and move more like a zeppelin. This can be a



small, one-man or a huge frigate size ship. Speeds are usually 20-80 mph (32-128 km), maybe more with high winds. Cost for this kind of invention would be anywhere from 1000 to 100,000 gold, depending on the size, possibly even more if it was truly huge and had special features and weapons.

Steam Cars: A steam-driven car or other vehicle would require lots of work. It would require something for fuel (probably wood or coal) and could produce speeds around 50 mph on the ground, but would have a slow rate of acceleration. This would be very expensive and would require a lot of forging and metalworking to make the boiler and parts strong enough to deal with the pressures and heat. This type of vehicle would also only be suitable on open and flat terrain or a road. Forest, mountains and swamps would make travel impossible with this kind of vehicle. The cost would probably be around 10,000 to 50,000 gold.

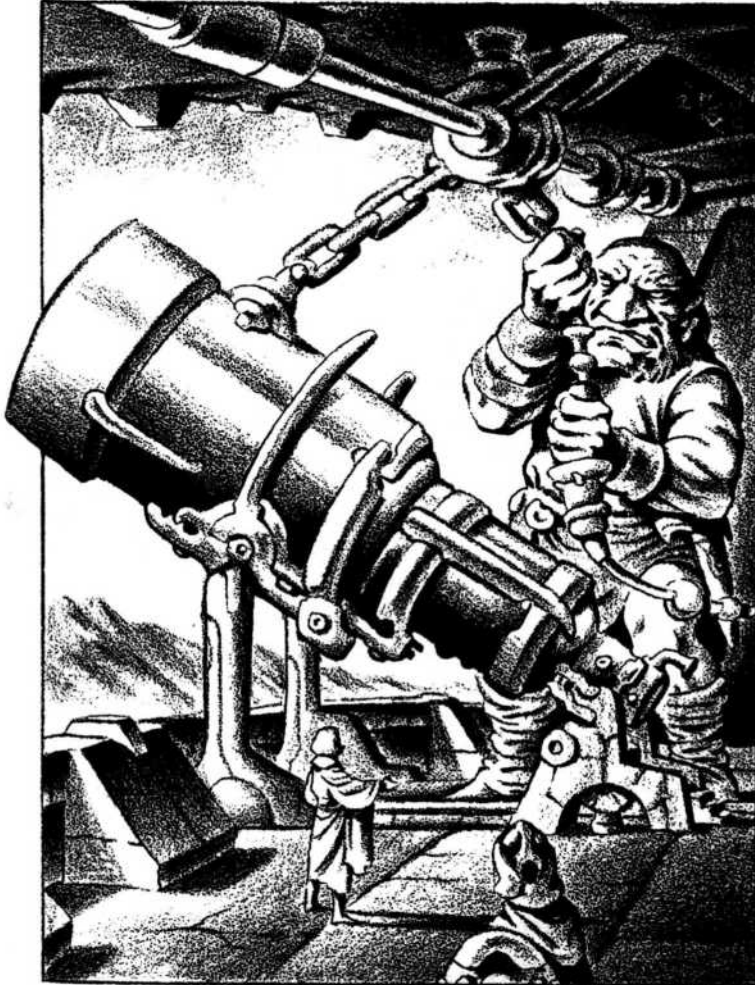
Siege Machines: The creation of giant crossbows, cannons, steam driven machines for scaling castle walls, and catapults that launch explosives into or against the castles. These special weapons are very large and cumbersome, but can inflict great damage to castles, buildings and ships. The cost for conventional siege weapons would be around 500 to 1000 gold, to add explosives as ammo, or create steam driven devices could easily bring the price up to 10,000 to 50,000 gold.

Gadgets

The Tinkerer is also skilled at making useful gadgets from springs, gears, and other components. These are the things that most Tinkerers are most likely to start the game with, from their starting fund for gadgets/inventions. Here is a list and prices to make them; to purchase them pre-made would be double or triple the cost.

Clocks: A device composing of springs, gears and wires that keeps track of time. It will need winding every week or so to keep the springs tight, but could be very useful when calculating speed, distances and figuring out what time of day it is underground. Cost 100 gold, 300 for fancy gold plated watches.

Compasses: A pocket-sized device used to find magnetic north. Simple: 20 gold, elaborate and well decorated ones could cost as much as or more than 100 gold.



Telescopes: A cylindrical tube that extends in length, by looking through it one can make far off objects appear larger. Cost: Basic model is 50 gold, elaborate/fancy models could cost 250 gold and up.

Glasses: Used to correct near- and far-sightedness, they can also be tinted to create glasses that protect against bright light such as sunlight or magical bright lights and flashes. Cost 10 to 50 gold.

Glass/Ceramic Wares: Bottles and jars for specimens, carrying water or other liquids. They also make great weapons when containing flammables/explosives because they shatter on impact, spreading the fuel/fire around. Cost varies, for small bottles 5 gold, medium 10 gold, large bottles cost anywhere from 15 to 25 gold.

Lighters: A device that rubs flint and steel together to create sparks. Great for lighting fuses and fires. Cost: 2 gold.

Pulleys and Cams: By themselves they can be used with rope to aid in lifting heavy objects. A more advanced application of attaching them to a bow or crossbow would allow for the

creation of a stronger pull on the bow so that more damage can be inflicted from arrows and bolts. Cost 2 to 3 gold per cam or pulley.

Metallurgy

The Tinkerer could use his knowledge of metals and chemistry to create stronger metals, such as stainless steel or other compounds that would enhance the properties of metal. This would increase S.D.C. of armor and make weapons stronger, highly resistant to rusting, and stay sharper longer.

With this the Tinkerer could create armor with +20% more S.D.C. with the same weight. This advanced metal also increases the armor rating of the metal by 1. Cost: Double the normal cost for that type of metal armor. For studded leather armor, increase S.D.C. by 10% and cost is 50% more, but no increase in armor rating.

Note: This is in addition to the possible enhancement of armor by adding more metal, as outlined in the *Palladium Fantasy RPG®* main book.

Weapons can be made tougher doubling their S.D.C., they won't rust and they tend to stay sharper twice as long as normal weapons.

Advanced Weapons

As well as the above mentioned metallurgically advanced weapons, the Tinkerer can create weapons of such high quality that they provide bonuses in combat. For Dwarven and Kobold Tinkerers, use the guidelines for bonuses as outlined in the main book for each specific race in the weapons section. For Tinkerers of other races, they can build a maximum of +1 to strike and parry, and a maximum of +3 to damage.

With the aid of pulleys and cams, the Tinkerer can actually increase the damage and the range done by bows and crossbows. Add 1D6 damage and 50 feet (15.2 m) of range per cam/pulley assembly (max of two, one at each end).

Also, bows with a greater pull on them can be created for characters with great strength. The cost is usually 50% more than a normal bow, due to reinforcing and using stronger materials. The bow allows one to add in the desired P.S. bonus to damage done by the arrows. So a bow built for someone with a P.S. of 25 would do +10 damage with all arrows shot from it. Note that if someone has a P.S. higher than 25 they can shoot it, but it will only do the +10 damage, no more. On the same note, someone with a P.S. less than 25 can't even draw it back, let alone fire it! In the case of giant weapons that already get a +1D6 damage, the damage bonus can only be applied to a bow needing a P.S. of 21 or higher. So a giant-sized long bow with a draw strength of 27 would do 3D6+6 damage.

Traps

Who do you think designs and build all the sophisticated non-magical traps and labyrinths that cover the *Palladium World*? The Tinkerer! Being an expert with mechanisms, the Tinkerer would be the perfect dungeon crawler, able to "know" where traps are most likely to be, how to disarm them, and how to make them and use them to his or her advantage, as well as able to pick locks (probably as well if not better than a thief!).

THE CHANGELING METAMORPH



An Optional P.C.C./R.C.C. For The Palladium Fantasy RPG®

By Mark Hall

As a people, the Changelings have been in hiding for millennia. Certainly, they use their shape-changing abilities to their advantage, but in many cases, it is just a matter of survival. But some Changelings, especially the young of Noah's Paradise (Palladium Fantasy RPG® Book VI, *Island at the Edge of the World™*), have become fascinated with their abilities, both psionic and physical, pushing these to their limits. They have learned, through practice, the true grandeur of being a Changeling, overcoming their bodies with their minds.

P.C.C./R.C.C. Abilities

1. Psionic Powers: All Metamorphs are Master Psionics, though they have fewer standard abilities than the title would indicate. At first level, a Changeling Metamorph knows:

Meditation

Alter Aura

Impervious to Poisons\Toxins (useful for hiding weaknesses to alcohol and salt)

Resist Fatigue

Mind Block: Auto-Defense

One additional power from any of the three minor categories can be chosen at every odd level, beginning with level 3. One Super-psionic can be selected at levels 5, 9 and 15.

2. I.S.P.: 2D4x10 + M.E. Each level of experience adds another 8 I.S.P.

3. Enhanced Shifting: The Changelings who have followed this discipline have learned to push their bodies to the maximum. While the restrictions against re-growing limbs and the limits of size still apply, their control of the ability is much finer than that of Joe Changeling. This is a difficult process, requiring a roll under the Enhanced Shifting Skill, which has a base percentage of 20%, plus 5% per level. I.Q. bonuses are applicable. Note that each attempt to change shape, whether successful or not, takes a full melee round. While the limitations of this ability are unknown, some documented abilities are listed below.

4. Limited Immortality: Once a Metamorph has reached ninth level, he has gained sufficient control over his body that he no longer ages in the normal fashion. While they have no special defense against death from other causes, they never suffer any further effects of age.

5. Bonuses:

Save vs psionics at 10 (plus bonuses) or better

+2 vs. any kind of mind control

+4 vs. possession

+4 vs. Horror Factor

Enhanced Shifting Abilities

Bio-regeneration

With concentration, a Metamorph can actually heal his body by shifting it into a less damaged form. This allows them to heal at a tremendous rate, as though each melee round of concentration was one day of "Treatment by a Professional" (2 Hit Points and 6 S.D.C. per round for the first two melee rounds, and 4 H.P. & 6 S.D.C. per round after that). This process is as painful as normal healing can be, so a save vs. pain (12 + M.E. bonuses) must be made to continue. If the save is failed, the Metamorph must begin again, at the slower initial rate.

Skill modification: Automatic. Aside from the save, this requires no skill roll to perform.

Reattach limb

While limbs cannot be regrown, the Changeling's own recently severed limbs can be reattached if attended to within 1 melee round per level. This is a painful process, requiring a save vs. pain at 16 (+ M.E. bonuses). If the save fails, the Changeling may keep trying (once per melee round, until the time limit runs out). **Skill modification:** -20%

Enhanced Senses

By altering his sensory organs, a Metamorph can increase his physical senses, or change them so they perceive things differently. Each sense must be enhanced separately, but there is no skill modification.

Olfactory Enhancement:

Track by Smell 30% +4% per level.

Recognize Scent 65% +4% per level.

Recognize Person by Scent 25% +4% per level.

Tactile Enhancement:

Add +10% to skills requiring a delicate touch (Art, Pick Pockets, etc.).

Aural Enhancement:

Can detect sounds as soft as 1 decibel at 75 feet (22.9 m).

Whispers are clear at 150 feet (45.7 m).

Normal conversation is clear at 360 feet (109.7 m).

Sounds can also be identified and located at 35% +5% per level.

The amplified hearing will also provide +1 to Parry, +2 to Dodge and +6 to Initiative, but loud noises will deafen the character.

Aural Alteration:

The ear can also be made to hear sounds of higher or lower frequencies than normal, giving them hearing similar to a dog's (for higher) or an elephant's (for lower).

Vision Enhancement:

Note: For these, each requires a separate roll to use.

Long range vision similar to a hawk's, recognizing a face at 2 miles (3.2 km).

Passive Nightvision.

Infrared Vision.

Ultraviolet Vision.

Polarized Vision.

Vision adapted to seeing underwater.

Respiration

A Changeling Metamorph can alter his respiratory system so he can breathe in foreign environments, or even respire anaerobically. While the modification takes 1 melee, it can be maintained indefinitely (except for the anaerobic respiration, which has a limit of 15 minutes per level).

Skill Modification: +5% to breathe in water, -10% for other environments.

Extremities

One of the first things a Metamorph learns to alter is his extremities, as changes here are easy to both observe and reverse. A truly skilled Metamorph is never without a weapon or means of transportation, and this list covers only the barest beginnings of their power.

Webbed fingers and toes: +5% to swimming, x2 to swimming speed.

Skill Modification: +20%

Flippers replacing arms and legs: +15% to swimming, x4 to swimming speed.

Skill Modification: -6%

Flying-squirrel-like glider membranes: maximum glide ratio of 10:1 (i.e. he loses 1 foot of altitude for every 10 feet he glides).



Skill Modification: -10%

Wings Replacing arms; Bat-like or feathered: Flying speed is equal to 1/2 P.S., for no more than half of P.E. in minutes (modified by Resist Fatigue, naturally).

Skill Modification: -20%

Combat Claws: +2d4 to punch and +2d6 to kick damage.

Skill Modification: Automatic

Climbing Claws: Hand claws: +1d4 to punch damage and +5% to climbing skill. Foot claws: +1d6 to kick damage and +10% to climbing skill.

Skill modification: -0%

Digging Claws: +1d6 to punch damage and allow for Digging (no tunnel) at a Spd of 4, or tunneling at a Spd of 1.

Skill Modification: -5%

Other options being explored include fangs, tails (by elongating the tail bone), natural armor (either outgrowth of bone, chitin, or matted hair) and prehensile feet. Those above are merely the most common. A Changeling is limited only by his own imagination and the inability to grow new limbs or exceed a certain size, and a need to remain strictly organic.

P.C.C./R.C.C. Skills

Language: Elf 98%

Language: Two of Choice (+15%).

Literacy: Elf (+10%)

Biology (+20%)

Math: Basic (+5%)

History (one race must be Changeling; +10%)

W.P.: One of Choice.

Hand to Hand: Basic

Hand to Hand: Basic may be improved to Expert at the cost of one skill, or Martial Arts (or Assassin, if evil) for two.

P.C.C./R.C.C. Skills: Choose 5 at level 1, and one additional at levels 3, 6, 9 and 12.

Communications: Any

Domestic: Any

Espionage: Detect Ambush, Detect Concealment & Traps, Disguise, Escape Artist and Imitate Voice & Impersonation only.

Horsemanship: General or Exotic only (generally none, however).

Medical: Any

Military: Surveillance only.

Physical: Any

Rogue: Any

Science: Any (+5%)

Scholar/Technical: Any (+10% on Lore, Language, and Literacy only).

Weapon Proficiencies: Any, save those allowed only to certain classes.

Wilderness: Any

Secondary Skills: Choose four Secondary Skills at level 1, and one additional at levels 4, 8 and 12, with all the usual restrictions on Secondary Skills.

Starting Equipment: Two sets of clothing, a nice cloak or cape, (with or without hood), leather boots, belt, blanket, backpack, two medium-sized sacks, two small sacks, a water skin, food rations for 1D4 weeks, a pocket mirror, hair comb and a tinder box.

Armor: Starts with a suit of studded leather (A.R. 13, S.D.C. 38).

Weapons: Starts with a dagger, and two other weapons of choice. All are basic S.D.C. weapons of fair to good quality.

Money: The character starts with 120 in gold, which can be used immediately to purchase more equipment or saved.

Experience Table: Same as the Mind Mage.



GESTALT

By Jay Fitzloff

The American Heritage Dictionary defines "gestalt" as, "A unified physical, psychological, or symbolic configuration having properties that cannot be derived from its parts." In the world of **Heroes Unlimited™**, the Gestalt is a unified character. It is a super being made up of two or more separate persons, animals or robots. The individuals, when not combined into their Gestalt persona, are relatively normal and comparatively weak. When the group joins together, the being that comes about has powers and abilities the individuals do not have.

Gestalt characters should be very rare in the world of **Heroes Unlimited™**, just as they are in comics today. Players wishing to create a Gestalt character should seek G.M. approval, for they may not wish to allow such a strange power category into their campaign. Not only does the Gestalt hero take a considerable amount of time to roll up, there's also plenty of room for player abuse with these unique character types. Of course, as a villain, the Gestalt NPC will certainly frustrate, mystify, and possibly creep out a group of heroes. Players will have no idea that the reason the villain disappears into a crowd so easily is because he or she is now five separate people!

An Optional New Power Category for Heroes Unlimited™, 2nd Ed.

Nature of the Gestalt

There are four different types of Gestalts. To determine which kind the character is, select one from the table below or roll randomly. If a G.M. likes the idea of a Gestalt hero, but thinks certain types would bring too many headaches, he should feel free to disallow whichever natures he doesn't want in his campaign.

01-25% Animal: The character's body is made up of many small animals — flies, roaches, worms, rats, etc. — which together form a kind of sentient being.

26-50% Human Physical: Two or more normal humans somehow shift their bodies into one another to form a super being.

51-75% Human Psychic: Two or more relatively normal humans are able to combine their minds and wishes, forming a super being.

76-00% Robotic: A group of weaker robots combine together to make a more powerful whole.

Animal Gestalt

Individually, the animals that make up this Gestalt act only through instinct, not having human goals or wants. Somehow, a force beyond their understanding sometimes calls them together to form a humanoid being with great abilities. The Animal Gestalt may be a voice for the animal kingdom, a force of mother nature brought forth to interact with the human race, or it could



be a long dead spirit, able to call animals to form a body similar to the one he had in life.

Whatever the reason for the forming of the Animal Gestalt, however, one thing remains true — the individual animals, when released from the force, do not continue to act according to the wishes of the Gestalt being, but go about their normal animal business, with the first goal usually being to get away from humans.

Step One: Type of Animals

The player may choose what type of animals come together to form the Gestalt being, or may roll to give them an idea. It may be appropriate to roll powers first, choosing the animal type that would fit the super abilities.

No matter what type of animal is chosen, a humanoid is always the form taken by the Gestalt, with the differing colors and shapes of the animals used to form human-like features. The animals come together when summoned by the outside force, forming the Gestalt being instantly, even if it is unusual for the animal type to move that fast.

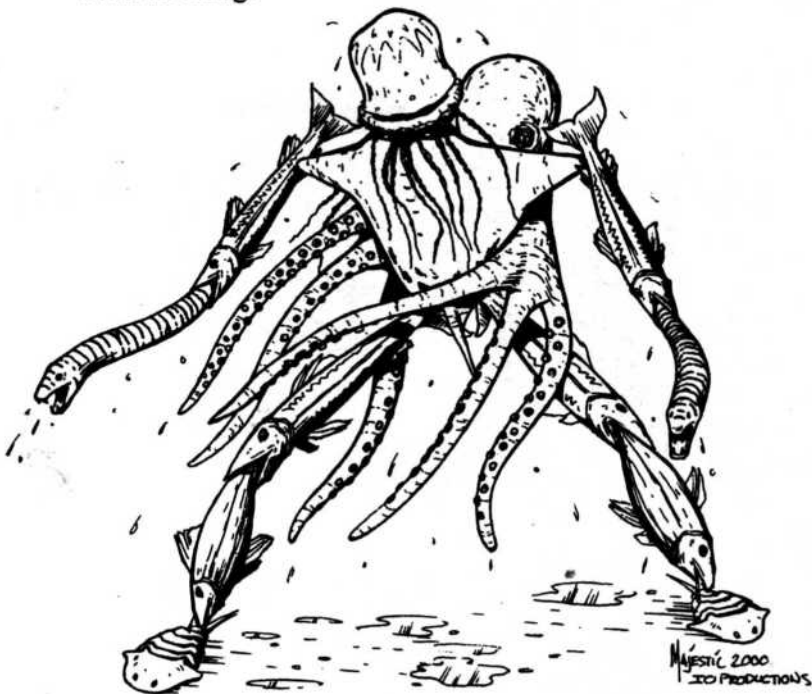
01-20% Crawling Insects: Roaches, ticks, spiders, silverfish, centipedes, etc.

21-40% Flying Insects: Flies, bees, wasps, dragonflies, butterflies, etc.

41-60% Earthbound Invertebrates: Worms, slugs, snails, etc.

61-80% Small Earthbound Vertebrates: Snakes, rats, salamanders, lizards, etc.

81-90% Hodgepodge Land: A variety of small land animals form the being.



91-00% Hodgepodge Sea: A variety of marine life forms the being.

Step Two: Controlling Force of the Gestalt

This determines the controlling force of the Animal Gestalt being, and perhaps also, its possible motives and goals. As always, the player may choose the mind, or roll randomly.

01-25% Spirit: An invisible spirit roaming the earth. Without a body, the spirit is only able to call small, simple-minded animals to form and control. The advantage of this controlling force is that it is the most human-minded, and therefore, the easiest to play and the easiest for other heroes to understand. Exactly why the spirit is still roaming the earth is up to the player, but some common themes are revenge and wrongful death.

The greatest disadvantage of playing a spirit controlling force is that the character is completely vulnerable to all magic and psionics that have power over spirits and possessing entities, such as exorcism and banishment. It is not obvious to anyone with such abilities that this is a weakness, but they may certainly guess so.

The body called forth by the spirit may be summoned only once per day. The body will have full S.D.C. each time it is formed, but all of the Hit Points belong to the spirit (which is similar to an Astral body). If the S.D.C. is depleted, the animals scurry off, but only the body is defeated. The only way to stop the Gestalt from coming back the next day is to somehow capture or destroy the spirit through psychic or supernatural means.

Education and skills are rolled up normally as described in **Heroes Unlimited™, 2nd Ed.** The only possible limitation is that if the spirit is from the past, it wouldn't know any modern technological skills.

26-50% Human Folly: Some kind of experiment gone wrong, strange new insecticides, and improper radioactive waste disposal are but a few examples of the usually unintentional mistakes humans make that cause the forming of this kind of Animal Gestalt. The advantage of this mind is that it's completely different than a normal human's, with many different parts making up the whole. As such, this type of Animal Gestalt mind gains a +8 saving throw against all psionic, possession and mind control attacks.

The disadvantage is that the Gestalt has no formal education, basically being born yesterday. The player may select twelve secondary skills at first level, and then one additional secondary skill every level thereafter, representing the Gestalt's desire and ability to learn. This character will also be completely new to human social interaction, and will probably act more like a very intelligent version of the animal he is composed of until he learns better.

The body of this Animal Gestalt type is here to stay. It does not appear or disappear for various reasons, has S.D.C. and Hit Points, and must heal as per the standard rules.

51-75% Force of Nature: Humans sometimes forget how to treat the world they live on and lose respect for the animals they share it with. This Gestalt mind is of the earth itself, and its motives usually involve righting an environmental wrong or teaching humans how to prosper without destroying nature. Since this Gestalt is supported by the earth, it can perform the psionic healing power of bio-regeneration every hour at no I.S.P. cost, as long as the Gestalt body is in contact with the earth (or the sea, or any other appropriate place decided upon by the player or G.M.). Education and skills are rolled up as usual, but high tech skills, such as computer use and energy weapons, are normally beyond the simple earth mind's ken.

The disadvantage of this character is that not only is it distant from human kind, its preachy morals will most likely begin to irritate many people. Also, if in the being's opinion there is no cause for it to be present, it won't make an appearance or stick around, no matter how dire the consequences for the rest of the group ("Well, we saved the forest, so I must go. I'll leave it to the rest of you to get away from the 200 angry and armed lumberjacks.").

76-00% Unknown: As the title says, the Gestalt being doesn't know why he can form together, he just does. The player rolls education and skills normally. The only disadvantage is a possible lack of direction. Plus, having a human mind in a body made up of slugs doesn't do wonders for one's romantic life or social well-being.

As with the human folly mind, the body of this Animal Gestalt does not come and go. S.D.C., Hit Points, and standard recovery rates apply to this character.

Step Three: Abilities

Attributes are rolled up as usual, with P.B. being a measure of how "normal" the Gestalt looks. Education and skills are determined as directed by step two. The player should note that unless the hero has a certain Gestalt ability or super ability, their character will not be able to do things simply because they feel it would be appropriate. For example, an Animal Gestalt composed entirely of flies wouldn't be able to fly unless it had one of the flight or glide super abilities. The physiology of the Gestalt is strange indeed.

At first level, the player rolls twice on the table that follows. Since the Animal Gestalt is almost always new to its form and still learning to use its abilities, roll once more on the table below at levels 2, 4, 7, 9, 12 and 15. Many of the abilities below can be taken twice, but if a result cannot be taken again, ignore the result and either re-roll on the table or roll for one Minor Super Ability.

Animal Gestalt Ability Table

01-10% Alter physical form: This ability is similar to the super abilities of stretching and shape changing, but with more limited application. The Gestalt's body does not have to stay in humanoid form. The character may reshape into any form as long as it retains the same mass as its humanoid form and is not separated into more than one piece. Thus, a Gestalt made entirely of mice could squeeze through a narrow opening or under a door, choose to appear as a giant mouse, or scale a wall by elongating vertically. Of course, in any shape the character is still going to appear as a mass of small animals, so the use of this ability for disguise is very limited.

11-20% Dissipation and Reformation: The Gestalt is able to completely separate its constituent parts and reform a short distance away in only a few seconds. This ability is similar to the Major Super Ability of Teleport, except that the Gestalt can only reform in an area it can see, can only affect itself, cannot carry any items, and can only go where his animal type could fit through. On the plus side, however, there is no chance for failure. This action takes one attack, but can be done as many times during a melee round as the character has attacks.

21-30% Animal Psionics: The player may select two of the Animal Psionics listed on pages 170-172 in *Heroes Unlimited, 2nd Edition*. These abilities require no I.S.P., and can be used as often as the character has attacks. This ability may be rolled more than once.

31-40% Animal Abilities: The Gestalt gets 20 BIO-E points to spend on abilities related to whatever animal type it is composed of as listed in the Mutant section of *Heroes Unlimited™*. If the proper animal type cannot be found, or if all BIO-E possible has been spent, then a Minor Super Ability appropriate to the Gestalt's animal type may be chosen. This ability may be rolled more than once.

41-50% Horror Factor: The appearance of a mass of smaller animals and/or insects is certainly unnerving. Such is especially the case for this Gestalt, and it garners a moment's pause when it appears on the scene. Horror Factor begins at 10. If this ability is rolled a second or third time, add another 1D4 to the character's Horror Factor. If this ability comes up beyond a third time, re-roll.

51-60% Astral Projection and Reformation: This ability is similar to the ability of dissipation and reformation, but is more time consuming and farther reaching. The Gestalt gains the psionic sensitive ability of Astral Projection with no I.S.P. cost. When the Astral body is released, the Gestalt animals/insects go scurrying off to go about their animal business. The Gestalt's astral form is not tied to a physical body and has no Astral Cord. It is free to travel about in the ghost like state for as long as duration allows. The Gestalt may then reform wherever it likes, as long as its animal type is able to travel there. Should the Astral body be in a place where its animal type cannot go (an air tight room, an airplane, outer space, etc.) when the duration is expired, then the Astral body is permanently trapped in Astral form and the hero's career on earth has come to a close! Animal Gestalts with a spirit mind should re-roll if this ability comes up.

61-70% Summon and Control Animal Type: In addition to the animals the Gestalt mind summons to form its body, it may also call forth additional animals of the same kind to serve it. This ability is similar to the Major Super Ability of Control Insects & Arachnids (with a similar extension made to other animal types should the hero be composed of worms or such). The hero gains the communication, summoning, and controlling aspects of that power, but not the abilities to increase animal/insects Hit Points, create giant versions of animal/insects, or the other abilities and bonuses listed at the end of the power description.

71-80% Selective Intangibility: The Gestalt character can make portions of its body less densely packed than others while in combat. In game terms, the Gestalt character has a natural A.R. of 12. An opponent must roll a 13 or higher to strike the character, otherwise the attack will pass through harmlessly. For every additional time this power is rolled, another +1 is added to the character's A.R., to a maximum of 15.

81-90% Distance Attack: Portions of the body can be flicked off without hurting the whole. In game terms, the character can make a physical attack (punch, kick, head-butt), with a range of 50 feet (15.2 m), +10 feet (3 m) per level of experience. The portion that disconnects will rejoin the main body quickly, and the Gestalt may perform this action up to four times per melee round.

91-00% Mass Increase: The Gestalt may call forth more of its animal type, adding their bodies to its own to grow larger. This ability is almost identical to the Major Super Ability of Growth, except that the player uses experience level to calculate growth potential rather than P.E. The Gestalt body may increase its height by two feet (.6 m) for every level of experience (including first). It also takes one melee round, for every two feet (.6 m), for the mass to absorb into the body.

Other Stuff

Level of Education and Skill Selection: See Step Two, above, for details of the hero's educational level.

Hand to Hand Combat: Combat skills are not automatic, and must be taken as a skill.

Attacks Per Melee (Hand to Hand): As with all super beings, Gestalt characters automatically get two attacks per melee round. Additional attacks are developed through hand to hand combat and other combat skills, or special abilities.

Weapons and Armor: Although not impossible for the Animal Gestalt character to use such items, it is unusual and sometimes difficult for the character to do so.

Alignment: Any alignment can be selected, but heroes should generally be of good alignment.

Structural Damage Capacity (S.D.C.): Because of the unusual nature of the body and the ability for injured parts to retreat inside, the Animal Gestalt starts with an unusually high beginning S.D.C. Base S.D.C. is 2D6x10, which can be increased by bonuses from certain super abilities. Any S.D.C. bonuses given through physical skills are NOT added to the Animal Gestalt's S.D.C.

Available Financial Resources: This character begins with no starting cash and would probably have difficulty getting a standard job. Luckily, the animal individuals can be left to fend for themselves most of the time and the character doesn't necessarily have the needs of a human being.

Human Physical Gestalt

The Human Physical Gestalt is perhaps the most mysterious of the Gestalt types. It is also hardest on the individual lives of the characters involved, and, due to the extra bookkeeping required, hardest on the player and G.M. But then, it is probably the most interesting to play because of these challenges.

The Physical Gestalt involves two or more normal human beings who, through some twist of fate, can combine, when within certain proximity of one another, to form a super being. The super being is not significantly larger or denser (unless it has powers that make it so), and what happens to the extra mass of the individuals is unknown. When the Gestalt being is formed it appears in costume and ready for action, usually with some knowledge of why it was formed.

It is recommended, during the creation of this type of character, that every time a table is presented, it be rolled on randomly. Often, the persons involved in a Physical Gestalt didn't want to be a part of this group, but they are and it's beyond their control.

Step One: The Usual

Determining the eight attributes, Hit Points, alignments, and optional rounding out data is done as usual, but it is done for ev-

ery member of the Physical Gestalt. To determine how many members make up the Gestalt being, roll on the table below.

01-50%: 2 members

51-90%: 3 members

91-98%: 4 members

99-00%: 1D6+4 members

The members of the Gestalt can be of varied health and backgrounds, without affecting their heroic persona in the least. The different members should at least get along and/or be of similar alignments, however, so they can agree to combine.

Step Two: Education & Skills

The members in the Gestalt will come from various walks of life, so roll a random educational level for each member. Also, keep in mind that no member had plans to be a hero, so unless they have a military background, physical skills and weapon proficiencies will be minimal. If pressed for time, players may also wish to roll on all the tables in step three to find out if it's necessary to flesh out each member of the Gestalt. All that might be required to make the character playable is attributes and a general idea of what each member does.

Step Three: The Details

Who decides when it's time

for the Gestalt being to be formed?

01-25%: One person, a leader type, always decides. As long as the other members of the Gestalt are in range, the Gestalt being will be formed by one person's decision. The only say the others have is to verbally convince or dissuade the leader.



26-50%: Majority rules. If most of the members want to join, and the others are in range, the Gestalt being will be formed. In the case of a two person physical Gestalt, either person can decide when it's time to go in to action, even against the other's wishes. In the case of a four, or other greater even-numbered group, at least half must want to join.

51-75%: All the members of the Gestalt group must want to form the joined hero. If one person dissents (or is unconscious, out of his mind, or somehow unable to have a decisive input), the Gestalt hero cannot be formed.

76-00%: Outside forces. Is it the full moon? Sunspot activity? Danger nearby? Monday Nights? Who knows what forces cause the individuals to be pulled together and the Gestalt being to be formed (player's choice), but it never fails to happen.

How close must the individual members be to each other to form the Gestalt Hero?

01-40%: Touching. Physical contact must be had for the individuals to meld together. Whatever the particulars are of the contact, it is usually a constant formation or pose that must be achieved (and for those of you with devilish minds, not normally lewd in nature).

41-70%: Close. All the members of the group must be within sight of one another. On a flat, outdoor field, range will be farther. Indoors, range will be highly restricted. Complete darkness inhibits the forming of the Gestalt, but touch is always sufficient.

71-90%: Far. As long as all the members are within 2D100 miles (3.2-320 km) of all other members, the Gestalt hero can be formed at whatever location would be the approximate mid-point between them all.

91-98%: Worldwide. As long as everybody's on the same planet ("Who let the astronaut in this group?"), the super being may be formed wherever desired by the person who makes such decisions. In a more far-reaching/space-faring campaign, range would be 1D6x100,000 miles (160,000-960,000 km), or if the G.M. wishes, one light year, tops.

99-00%: Infinite. No matter where they hide, no matter how many dimensions they're removed from one another, no barriers, bonds, or distances can prevent the Gestalt group from coming together when the time is right.

Who is in control of the Gestalt Hero when it's formed?

01-50%: One member is always in control (the leader who decides when to form, if there is one. Otherwise, it's usually the person with the most impressive mental attributes). The Gestalt being's I.Q., M.E. and M.A. will be equal to this one person. Skills and Education of the hero will also be the same as this leader.

51-75%: Random between members. Every time the Gestalt being is formed, roll randomly to determine who is in control. The I.Q., M.E., M.A., skills and education of the Gestalt hero will be equal to the person who is in the command chair for the session.

76-90%: Collective mind. A sort of fast-acting democracy is taking place inside the Gestalt body's mind at all times, with all members bickering and deciding what to do. The process happens nearly instantly, but still slows down the decision

making process enough that the being gains no Initiative bonuses, despite high P.P., super abilities, etc. The collective mind is very hard to overcome mentally, however, and the Gestalt being gains a +1 saving throw against psionic, possession and all mental attacks, for every member (e.g. four members equals a +4 bonus).

I.Q., M.E., and M.A. of the Gestalt being is equal to the highest of each from the pool of members (but not added together!). The Gestalt being rolls its own education level, picking Skill Programs and Secondary Skills from those its members have.

91-00%: Mind of its own. The joining of the minds creates a different and unique (but consistent) personality. Thus, the Gestalt being may have goals and desires opposite the individuals, and may not want to ever separate to its component parts. More than likely, though, it will be a heroic persona. There is a 01-60 percent chance that the Gestalt members will have no recollection of what their alter ego did, and will have to hear about it from others and/or read about it in the papers.

I.Q., M.E., M.A., skills and education are determined separately for the Gestalt being in this case, with no regard to the mental attributes of the members.

What powers does the Physical Gestalt being possess?

01-20%: One Major Super Ability and two Minor abilities.

21-40%: One Major Super Ability and one Minor ability.

41-60%: Three Minor Super Abilities (no Major powers).

61-80%: Four Minor Super Abilities (no Major powers).

81-90%: Unstable! Every time the Gestalt being is formed, roll one Major Super Ability, noting any combat adjustments on the side because they won't last. Each time the hero is pulled together for action, it goes in with a different Major Super Ability.

91-00%: Combined Physical Might. The Gestalt has no official super abilities. Instead, the physical attributes (that's P.S., P.P., P.E., P.B., Spd, Hit Points, and S.D.C.) of all the individual members are added together to create a perfect being, with all appropriate attribute adjustments. The greater the number of members, the more astounding the Gestalt being becomes, but standard attribute maximums still apply (G.M.s may wish to limit this to two and three person teams).

Other Stuff

Level of Education and Skill Selection: Depends on who controls the Gestalt. See above.

Hand to Hand Combat: Dependant on who is in control of the Gestalt. If the being has a mind of its own, however, combat skills must be selected as per usual.

Attacks Per Melee (Hand to Hand): The Gestalt being begins with two attacks per melee round. Additional attacks are developed through hand to hand combat and other combat skills or super abilities. The Gestalt being DOES NOT add together the attacks and combat bonuses of all of its members.

Weapons and Armor: The problems of having equipment in the right place at the right time usually prevent any burdening down with gadgetry, guns, etc.

Alignment: Any alignment can be selected, but the Gestalt character is usually of an extreme alignment. Thus, Principled if a hero and Diabolic if a villain.

Structural Damage Capacity (S.D.C.): Unless noted otherwise, the Physical Gestalt being has a base of 10 S.D.C. for every member that combines to form it. S.D.C. can be increased through taking Physical skills (only when the Gestalt itself has separate skills) and certain super abilities.

The percentage of physical harm done to the Gestalt being is also subtracted from the health of the group's members when the Gestalt splits apart. Thus, if the Gestalt being had lost approximately 80% of its S.D.C., so too would the individual members be short 80% of their S.D.C. when the being split. Damage must be recovered by the usual means for the Gestalt being to be at full capacity.

Available Financial Resources: The Gestalt being itself has none. Available cash will depend on the willingness of the individual members to donate to the cause.

Human Psychic Gestalt

This Gestalt type is very similar to the Human Physical Gestalt, in that many non-heroic members are needed to form one super being. The difference between the Psychic Gestalt and the Physical Gestalt is that in this case, the members do not disappear when the Gestalt comes into being; sometimes they might even be able to watch their hero in action.

It is up to the player to come up with the reason for his group being able to call forth a psychic being. Perhaps each has a piece of an ancient amulet that when put together summons an extra-dimensional creature. They might all be spiritualists who can call forth a being from beyond to help them. Coming up with a crazy origin is part of the fun.

No matter the reason for the individuals being able to create a Gestalt being, one thing must be kept in mind; the individual members themselves are not psychics and have no extraordinary abilities whatsoever. The only strange psychic power any of them have is the ability to summon a Gestalt being.

Step One: The Usual

Determining the individual member's attributes, Hit Points, alignment, skills and education are performed as explained in **Heroes Unlimited™**. To determine the number of members in the Psychic Gestalt, roll on the table below. You'll notice that this type can have many more members than the Physical Gestalt.

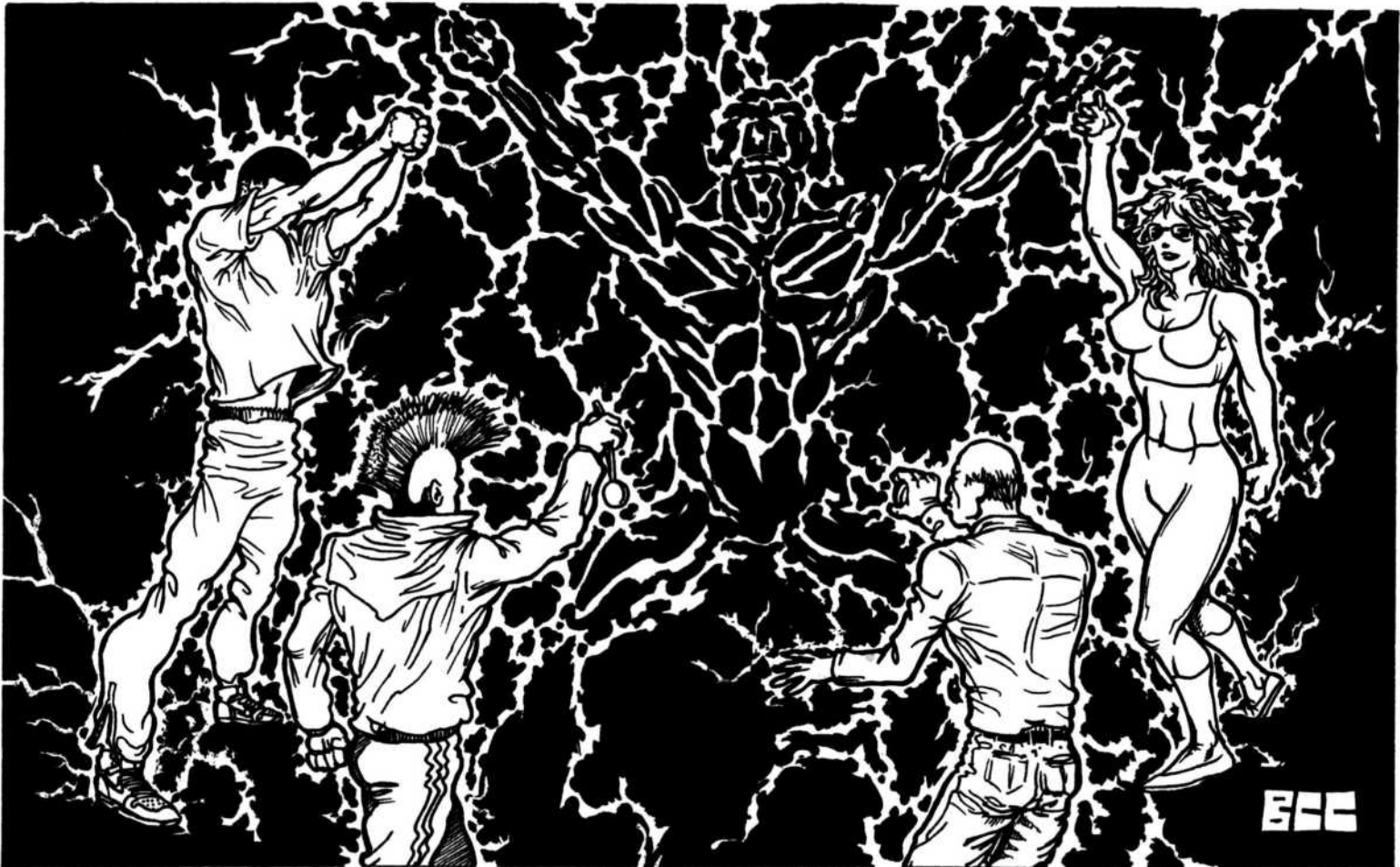
- 01-40%: 2 members
- 41-70%: 3 members
- 71-90%: 4 members
- 91-00%: 4D4 members

Step Two: Education & Skills

For the Psychic Gestalt being, attributes, Hit Points, alignment, skills and education are rolled and calculated separately. The Gestalt could be weaker, slower and dumber than the individual members (hey, not everything from another dimension is a powerhouse).

Step Three: Abilities

The Psychic Gestalt being receives a +1D4 to its M.E. Any other attribute bonuses will only be gained through physical skills and/or super abilities.



The members of the Psychic Gestalt team must all be willing participants to form the Gestalt being, a creature that comes into physical existence through the members' force of will. To form the Gestalt being, all members of the group must be within twenty feet (6.1 m) of one another and spend one minute (four melee rounds) concentrating on bringing the being forth. As long as their concentration isn't broken, the being will appear and perform a task designated by the group. Things such as getting an object, fighting a foe, or conveying a message to someone are acceptable tasks.

The members of the group must continue to concentrate in a seance like fashion for the Gestalt being to stay in existence. Members of the group are aware of their surroundings and not completely incapacitated while concentrating, but being attacked or assaulted will end their concentration. Eight hours is normally the limit to how long a Psychic Gestalt being can be maintained before exhaustion forces the group to quit.

Every time the Psychic Gestalt being is called forth, it is at full Hit Points and S.D.C., recovered from whatever physical ills might have been bothering it at the end of its last venture. The Psychic being will not give up its assigned task due to injury. If killed in the line of duty, the group's summoning ability is over. Insanities, lingering psychic effects and other mental problems acquired by the being will still be present when summoned again, and perhaps (G.M.'s decision) transferred to some or all of the Gestalt group. The team must use care in determining tasks for the Psychic Gestalt being.

The Psychic Gestalt being saves vs. psionic attack, possession, and insanity on a 10 or higher. In addition, a +1 to this saving throw is gained at levels 3, 6, 9 and 13.

The following table is rolled on to determine the Psychic Gestalt being's super abilities:

- 01-15%:** One Major Super Ability and two Minor abilities.
- 16-30%:** Four Minor Super Abilities (no Major powers).
- 31-45%:** Two Major Super Abilities (no Minor powers).
- 46-60%:** Physical psychic. Select ten abilities from the Physical psionic category and one Super psionic power. One new Physical and one new Super psionic ability are selected by the player every other level (3, 5, 7, 9, 11, 13 and 15). Selected Super psionics should be physical and combative in nature. Base I.S.P. is equal to the Gestalt being's M.E. x 2, plus ten for every member of the Gestalt. Ten additional I.S.P. is gained per level of experience.
- 61-75%:** Sensitive/Healing psychic. Select twelve psionic abilities from the Healing and Sensitive categories and one Super psionic power. Two new Sensitive or Healing and one new Super psionic ability are selected by the player every other level (3, 5, 7, 9, 11, 13 and 15). Selected Super psionics should be of a non-combat nature. Base I.S.P. is equal to the Gestalt being's M.E. x 2, plus ten for every member of the Gestalt. Ten additional I.S.P. is gained per level of experience.
- 76-90%:** Two Minor Super Abilities (no Major powers), 1D4 minor psionic powers and one Super psionic power of the player's choice. I.S.P. is equal to the Gestalt being's M.E. x 2. For every level of experience gained, the psychic gains 1D6+1 I.S.P.
- 91-00%:** Mental giant. The Psychic Gestalt being has no super abilities or psionics. Instead, the I.Q., M.E., and M.A. of all

the Gestalt members are added together to calculate the Gestalt being's mental attributes (and yes, they may go beyond 30). The Psychic Gestalt being automatically is of Doctorate level for skills and education. This kind of character will most likely be the super inventor, thinker type, although limited by the funds and time constraints of the group.

Other Stuff

Level of Education and Skill Selection: Unless otherwise noted, the Psychic Gestalt being and individual members of the Gestalt roll standard educational levels and choose skills accordingly.

Hand to Hand Combat: Combat skills are not automatic for the Psychic Gestalt being and must be chosen as a learned skill.

Attacks Per Melee (Hand to Hand): The Psychic Gestalt being gets two attacks per melee round. Additional attacks are developed through hand to hand combat and other combat skills, or special abilities.

Weapons and Armor: Usually none, as the Psychic Gestalt being springs to life from nowhere.

Alignment: Any alignment can be selected, but the being will be under direct orders from the group, no matter what its alignment.

Structural Damage Capacity (S.D.C.): Unless otherwise mentioned, the Psychic Gestalt being has 10 S.D.C. for every member of the Gestalt group. Physical skills and super abilities may increase the S.D.C. of the character.

Available Financial Resources: The Psychic Gestalt being has nothing and is totally dependant upon the Gestalt group for any monetary needs it might have.

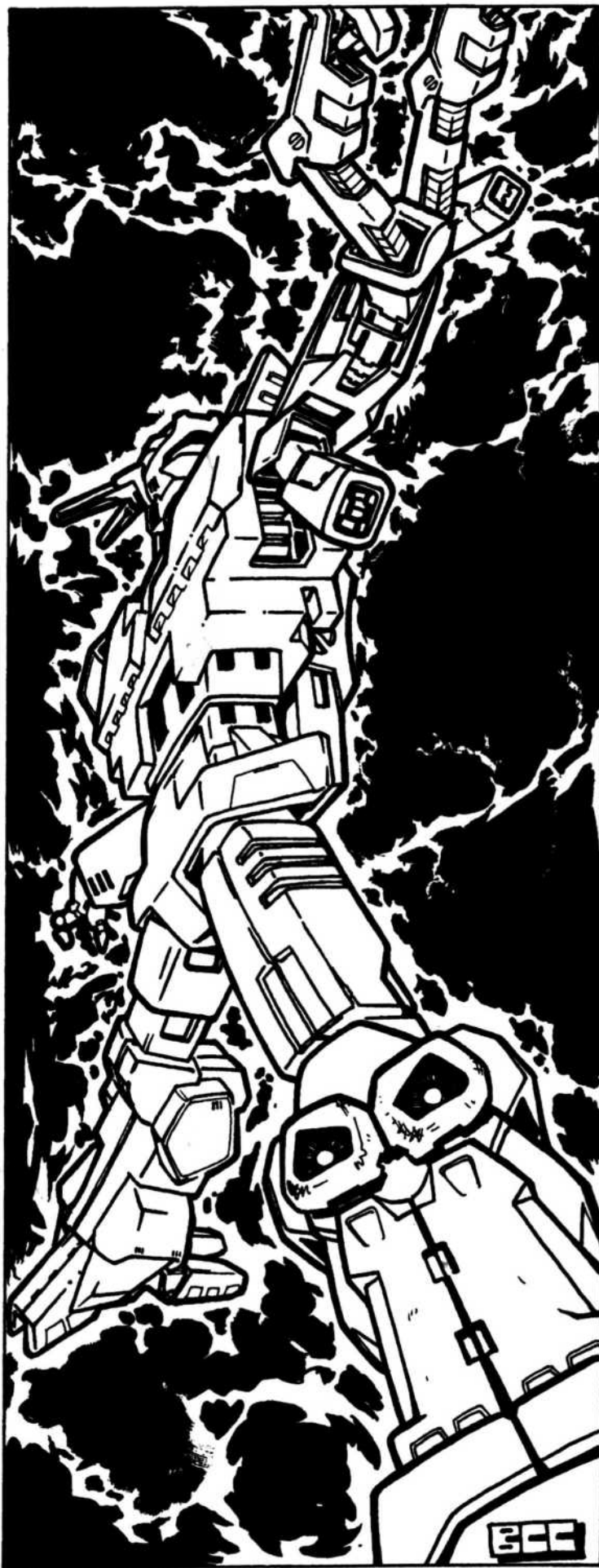
Robotic Gestalt

The Robotic Gestalt character is created almost exactly like the standard robotic character as described in **Heroes Unlimited™**, with the player determining a budget and building the bot from there. The main difference between the standard robot and the Robotic Gestalt is that the budget is divided among two to five weaker robots.

It is the player's choice how many weaker robots make up the Gestalt team, but it generally should be no more than five; otherwise the player will just end up with a group of walking light bulbs. Standard construction rules are used, except that robot intelligence and power supply need only be purchased once from the lump budget for all of the little bots. After that, the money is divided as evenly as possible between the robots in the Gestalt.

As might be guessed, the weaker robots can shift into one another in one melee round (15 seconds) to form a larger, more powerful robot. No mass disappears in the making of this robot, so the Robotic Gestalt being will always be larger than its constituents. The Robot Gestalt's intelligence and power supply will be the same as the smaller robots, but the player may build the rest entirely differently. The completed puzzle can be quite different from the parts.

The Robotic Gestalt tends to be composed of mechanical or vehicular body types, but anything can happen. In all other regards besides those mentioned, the Robotic Gestalt character conforms to the robot power category as described in **Heroes Unlimited™**.



General Advantages and Disadvantages to Playing a Gestalt Character

To many players and G.M.s, the Gestalt power category may sound too "over the top" in terms of powers, abilities and advantages that would come with the class. In fact, it may seem that a person choosing to play a Gestalt is getting three or four characters for the price of one.

In some ways, yes, the Gestalt, especially Physical and Psychic, have advantages over the other power types. After all, assuming all the members get along and the player rolled fairly high to determine group membership, one player's character(s) could be making five times the money, doing footwork five times as fast, and being five times the pain in the G.M.'s neck, compared to the rest of the group. None of this could be done while in their heroic form, of course, but in an investigative or heavy role-playing campaign, the Gestalt player could usurp much of the G.M.'s time.

All of the above assumes, however, that the Gestalt group gets along. What if each member of the group must roll randomly for alignment? What if the different factions that get control have vastly differing views on what it means to be a hero? What if one member of the group keeps trying to elude the others and doesn't want to be a hero? With the Gestalt character, the G.M. should be allowed to make at least a few of the members NPCs, so the player won't have complete control (unless the player is already doing a fabulous job of playing four people at once).

The biggest disadvantages for the Animal Gestalt are personality and appearance. For the Physical, Psychic and Robotic Gestalts, an even greater threat looms; being split up. Each member of the group is certainly weaker than the heroic counterpart, and any villain that learns of the Gestalt's secret will surely attempt to divide and conquer.

If even one member of the group is missing, killed or destroyed there is NO WAY for the group to form their heroic counterpart. With one member permanently gone, the Gestalt's heroic career is over. A player will have to be almost paranoid in protecting his or her secret and keeping the group's identities under wraps.

Despite all of this, if the advantages still seem too great, but a player is desperate to make a Gestalt hero, then the G.M. could enforce other limitations. Such drawbacks could include only being able to join for a few hours each day or week, only being able to form on certain days, or a vulnerability that causes the being to instantly split apart. Such limitations are often what make a character challenging and fun to play.

The Gestalt Campaign

Another interesting take on this power category is to have every member of the Gestalt group be a player character. Such a campaign would require a lot of teamwork and stress player interaction. After all, if one person bites the dust, there goes the Gestalt. It could also be a chance for a G.M. to run a lower-powered campaign, since there would always be just one hero with super abilities.

With every member a player character, exceptions could be made to the previously stated rule of all members being weak and non-powered. The Gestalt campaign could be crossed over to or with other Palladium games to make for something different. For example, a group of psychics from **Beyond the Supernatural**® could form a psychic, vampire-hunting Gestalt. A hidden shrine could house martial artists from **Ninjas and Superspies**™ that know an ancient secret which allows them to join into a Physical Gestalt martial arts master. It's even conceivable that the Coalition in **Rifts**® has done some strange experiments that could have produced any of the Gestalt natures.

In any case, the Gestalt is there to add a new level of challenge and strangeness to the world your characters live in. Use it in whatever way it will accomplish that goal best.

GESTALT NPCs

By Wayne Smith

Below are a few examples of Gestalt Heroes and Villains, to give players and Game Masters a few ideas on how this power category may be used. You may notice that in a few instances, these NPCs may not follow the strict letter of the rules. This was done only to illustrate the point that these rules are only guidelines, to be used, modified or discarded by the G.M. to make for a better campaign.

Heroes

Fly Boy

Fly Boy is a superhero whose body is composed entirely of flies. He patrols the streets of the city he lives in, as a giant swarm of houseflies, and forms a body out of them when he sees an injustice that need to be righted. He's been doing this for two years now, and he still doesn't know exactly how he got started.

He thinks his name used to be Danny Westlake. He has a faint memory of running away from home when he was 14 years old. He's not sure why, but he's sure there must have been a good reason he was happier living on the street than with his parents. Fly Boy thinks he might have been homeless for a year or two, but he doesn't really remember much of his street life, either. What he does know is that he was abducted.

From what he can piece together from the memories he does have, he's pretty sure that someone performed experiments on him. He has no idea who, or why, but he does know that the experiments killed him, or at least, the boy known as Danny Westlake. He knows this because one of his first clear memories is of floating in the air above a garbage dump, staring down at a body — his body.

As far as he can figure, his spirit — or consciousness, or soul, or whatever — left his body that day, and was absorbed by a swarm of flies. He quickly learned that if he concentrates, he

can form a body out of them. It's not a pretty sight, but it gets the job done. And that job is fighting crime.

Fly Boy sees himself as the protector of the downtrodden. He believes that the reason he was allowed, by whatever force or power, to remember where he came from, was so that he would be motivated to keep the same thing from happening to others. Therefore, he has done his best to focus on them, defending those that most people couldn't care less about. It's not a glamorous job, but then what can a guy made out of flies expect?

Real Name: Formerly Danny Westlake.

Other Aliases: Superfly, Street Fly, and "My God, what is that thing?"

Alignment: Scrupulous.

Attributes: I.Q.: 11, M.E.: 15, M.A.: 8, P.S.: 18, P.P.: 15, P.E.: 14, P.B.: 5, Spd.: 10 (240 mph/384 km flying).

Height: 5 feet, 8 inches (1.73 m).

Weight: Surprisingly heavy, 200 pounds (90 kg).

Experience Level: 3rd level superhero.

Hit Points: 23

S.D.C.: 130; **Natural A.R.:** 12

Disposition: People generally run away from Fly Boy in fear, even those he is protecting. He doesn't mind, though; he realizes his job is a thankless one. He is just thankful he has little memory of what it was like to be human, so he doesn't truly appreciate what he has lost.

Appearance: His physical body is an undulating, humanoid mass of houseflies.

Power Category: Animal Gestalt.

Gestalt Abilities: Dissipation and Reformation, Selective Intangibility.

Major Super Abilities: None.

Minor Super Abilities: Fight: Wingless.

Combat: Hand to Hand: Expert.

Number of Attacks: 4, +1 in flight.

Bonuses: +2 to roll, +2 to pull punch, +3 to parry, +3 to dodge, +2 to strike, and +2 to initiative. In flight, he gets an additional +2 to strike, +2 to parry, +4 to dodge under 80 mph (128 km), +6 dodge at higher speeds, and +4 to damage per 20 mph (32 km).

Night Shift

A few years ago, the residents in a tight-knit neighborhood in a crime-ridden city were desperate to fight the criminals that had taken control of their streets. The local police were overworked, and of little help. A few of them even considered vigilantism, but they lacked the experience, raw physical ability, and frankly, courage, to be up to the task.

A few of the older members of the community longed for the old days, when their neighborhood had a champion to keep the criminal element at bay. He went by the name of Night Shift, and he was a well-known vigilante/hero in the 1920's-1930's.

Bob Smith, one of the members of the mostly ineffective neighborhood watch group, was curious about this old hero, and took it upon himself to do some research on him. He scoured the local library, and old public records from the time, and learned a lot from old newspaper accounts of Night Shift's heroics. But then he found something strange.

Night Shift had died a rather mysterious death. The records officially showed that he was killed by a bomb, planted by a local criminal organization. But the rumors at the time were that Night Shift himself had caused the explosion. There was even a much-criticized biography written about the masked hero, which included all sorts of theories about his death, and what was allegedly a suicide note written by Night Shift himself. Bob eventually tracked down a copy of this old book, which had been out of print for decades.

Within the book's pages was indeed Night Shift's alleged suicide note. If the author of the book is to be believed, Night Shift thought that his work was done in the city, for the time being. He knew that one day he would need to return, however, and left instructions on how to bring him back from the dead! Apparently, Night Shift had begun to dabble in the occult in his later years, and actually believed he could be resurrected, if he was truly needed.

Bob read this and was filled with hope. He had found the answer to their prayers, and the directions were right in this book. His neighbors were somewhat more difficult to convince, but eventually he got them to give it a try. He and seven other concerned and desperate citizens performed the ceremony as described in the book, and to their astonishment, it worked.

Ever since then, the eight of them have summoned Night Shift whenever the community has truly needed his help. He appears every time, and gladly does what needs to be done, vanishing immediately thereafter. He will not discuss his past, or anything else, in fact. The group must have a specific objective in mind when they summon him, and when he has accomplished that, he disappears until the next time he is needed.

Real Name: Unknown.

Alignment: Scrupulous.

Attributes: I.Q.: 8, M.E.: 14, M.A.: 8, P.S.: 23, P.P.: 23, P.E.: 19, P.B.: 14, Spd.: 37.

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

Weight: 190 lbs (85.5 kg).

Experience Level: 5th level superhero.

Hit Points: 39

S.D.C.: 98

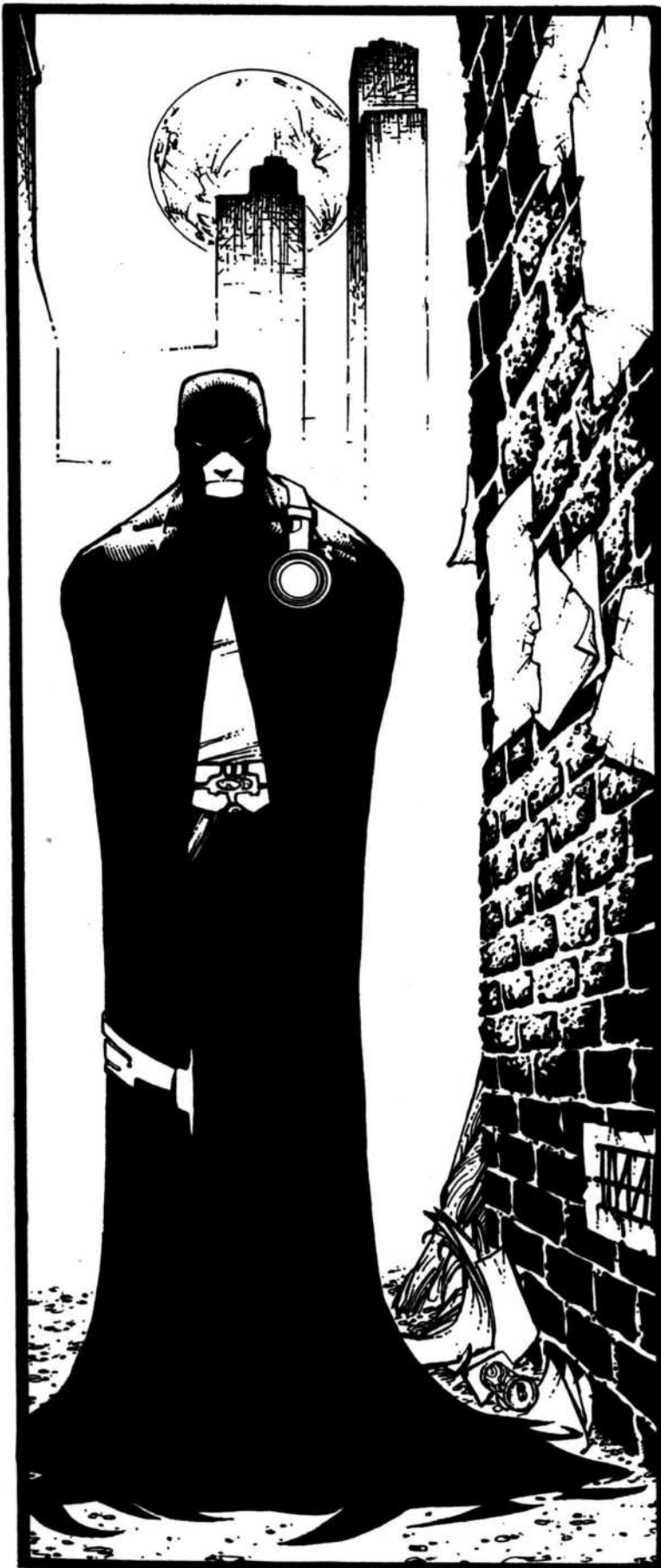
Disposition: Night Shift is all business. He never says much, and is always focused on the task at hand.



Education Level and Skills: Street Schooled:

Street Skills: Literacy: English (34%), Streetwise (+14%), Prowl (+5%), W.P. Knife, Concealment, Find Contraband & Illegal Weapons, Pick Locks, Sewing, Sing, Law (General), Language: Spanish.

Secondary Skills: Hand to Hand: Expert, Palming, Pick Pockets, Art, W.P. Blunt, W.P. Chain, W.P. Revolver.



Appearance: A tall, very athletic man in a black mask and a flowing, black cloak.

Power Category: Human Psychic Gestalt.

Major Super Abilities: None.

Minor Super Abilities: Extraordinary Physical Prowess, Mental Stun.

Psionics: Mind Block, Telekinesis (Super).

I.S.P.: 48

Combat: Hand to Hand: Martial Arts.

Number of Attacks: 6

Bonuses: +8 to parry, +8 to dodge, +3 to auto-dodge, +6 to strike, +4 to roll, +3 to pull punch, +2 to initiative, +8 to damage.

Education Level and Skills: Trade School:

Espionage Skill Program (+15%): Hand to Hand: Martial Arts, Detect Ambush, Intelligence, Wilderness Survival, Interrogation, Tracking.

Police/Law Enforcement Skill Program (+15%): W.P. Revolver, Radio: Basic, Criminal Science (without Forensic Medicine), Law (General), Streetwise.

Secondary Skills: Climb (+10%), Running, Swimming, Prowl (+10%), Athletics, Body Building & Weight Lifting, First Aid, Pilot Automobile.

Villains

Bubonic

Dr. Ronald Hibbard was once an average scientist working in a government disease control laboratory. He was never anything special, as far as research scientists go, and spent years in the same position, getting passed up for promotions, and watching many of his colleagues move on to high-paying jobs with pharmaceutical firms and other companies. Always being the kind of man to blame everyone else for his shortcomings, Hibbard grew more and more resentful, and eventually turned to a life of crime.

Dr. Hibbard began conducting his own experiments with deadly diseases, and hired thugs to perpetrate all sorts of crimes to fund his research. He liked to be known as "ChemEvil," and was pretty small-time for a supervillain, but he had big plans, and was well on his way to really making a name for himself.

That's when Dr. Hibbard had a little accident. The Doctor knew full well that when working with diseases, one can't be too careful. But when on a limited budget, and without all the proper equipment and safeguards, bad things can happen. A modified, fast-acting strain of Bubonic Plague got loose in his basement laboratory, and Hibbard died in a matter of minutes.

But the world had not seen the last of ChemEvil. His spirit had somehow survived, and, frightened and confused, he found his way to the sewers of the city. After weeks of roaming the sewers, Hibbard discovered he had influence over rats, and eventually learned he could draw them together and actually make a sort of body out of them. He spent the following months exploring the extent of his newfound powers.

Hibbard has spent the last two years gathering everything he needed to continue his research. He controls an army of rats, which he uses as his defenders, couriers, and test subjects. He has set up a new lab in the sewers, and is planning on releasing a strain of the Plague, similar to that which killed him, and spreading it throughout the city with his rat subjects. He would



have done so already, but he is having a bit of trouble developing one that will spread and kill quickly, yet will not kill his rats before they can deliver it effectively.

Real Name: Dr. Ronald Hibbard (deceased).

Other Aliases: The Rat Man; known as ChemEvil in his former life.

Alignment: Diabolic.

Attributes: I.Q.: 18, M.E.: 11, M.A.: 9, P.S.: 12, P.P.: 8, P.E.: 15, P.B.: 4, Spd.: 13.

Height: Seven feet (2.1 m).

Weight: 250 lbs (112.5 kg).

Experience Level: 5th level supervillain.

Hit Points: 34

S.D.C.: 95

Disposition: Ronald Hibbard was an evil, bitter man who blamed the world for all of his problems when he was alive. His death and consequential transformation into a rat-monster haven't improved his mood much.

Appearance: Appears as a seven foot (2.1 m) humanoid form composed of rats, constantly writhing about. He usually attempts to cover himself with a long, tattered trench coat or a white lab coat.

Power Category: Animal Gestalt (Spirit).

Gestalt Abilities: Summon and Control Rats, Horror Factor (10), Dissipation and Reformation, and Animal Psionics.

Psionics: Animal Speech and Telepathic Transmission (neither requires I.S.P.).

Combat: Hand to Hand: Basic.

Number of Attacks: 5

Bonuses: +2 to roll, +2 to pull punch, +2 to parry, +2 to dodge, +1 to strike, +1 to initiative.

Education Level and Skills: Doctorate:

Business Program (+30%): Basic Mathematics, Business & finance, Computer Operation, Law (General), Research.

Medical Doctor Program (+30%): Biology, Chemistry, Pathology, Medical Doctor.

Science Program (+30%): Advanced Mathematics, Anthropology, Botany, Chemistry: Analytical.

Technical Program (+30%): General Repair/Maintenance, Language: German, Photography, Writing.

Secondary Skills: Pilot Automobile, Speak English (+25%), Read and Write English (+20%), Cook, Sewing, Basic Electronics, Holistic Medicine, Prowl, Swimming, Concealment, W.P. Revolver.

Darcanis

This villain was created when a demon performed a sort of "group possession" on a group of four archeologists, who discovered the tomb where he had been cursed to lay dormant for centuries. They were unaware that anything had happened, and after their work was completed at the dig site, they returned to their individual, ordinary lives in the city in which they all lived. A few days later, a strange thing happened one night. They were each doing their own thing, sitting at home, at the movies, sleeping, etc., when they all suddenly vanished. A few hours later, they all regained consciousness, together, in an alley. Needless to say, they were all very confused.

They spent the next three months trying to figure out what had occurred that night, and then it happened again. This time

they reappeared on a rooftop, in another area of the city. When it happened again three months later, they began to see a pattern. Every time it happened, it was at midnight, on the night of an Equinox or Solstice. From their collective studies, they new that some ancient cultures believed that these were times when magical energies were in abundance. They still didn't know exactly what was going on, however, and simply had to keep looking.

About a month later, they were back at the dig site were the possession (still unknown to them) occurred, investigating the possibility that their discoveries there had something to do with what was going on. Unknown to them, the site was on a ley line nexus, and the first night they spent there, at the stroke of midnight, the four of them disappeared. They awoke a few hours later, horrified to find all of their assistants at the site killed and the camp site in shambles. The dig site appeared to have been vandalized and deliberately caved in.

The demon that possessed these archeologists had been bound to the dig site by an ancient curse. He was desperate to get out, and when they came along, he found a way to do just that. His essence is now within the four scientists, split between them. Unfortunately for him, because of the curse, he can only take control of the archeologists when he can gather sufficient magical energy (P.P.E.) from his (their) surroundings, and only at night. This pretty much limits him to the Summer and Winter Solstices, Vernal and Autumnal Equinoxes, Lunar and Solar Eclipses (and only the short time the sun is blocked for that last

one), and any time all four of the archeologists are within two miles (3.2 km) of a ley line or nexus point at midnight.

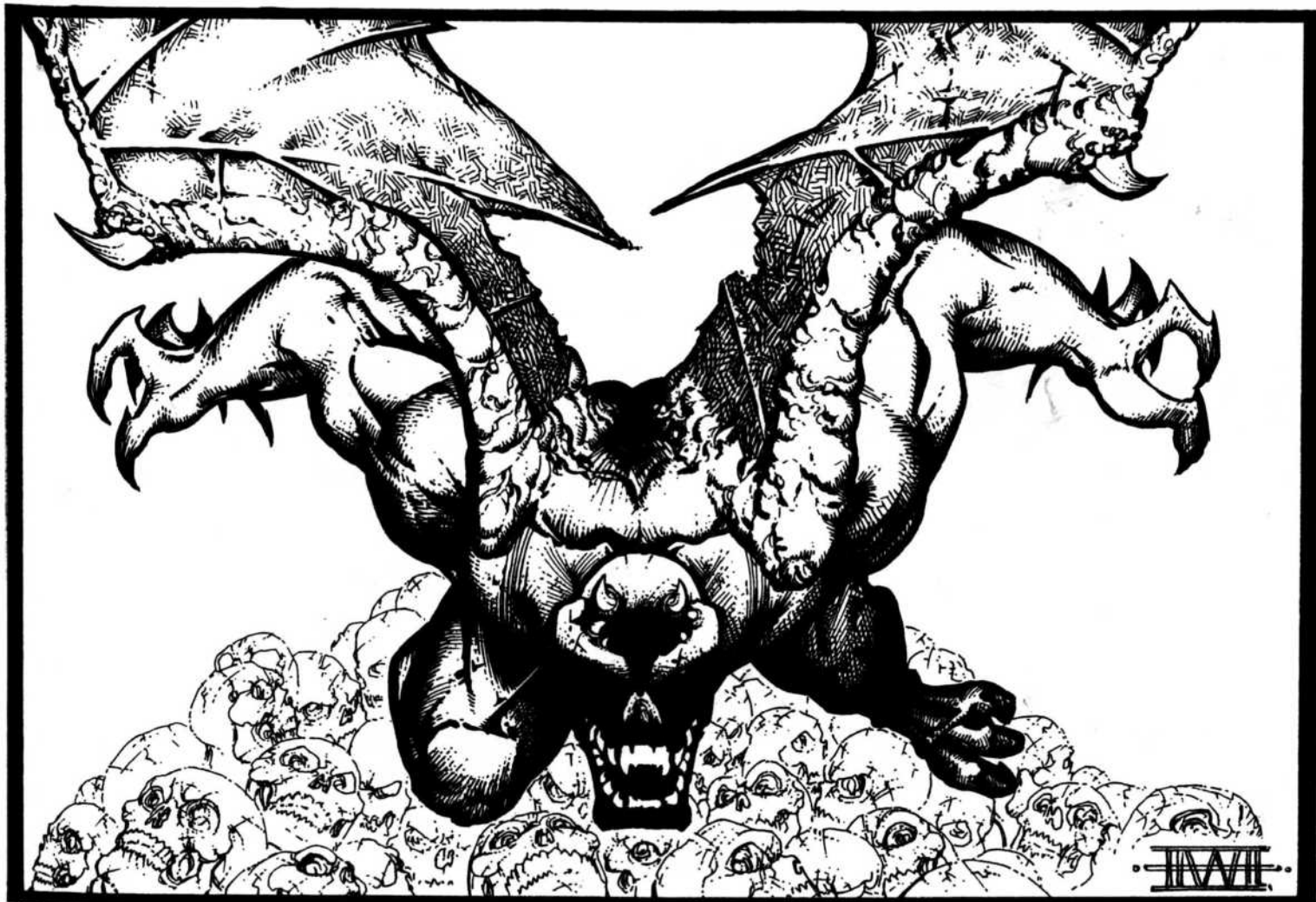
Now that he has realized his limitations, he is eagerly searching for a way he can take control whenever he wishes, which of course would be every night. Short of somehow trapping the archeologists near a ley line every morning before he disappears, he believes his best chance would be to acquire some sort of amulet or talisman to provide him with the required magical energy, so he wouldn't need a ley line or celestial event.

When he is able to take control, he appears at the exact mid-point between the four archeologists, wherever they are on Earth (accounting for the curvature of the Earth, that is; he will always appear above ground). Their bodies disappear when this happens. When daylight approaches, he is forced to go back into hiding, and their four bodies reappear where the demon had last stood. The archeologists are starting to figure this out, and so they try not to travel too far from each other, lest they wake up hundreds, if not thousands, of miles from where they were before they disappeared.

The four archeologists still have no idea what's causing their troubles, however. One of their theories is some sort of group sleepwalking phenomenon. They haven't got a clue how they end up together every time, and they are not looking forward to the next Solstice or Equinox.

Real Name: Darconis.

Alignment: Miscreant.



Attributes: I.Q.: 15, M.E.: 18, M.A.: 11, P.S.: 62 (Supernatural), P.P.: 21, P.E.: 22, P.B.: 10 (12), Spd.: 18 (180 mph/288 km flying).

Height: 6 feet, 6 inches (1.98 m).

Weight: 220 lbs (99 kg).

Horror Factor: 13

Experience Level: 3rd level demon.

Hit Points: 30

S.D.C.: 166

Disposition: What can we say? He's a demon. He's evil, and totally consumed by his need to free himself of this curse, so he can be free to cause death and destruction to mankind.

Appearance: A tall, dark-skinned humanoid with large, leathery wings protruding from his back, and small horns on his forehead.

Power Category: Human Physical Gestalt.

Major Super Abilities: Supernatural Strength.

Minor Super Abilities: Flight: Winged, Nightstalking.

Combat: Hand to Hand: Assassin.

Number of Attacks: 6, +1 flying.

Bonuses: +2 to save vs psionic attack or insanity, +4 vs magic or poison, +14% vs coma/death. +2 to initiative, +5 to strike, +7 to pull punch, +9 to roll, +5 to parry, +5 to dodge, and +51 to damage. In flight, he gets an additional +2 to strike, +2 to parry, +4 to dodge under 80 mph (128 km), +6 to dodge at higher speeds, and +4 to damage per 20 mph (32 km).

Education Level and Skills: On The Job Training:

Physical/Athletic Skill Program (+15%): Acrobatics, Boxing, Gymnastics, Wrestling.

Ancient Weapons Skill Program: Paired Weapons, W.P. Sword, W.P. Blunt, W.P. Spear.

Secondary Skills: Hand to Hand: Assassin, Recognize Weapon Quality, Prowl, Concealment, Astronomy, Land Navigation.

Quick stats for the four archeologists:

Jerry Clark: I.Q.: 18, M.E.: 12, M.A.: 11, P.S.: 12, P.P.: 14, P.E.: 9, P.B.: 11, Spd.: 10; Principled alignment; Master's Degree, Science, Technical, Business and Language Skill Programs; 36 years old.

Mike Roenick: I.Q.: 16, M.E.: 14, M.A.: 9, P.S.: 8, P.P.: 12, P.E.: 8, P.B.: 9, Spd.: 9; Principled alignment; Pd.D., Science, Technical and two Language Skill Programs; 39 years old.

Sue Blanchard: I.Q.: 17, M.E.: 11, M.A.: 13, P.S.: 9, P.P.: 13, P.E.: 12, P.B.: 14, Spd.: 15; Scrupulous alignment; Master's Degree, Science, Business, and two Technical Skill Programs; 33 years old.

Dan Fellsworth: I.Q.: 16, M.E.: 15, M.A.: 13, P.S.: 15, P.P.: 13, P.E.: 13, P.B.: 14, Spd.: 16; Scrupulous alignment; Bachelor's Degree, Science, Technical, Language and Journalist/Investigation Skill Programs; 28 years old.

BTS Adventures

Trouble in the Midwest

An adventure for
Beyond the Supernatural®

By Blake Trzpuć
Designed for 3-5 low level characters.

Setting and Background

The characters have been contacted to investigate a ritual killing. Characters can be hired to help investigate the scene from any number of sources, police connections, government agencies, or hired by an anonymous individual. The characters are asked to fly to Minneapolis, Minnesota where the victim was found murdered in a ritualistic fashion. While the characters were arriving in Minneapolis, police had already begun to conduct the investigation, and so the adventure begins...

Act One: Just another day on the job.

The body of Alexis Hagan, a 32 year old female, was found at approximately 11am Central Time by a pair of adolescents. Reports from the adolescents indicate they didn't see anyone exiting the area, nor did they notice any unusual individuals in the area. The body of Alexis Hagan was found attached to the underside superstructure of the Robert Street Bridge, a bridge leading over the Mississippi into the main business district downtown. The body was found attached to the bridge over 20 feet (6 m) above the shoreline. The alarming fact of this gruesome murder is the killer took the time to drill ten holes in the steel superstructure and then secured the body to it by bolting the body to the under side of the bridge during a rush hour.

The body is taken down from the bridge through the use of a ladder from a fire engine. Upon inspection, the authorities and characters alike notice the body has been brutally disfigured.

Besides the body, several other pieces of evidence are around. Two large triangles facing one another, in an hourglass shape, are located directly under where the body was attached.

A standard background check of the woman will reveal she was a worker for the city in the records division for city hall. The victim's belongings appeared to have been rifled through, implying the killer had been looking for something.

Looking around the scene of the crime, an officer has just located a small jagged imprint in the clay shore. *A successful roll versus intelligence attribute will alert the characters that the imprint is similar to a set of keys dropped. A character possessing the Locksmith or Pick Locks skills will automatically notice the keys as similar to keys used for city or government building. The characters should then be given further clues if necessary to lead them to investigate the victim's office.*

Inspection of the victim's office confirms the killer had been there. The victim's keys dangle from the lock. The office has been ransacked and was left in shambles. Located on the desk is a box of manila folders. The exterior of the box identifies the box's contents, copies of birth certificates from seven years ago. Many of the files from the box have been discarded about the floor. One folder on the desk, however, lays neatly on the desk-top. Though the folder is empty, a label with the name "Sarah Chilson" typed neatly on it confirms whom the file belonged to. **Note to G.M.:** *From this point quick-thinking characters will have their characters attempt to gather information on Sarah Chilson. If the characters look-up Sarah Chilson they will find she was given up for adoption at birth. Further evidences shows her biological parents were murdered shortly after Sarah's birth.*

Act Two: Fox hunt.

Around 2pm Central Time, the characters receive a call from the Fargo Police Department in North Dakota, reporting a second ritualized murder. The characters' help is once again requested. *Most flights out of town are experiencing long delays or cancellations, due to weather conditions. The dark sky and blowing wind are definite signs of an approaching thunderstorm. Whether the characters wait for a plane or travel by car, they'll arrive in Fargo approximately four hours later, around 6pm.*

When the characters reach the scene of the second murder, they will learn the Fargo Police Department has already identified the second body as Ruben Brown, a 28-year-old male. They reported the body was found in his home, after he failed to show up at his job as a social worker for an adoption agency. The police located the body upon arrival at the scene by looking into the victim's living room window. The body appeared to have several visible wounds. After seeing the body, one of the local police attempted to force open the front door. As the officer kicked the door, an explosion threw the officer back like a rag doll. The officer was severely injured from the explosion and has been rushed to the hospital. The demolition team has been called in, and has identified the explosive device as a homemade charge quite ingenious in design.

The characters arrive in time to see the bomb squad clearing the house of numerous booby traps and explosives. The characters can enter the house and look around when they've finished. **Note to G.M.:** *Make sure to emphasize the large quantity of ex-*

plosives carried out by the bomb squad, and the varied types — everything from claymore mines to homemade bombs.

Upon investigation of the house the characters will see that the victim was killed in a similar fashion to the first. The contents of the man's pockets lay sprawled around the body and keys are nowhere to be found. Should the characters search the man's office at the adoption agency, they will discover it was ransacked and a file on Sarah Chilson is again found empty, except for a baby picture of her. The photograph shows that Sarah has an almost perfect hourglass-shaped birthmark on her upper right arm. If the characters question Mr. Brown's coworkers, they will remember Sarah's case. Sarah Chilson was placed in foster care in Grand Forks, North Dakota while she awaited adoption, the name of the foster family is easily accessible.

Act Three: Welcome home.

The characters will arrive in Grand Forks, North Dakota in about an hour's drive. The roads are beginning to become difficult to drive on, as strong winds and misty rain reduce visibility. Grand Forks is a small Midwestern city with around 50,000 people. The characters are able to easily locate the house of the foster family. As the characters approach the house, they see a set of bloody fingerprints on the outer doorframe. Inside the foster house the characters find a gruesome sight. The foster mother and father have been murdered, and a young girl sobs, clinging to the foster mother's lifeless body. The sleeve on the little girl's right arm has been torn, suggesting the killer was looking for a birthmark. The little girl is in shock and is incoherent, so the characters will not get any information from her for awhile. Outside the house, the neighbors are beginning to gather and become inquisitive and may accidentally destroy evidence just by walking around. **Note to G.M.:** *Suggest to the characters that notifying the city police would be a good idea, if they haven't already done so.*

Once the police arrive they will immediately begin taping off the yard. The neighbors outside continue to gather, and the police begin to examine the scene. *If the players question the neighbors, a few of them will remember Sarah Chilson vividly, and describe her as full of life and always kind. If asked about the right arm, the neighbors will tell the characters Sarah had an hourglass shaped birthmark. Though the neighbors do not know what happened to Sarah, they will remember that she was adopted by some family around the age of five. One of the neighbors seems to recall that the foster family had files on their foster children hidden in the house.*

After an extensive search of the house, the characters will find a small stack of files hidden in a box in a back closet. The files will indicate that Sarah Chilson was adopted by the Pietsch family, in a small farming community approximately 230 miles (368 km) away. The current address of the Pietsch family is also included in the file. Outside, weather conditions are quickly deteriorating and a thunderstorm begins to pour from overhead. The sheet lightning prevents the characters from taking a flight.

Act Four: On the road again...

The thunderstorm is relentless. The pouring rain outside impairs visibility; blurred images can be seen at best. A strong crosswind blows the car around the road like a toy. Water begins to pool on the road, making the drive extremely dangerous.



Driving at a slow speed (six hour drive instead of four) will help to avoid hydroplaning off the road. **Note to G.M.:** *Advise the characters they may attempt to drive at the normal speed if they wish. Should they choose to do so, have the driver roll a Pilot: Automobile at a -20% for each hour. A failed roll means the car hydroplanes off the road and gets stuck in mud, requiring another vehicle to pull it out. Because of the weather the roads are pretty deserted, and a tow truck will take two hours to arrive assuming the characters have a way to call one. A four wheeled vehicle can get out, but one hour of effort is required to get free from the deepening mud.*

Act Five: Come out, come out, wherever you are.

When the characters have arrived at the farming community, it is late into the night and the weather has not let up. The small community is a collection of vast crop fields, only divided by the narrow gravel roads. There are few signs or visible markers to help direct the characters to the farm. **Note to G.M.:** *A successful Land Navigation skill check is required to reach the farm in minimal time. Assuming the characters are successful, they will navigate gravel roads through dozens of wheat and sunflower fields to the isolated Pietsch farm. The Pietsch farm is a gigantic crop farm hidden away by hundreds of acres of wheat, tall sunflower fields and corn. The pitch black night skies and rain reduce visibility to near zero. Sight is possible thanks only to the sheet lightning and the headlights of the car. Portable light sources seem to be drowned out in the pounding rain.*

Scattered about the farm are several building shapes that can barely be distinguished. There is a guest house, several grain si-

los, a chicken coop, barn, storage shed, pond, and the main farmhouse with attached garage. The closest building is the storage shed, and the guest house nearby has a single porch light flickering in the rain, the only sign of life in the night.

Buildings and Landscape

Storage Shed

As the characters approach the storage shed, they can just barely hear the faint sound of a diesel engine running, almost inaudible in the rain and thunder. *If the characters open the door, they see a string attached to the top of the door snap, and notice that it leads to the cab of a combine. A man with a gag over his mouth has been hogtied to the thrashing blades, and as the string breaks the blades begin spinning, killing the man with a sickly noise.*

If the characters look around they will find a tool rack against the wall empty, with the dusty outlines of axes, scythes, sledge hammers, and many other tools missing from the walls.

Chicken Coop

The Chicken Coop is a run down, whitewashed building in bad need of repair. The coop from the outside is overly quiet. Inside the coop scattered around is a collection of chickens, their bodies dismembered. Lying on the ground besides the chicken parts is a bloody scythe.

Grain Silos

A collection of three grain silos. Opening the doors will cause grain to come pouring out of the silos. Nothing of importance is at this location.

Pond

The pond is a murky, and a pungent odor lingers. The pond appears to have shapes of objects just below the surface. The shapes seen are refuse from the family. Nothing of importance is at this location.

Guest House

The guest house is slightly run down, and in need of cosmetic work, but even in its current condition it has an inviting look, especially in this rain, with the porch light on, and dim light radiating from the curtained window. *Inspection of the windows will reveal they have been spray painted over, hiding the contents inside. Should a window be broken it will activate a nail bomb facing toward the window. Any characters within 6 feet (1.8 m) of the window will take 3D6 S.D.C. A successful roll with punch/fall roll will reduce the damage by half.*

At the top of the porch, there is a claymore that is highly visible. *It is not functional however. It is meant only to draw the characters' attention away from the land mines. The porch is rigged with several mines. If a character steps on the porch they will trigger a mine and take damage. There are a total of four mines. If the characters are cautious they will only activate the first one. If they are not cautious, have each character who steps on the porch roll a D6. On a roll of one or a two the character has stepped on another mine. A successful demolition roll can disarm any mine that has not been triggered. Mines do 4D6 S.D.C. damage each.*

Inside the house, in the back bedroom the characters will find a man tied to the posts of a bed. He is barely alive; his body has been vivisected (dissected while still alive). The instruments of the man's torture are sprawled around and in the man's open chest. Inside the open chest are various kitchen utensil such as forks, knives, and even scissors, methodically inserted into organs. *A paramedic is needed to stabilize the man, but he is near death and obviously in shock. When he sees the characters he looks at them with a sad face with tears running down his cheeks. "I had to tell him, I wasn't strong enough. He's going to kill her if he hasn't already. You have to stop him! He's insane!" Note to G.M.: At this point the man will either be stabilized by the Paramedic skill or pass away. From the inside of the guest house the characters can see bombs all over the windows and doors. Feel free as G.M. to build up the suspense and toss in more booby traps for more combat oriented or more experienced groups.*

Barn

The Barn has obviously seen decades of use. Its once bright red paint has since faded to a dull crimson. The white trim around the edges of the barn has begun to peel, and the main entrance to the barn is slightly ajar. *Opening the barn door will cause a farm drag to come tumbling down, another one of the killer's booby traps. If the characters are careless entering this building have them roll a dodge verses a target number of 15 or get hit with the spike-covered drag for 5D6 S.D.C.*

Inside the barn the sounds of flies swarming is almost overwhelming. The smell of death lingers heavily in the air. Scattered about barn are multiple blood splatters covering the walls, floor, and ceiling. In the far end of the barn, a ladder leads up into the hayloft. A single trickle of blood drips steadily down

from the hayloft, collecting in a small pool at the base of the ladder. It sounds as though something is swaying heavily above in the hayloft, as the wood creaks and groans.

Should the characters climb the ladder, they will find out it has been booby-trapped. When pressure is applied to the upper rungs, hundreds of gallons of gasoline splashes down on all those on the ladder and around its base. Shortly after the gas has drenched the area, the characters begin to hear the distinct sound of something ticking. A successful demolition skill roll will instantly alert the characters that the noise belongs to an incendiary timer. If they do not have the demolition skill they will have to use common sense to know it is time to run! The characters are not meant to get caught in the explosion, but anyone who does will take 1D4X10 S.D.C. damage. Characters that run are not caught in the explosion, and see the barn explode in a fiery display.

Farmhouse

The farmhouse is a typical one, whitewashed, with a picket fence and a large porch. The rain overflows the gutters. The porch has a dozens of half-dried footprints spread sporadically over the porch, obvious signs it has been tampered with somewhat recently. **Note to G.M.:** *The final action is actually in the basement located under the trap door in the garage, but let the characters feel free to explore around; it will help build up the suspense. Try to make it obvious the windows are painted over like the ones over at the guest house that were rigged, and that porch has obviously been tampered with. This is buying time for the killer to do his ritual. The characters should spend some time figuring this out, but intelligent players may notice the 2nd floor windows have not been sprayed over.*

Once inside the house, the characters will notice again the sounds of flies and the stench of death lingering. The house is dark, lit by the lightning outside. The power to the house has apparently been cut or knocked out by the storm. **Note to G.M.:** *Each room has a different description, and depending on the characters' choice and mode of entrance, use the room descriptions as they enter them in whatever order. Feel free to add more traps or adjust the traps listed to fit the level and abilities of your group.*

Windows

The bottom level of windows has been painted over much like the windows at the guest house. The 2nd story windows are not painted over, but the curtains have been drawn. To enter through the 2nd story windows will require climbing up the overhang of the porch. *All the lower level windows are armed with explosive that can only be disarmed from the inside of the house. Any attempt to break or open the windows will set off the bombs, causing 3D6 S.D.C. to a 6 foot radius (1.8 meters). The 2nd floor windows are rigged with sledge hammers, axes, and whatever other implements the killer could find (a successful detect concealment roll will alert the character of the trap). A climbing skill check is needed to scale up the side of the farmhouse. Careless opening of the windows will cause the weapons to swing down in an arc and possibly strike the character for up to 3D6 S.D.C. (dodge at a 15). Any character struck by the weapons must make a physical prowess attribute check or get knocked off the roof, taking an additional 1D6 S.D.C.*



Porch

The porch is lined under the floorboards with several land mines. *Any pressure on the porch could activate several mines at once, making demolition disposal difficult (-10%).* There are a total of 15 mines beneath the porch. If any character steps on the porch, roll a D6; on a result of 1 or a 2 the character has stepped on a mine. The mines are capable of doing 4D6 S.D.C. to a ten foot (3 meter) radius. To fully cross the porch, a total of three rolls must be made to avoid stepping on mines.

Front Door

The screen door of the farm house bangs violently in the wind. It is barely attached, and could fly off at any second. Behind it is a solid oak door, which is locked. *The killer has rigged the front door so if it is opened (either kicked, lock picked, or any other means) a double-barreled shotgun will fire both barrels simultaneously. (A roll to hit is made for each barrel, but only a single dodge roll is necessary. Compare that dodge roll to the two strike rolls individually, to see if both, one, or neither of the barrels hit the character.) The shotgun will do 4D6 S.D.C. per barrel.*

Front Hallway

There are no traps in this corridor, but there is a cat hiding in the hallway closet, feel free to have the characters hear scratching noises from there. Off to the right, a door leads into the kitchen. Further down the hallway is a staircase leading up. The hallway also leads forward to the living room.

Kitchen

The pea green Formica and matching appliances make the kitchen look like something out of a bad 1950's sitcom. The

characters may notice that the kitchen cutlery is missing, and a thin leather strap is sticking out the edge of the closed refrigerator door. *Inside the fridge is the family rottweiler, still alive, but shivering cold and whimpering. The dog will jump out at who ever opened the door. This should be played as if it were an aggressive action. In actuality, the dog is happy to be free and is trying to tackle and lick the character that set it free. If the dog is attacked, it will fight to the death. If the characters do not kill the dog and treat it kindly, it will follow them around and help them at a later point.*

Quick stats for the rottweiler: S.D.C.: 25, Hit Points: 30, +2 to strike, +5 to dodge.

Living Room

Here in the living, room sitting in their rockers, are grandpa and grandma, decapitated. Judging by the bloodstains on the floor, they were moved here from elsewhere. Alarmingly, the killer took the time to dress them in fresh clean clothes. More disturbing is the fact that the killer neatly folded their blood-stained clothes next to each of the bodies.

Upstairs

The only thing of note upstairs is the body of a woman knocked unconscious, but alive. *She'll be out for a few hours.* The killer appeared to have trashed the room but left a stack of crayon drawings piled neatly next to the woman. *An extremely careful observation will reveal a single water droplet beaded up on the top art piece. The killer actually cried a single tear of remorse for his actions, but believes he must kill Sarah for the good of humanity.*

Garage

Upon initial investigation, the garage has a car inside along with the dusty outlines of many power tools along the wall. The garage is otherwise a mess and filled with hundreds of boxes and serves as a storage area. **Note to G.M.:** *Hidden underneath a tarp in the back of the room is a storm door leading to the cellar. The characters may find this if they search hard enough, or they will find it at the beginning of act six with the scream.*

Act Six: Scream!

Regardless of what has happened so far to the characters, if they have not investigated the garage thoroughly yet, they will hear a scream coming from there. Hidden under a tarp in the corner of the garage is a storm door leading to the basement. Once the door has been opened, whispered chanting echoes from downstairs.

Upon reaching the bottom of the ladder the characters will see from the dim candlelight a small unconsciousness child lying on top of a makeshift table with an hourglass shape drawn around her. There is a circle of blood dripping around the table, and the air hangs heavily with the scent of burning incense. A window is banging against its frame in the storm. A frightened voice speaks to the characters from the shadows in a weak voice, "Help me!" From the darkness a man in his thirties with a frantic and scared look in his eyes approaches the characters. The man is naked and his wrists are slashed. The man's back is covered in what appears to be whip marks. The man again then pleads, "Look what he did to me!" *Should the characters be sufficiently paranoid to search in the area where the man was hid-*

ing, they will find a bloody knife from the kitchen. This man is the killer, but is quite intelligent and will play the characters for fools if he is outnumbered. If the characters begin to search or get paranoid, the bloody man will say the killer was trying to release some sort of spirit that was held in Sarah Chilson's body when the party interrupted him, and he ran out the window in a hurry. If the characters did not kill the rottweiler, the dog will attack the man immediately, giving his identity away. Otherwise, the killer will play the role of a victim, pleading for help and begging the characters to take him away from here. Should the characters believe the man, he will be gentle until he sees a chance to run or get a gun. At that point he will fight or flee. If the characters manage to kill the man, they will see on the inside of his bloody wrists are small, hourglass shaped tattoos.

The Killer

Alignment: Diabolic.

Attributes: I.Q. 20, M.A. 20, M.E. 16, P.S. 15, P.P. 18, P.E. 14, P.B. 8, Spd. 10.

S.D.C.: 38 (adjust according to the power level of the group).

H.P.: 42 (adjust according to the power level of the group).

Natural Abilities: **Damage:** 2D6 S.D.C. or by weapon. **Bonuses:** +3 to strike, +5 to parry and dodge, +5 to roll with punch, +2 to initiative.

Skills: G.M. discretion; whatever skills are useful at the time.

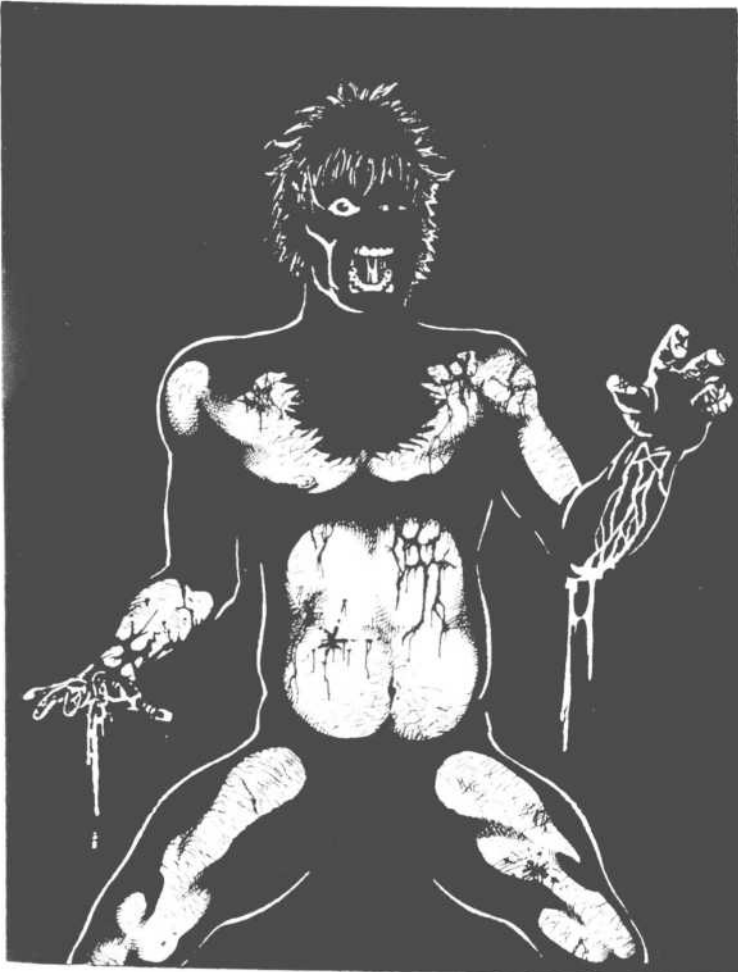
Height: 6 feet (1.8 m).

Weight: 150 lbs (67.5 kg).

Notes: The killer is an average looking man that has been trying to release a spirit that he believe inhabits Sarah Chilson's body. The killer truly believes that by killing Sarah Chilson and all the other people he has killed, he is ultimately making the world a better place.

The Wrap-Up

Eventually, the killer will either outsmart the characters and get away, making him a possible reoccurring threat, or the characters will manage to subdue or kill the man. Either way, the identity of the killer will remain a mystery. Sarah will be cared for by her only surviving relative, her mother. What lies ahead for Sarah Chilson? Does her birthmark have any significance? Is little Sarah really a vessel for some powerful spirit? Was the killer acting alone or as part of a cult? That is an adventure for another time.



Dark Consequences

An adventure for Beyond the Supernatural®

By Russell Brin

Introduction

This adventure is ideal for player characters who are members of a paranormal investigation agency. Recently, there have been a few strange occurrences that the overworked police just can't figure out, and they may have turned to the agency for some help in solving these cases. Otherwise, the player characters could simply have heard about these events on the news.

Background

The following events have happened during the past month:

In the past week, eight children have been kidnapped. None of the abductions have had any witnesses, but a blond woman wearing sunglasses has been spotted in the vicinity around the time of three of the kidnappings. She is wanted for questioning, and remains at large.

Susan Glanick, a single mother of three, gunned down Donovan Smith in front of his eight-year-old son. She works part-time for Arthur Hill Accounting, Ltd. Susan is currently undergoing psychiatric assessment for a trial later in the year. Motive for the killing is not known at this time.

Larry Stillinger was found on his bed with a broken neck and multiple impact wounds to his chest, neck and head. There are signs of a struggle. Larry was a well-known practitioner of Leopard Style Kung Fu and a teacher at a local school. He had no family.

Gary Simon, a prominent executive of Tiger Gas, was found stabbed to death in his bathtub. His wife found his body after she returned from a weekend retreat. The only sign of a struggle is a hole punched through a tile wall, apparently by a huge fist. He was apparently stabbed with a kitchen knife.

Note: So far, the police haven't been able to find a killer in the latter two cases. Susan Glanick is not believed to be a suspect in the other two killings. No connection has been made between the kidnappings of the children and the killings of the three men.

G.M. Data

History of Events

Five years ago, Shelly Chung was dating the criminal mobster Louie Angoletti, who has a history of criminal violence, particularly against women. One night, he and seven of his friends assaulted her in her old apartment. She was beaten nearly to death, then her body was thrown into a dumpster and the garbage was lit on fire. She survived, barely, thanks to the quick thinking of a local store owner. A short investigation into the incident followed, but no charges were ever placed against Angoletti or the other men.

Louie continued to live his violent criminal life. After a few years, Angoletti and the men forgot all about the incident with Shelly Chung. Five months ago, a woman with no criminal record gunned down one of Louie's friends in an amusement park. There was no apparent motive for the killing. A few weeks after that, two more friends were found dead, one with a broken neck and the other from multiple stab wounds. Neither attacker was found. This, combined with escalating violence against his business fronts, has led him to believe that someone with a vendetta against him is gunning after him, although he hasn't even considered Shelly, who he has all but forgotten.

In a seemingly unrelated matter, there has been an increase in the number of child abductions recently, with mothers everywhere fearing for the safety of their children.

NPCs of Note

Shelly Chung

Alignment: Miscreant

Attributes: I.Q. 15, M.E. 15, M.A. 10, P.S. 14, P.P. 8, P.E. 15, P.B. 14, Spd. 17.

Hit Points: 35

S.D.C.: 15

P.P.E.: 41

Level: 7th Level Arcanist.

Age: 26

Skills: Basic Math 98%, Demon Lore 98%, Ghost Lore 98%, Geomancy Lore 98%, Religious Lore 98%, Research 98%, Archaeology 85%, Biology 95%, Chemistry 98%, Chemistry: Analytical 98%, Chemistry: Pharmaceutical 95%, Art 88%, Journalism 88%, Latin 98%, English 98%, Mandarin 98%, Malaysian 98%, Forensics 90%, Paramedic 98%, Pathology 98%, Medical Doctor 98%/98%, Computer Operation 98%, Anthropology 90%, Botany 95%, Psychology 95%, Pilot Automobile 98%, Pilot Motorcycle 90%, Sewing 80%, Swimming 98%, Escape Artist 70%, Cook 97%, Hand to Hand: Basic, Running, Athletics, W.P. Auto Pistol.

Special Magic Skills: Understand the Principles of Magic 98%, Read Magic 98%, Sense Magic 120 feet (36.6 m), Recognize Magical Enchantment 85%.

Number of Attacks: 3

Combat Skills: 1D6 Kick, Critical Strike 18, 19, 20.

Combat Bonuses: +1 to Strike, +3 to Parry or Dodge, +2 to Damage, +3 to Pull or Roll.

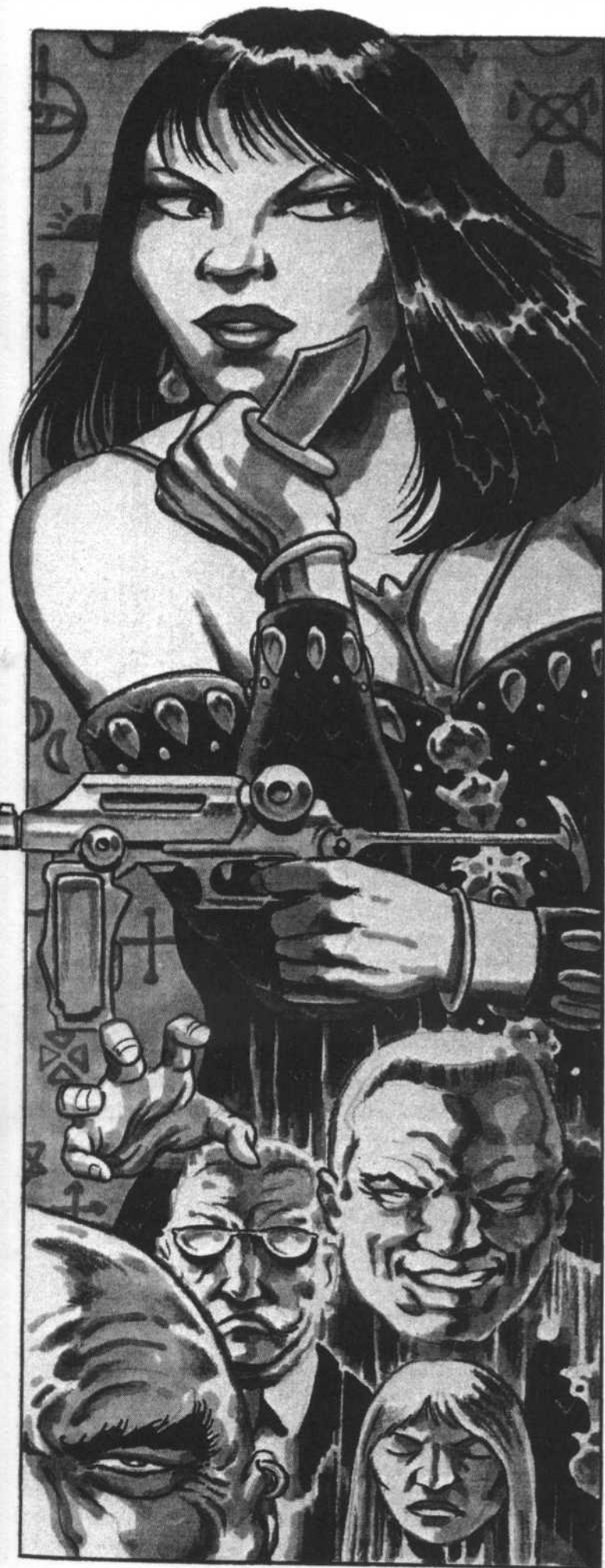
Other Bonuses: +1 to save versus Psionics, +4 to save versus Horror Factor, +4 to save versus Magic, +4 to save versus Possession.

Cult Leader: Yes; Medium Size group: 13 fanatical followers and 20 fringe members (9 women and four men in core group, 10 P.P.E. average).

Supernatural Guardian: Tectonic Entity

Familiar: None

Base of Operations: House Attic



Criminal Record: None, but wanted for questioning.

Financial Resources: \$70,000

Magic Knowledge

Offensive Spells: Blinding Flash, Energy Bolt, Simple Paralysis.

Other Spells: See the Invisible, Death Trance, See Aura, Sense Magic, Befuddle, Concealment, Extinguish Fire, Levitation, Mystic Alarm, Turn Dead, Breathe Without Air, Impression, Simple Invisibility, Escape, Superhuman Strength, Time Slip, Words of Truth.

Rituals: Simple Circle of Protection, Create Mummy, Immure Entity, Summon Greater Being.

Dual Invocations: Swim as a Fish, Apparition, Animate and Control Dead, Summon and Control Canines, Phobia Curse, Temporary Insanity.

History

After that night, Shelly Chung was changed. Once she was naive, and believed that there was good in all people; that belief got shattered. A few days after the incident, a mysterious man approached her and said that he knew what had happened, and would help her exact revenge. She tried to refuse him, but couldn't block out the pain of the experience. His promises of revenge and power were too much for her to resist, and she agreed to become his pupil, to learn magic to help her strike out against the men who has assaulted her. After taking time off work to deal with "family problems," she began to learn magic and started her plot. The mysterious stranger is still around, encouraging her campaign of violence, while still being quite distant. Shelly knows very little about her mentor, only that his name is Zeryuel (pronounced Zar-ee-elle).

Men Who Remain

Bobby Seng; no kids, 29 years old. Seng works as an enforcer, and is a black belt in Tae Kwon Do. He has a long criminal record and is very violent, especially towards women. He is Shelly's next target.

Joey Frescino; father of two, 30 years old. Joey has been in seclusion for the past five years. He lost his job after being unable to return, wracked with guilt for what he did. He wants to apologize to Shelly but is too scared to confront her (with good reason). He is currently in the local hospital's psychiatric ward for depression.

Tony Sendiza; 27 years old. Tony has a girlfriend with a little baby girl, and who is pregnant again. He moved out of state after the incident and gave up the criminal life to become a family man.

Plans for the Future

Shelly is on a quest for revenge. She is planning on killing Bobby Seng next, and will use anything at her disposal to accomplish that end. The player characters may see the attack being perpetrated if they can link all of the men together, and find the nearly lost police file of the incident which sparked this all. The players should be torn between two wrongs here: the wrong committed against Shelly Chung five years ago, and the wrongs being committed right now. Certainly, she has a justifiable excuse for wanting vengeance, but it's up to the player characters to make sure no one else gets killed, especially if they are of good or unprincipled alignment.

Something else that should be of concern to players is her other plan. That is, the reason for the abductions. She plans on using the children's high P.P.E. levels to assist her in a ritual to summon a powerful being to Earth, which she feels can best help her kill her former boyfriend. It's up to the players to decide how to end this. Shelly's use of demonic agents makes her far more dangerous than most opponents, and she probably won't listen to reason if she feels she is going to be denied vengeance. Another factor to consider is Zaryuel: Who is he, what does he want, will he attack the player character's if they stop Shelly's killing/vengeance, or will he not show at all? It's up to individual G.M. to decide what, if anything, will happen with Zaryuel.

Nightbane®

Optional Fringe Group Source
Material for the Nightbane® RPG

ON THE FRINGE OF THE NIGHT

By David Solon Phillips

Disclaimer

The information and O.C.C.s depicted in this article are purely fictional. They in no way promote or denounce anything to do with said groups; it is all make-believe. Also, all characters and character types are created from the author's imagination. Any similarity between this and real individuals alive or dead and/or real situations is purely coincidental.

The following was recorded by A.D.A. agents in a safe house. The speaker is Edward "Bunker" Hill, Major in the "Montana Minutemen" (a militia group located in Montana). The subject was being affected by interrogation drugs to determine his loyalty as a potential member of the A.D.A. Militia reserves:

"I used ta' think it was the Reds or the Aliens or maybe the C.I.A. in cahoots with the Aliens, or maybe all three. You probably won't believe this, but I found out that the conspiracy goes deeper and darker than anyone suspected...

"Me and Orson was in 'Murray's Bait and Tackle shop' getting 'supplies' and just shootin' the breeze, when Kyle bursts in and says that while he and Unis was over in 'Food Town' they heard some men in fancy black suits askin' one of the clerks about the Wilkins boy, Ralph, what used ta' work there. The men said they was with the N.S.B.; Feds, agents of whoever really runs this country. They said something about some 'preeverts' getting killed outside of town. Sheriff said it was Indians off the reservation; I believed that as much as I believed

Ralph had something to do with it. Seein' as that is, why would they want Ralph? Anyway, so after we stowed the 'supplies' in the truck, we started back to the compound. Me and Orson were followin' Kyle and Unis. About ten minutes outta' town, me and Orson hear Unis over the C.B. tellin' us to execute emergency procedure Alpha, which basically means get your guns ready, only this weren't no drill! Just over the ridge we see two cars off to the side of the road. We pull up and see Ralph Wilkins' bike and down a ways we see Ralph being surrounded by four men, three of them looked like Feds and one looked to be Larry Johansson, the Sheriff of this county; he hadn't acted right for months.... At any rate, Kyle jumps outta' his four by four shoutin', 'What the heck is going on here?!' And one of the Feds answered him by pulling a gun and blowing Kyle's head clean off!! Kyle didn't pull no weapon! It was cold-blooded murder! Fed or not, this was self-defense now! Before I knew it Unis, who had just become a widow, pulled her .50 caliber Desert Eagle from her purse and filled the man that just killed her husband with holes. He didn't fall though, or bleed for that matter. He just stood there with his arm and shoulder hanging off his body as Unis had near blew them off! He reached for his gun with his good hand... He weren't no human! A large firefight erupted. One of them government men turned into a huge monster, like a giant slug with teeth. I thought to my self, 'I knew it! I was right about the government all along!' Thing didn't have no eyes, don't know how it saw but it sure didn't expect to see my .45 Thompson submachine-gun — with a 30 round



drum — or Orson's brand new 7.62 Millimeter SAR Galil, lucky we went to Murray's... he sells more than bait and tackle. Needless to say we unloaded on the thing. It dropped, can't say we killed it cause it was still twitchin' and oozin' on the ground there, but that's about all it was doin'. Next thing I noticed was the two Feds and the Sheriff were after Ralph on foot. The Sheriff tackled poor Ralphie — we couldn't shoot! Me and Orson were reloadin' and Unis was afraid of hittin' Ralph.

"I heard Rumors about that boy, but when I saw what Ralph had become I thought I had lost my mind... He looked like a metal dragon with angel wings. Orson just dropped to his knees and stared; we all just stared as Ralph mowed through the two Feds and the Sheriff like a wild animal. But ya know? I've know Ralph since he was adopted as a baby, I know his daddy for years and I don't care if he is a monster 'cause he's our monster. Anyway Ralphie changed back and me and Orson finished off that thing we shot earlier. That was the last we saw of Ralph Wilkins. Oh yeah, they found the Sheriff's body in his own house, shoved up in a crawl space — been dead for months. What Ralphie killed outside of town that day weren't Larry Johansson, but it sure looked like him.

"I was right about there being a conspiracy, but who knew how deep and weird the whole thing got? But I can tell you that we're ready, the Montana Minutemen are ready for anything!"

Strange Bedfellows...

Militias, Survivalists, Gun-Runners and the A.D.A. after Dark Day

In the latter half of the 1990s, militia groups, Survivalist groups, etc., were becoming larger in numbers and more of a problem for the federal government. Therefore groups like F.B.I., C.I.A., A.T.F., and other similar organizations made more of an effort to keep tabs on militias, Survivalist groups and the like, mainly through informants (members who give information, usually for a price) and undercover agents who infiltrate these groups and communicate through covert means. After Dark Day, people were frightened and felt vulnerable; many believed it was Armageddon, many saw monsters walking the earth. Those that could not accept the explanations of the government quietly withdrew from mainstream society. When the Preserver Party finally took power, they went after all their enemies with a vengeance. At first Militia Members and their ilk looked on with glee as the F.B.I., C.I.A., A.T.F. and the like were disbanded one by one, but much to their chagrin the old groups were soon replaced by the N.S.B. who soon went after other groups such as gun smuggling rings, the Mafia and, of course, militia groups, who had to go deeper underground for fear of extinction (which, needless to say, fed their hatred and distrust of the federal government). In fact, many of the more

“public” militias were utterly destroyed in huge, armed assaults. This was an effort on the part of the National Security Bureau to make examples of these groups. Through great media coverage of the assaults, these groups were touted as dangerous and/or treasonous elements that would not listen to reason and therefore had to be dealt with for the “greater good”. But this backfired to an extent; indeed, such coverage turned many militia/Survivalist groups into something close to martyrs in the minds of those already distrustful of the government. Other militias banded together, using their already existing underground networks of safe-houses and gun-running/smuggling rings to help each other stay in existence, and to secretly recruit among the downtrodden, those mistreated and/or distrustful of the government at large. After Dark Day, these various militias were at an all time high, insofar as membership and paranoia (there probably is some correlation there). Stories of aliens, demons and monsters walking the streets and even entering and/or controlling the government have always been present, but now there was something different... evidence. On top of that, old government agencies in exile used their old militia files, contacts and their old agents (who had been stranded “undercover” since the takeover) in an attempt to contact the various militias for the purpose of gaining assistance in ousting the new government. Feeling that for once they were on the same side, militia groups, Survivalists, Gun-Runners and other fringe elements were contacted and enlisted. Groups such as the K.K.K., Skin Heads and the various Neo-Nazi/Hate groups were not contacted or even considered, as they were found to be untrustworthy by the A.D.A. Their agenda of ethnic purity was too harsh, and many had already joined up with the preserver party anyway and were already their proverbial (and in some cases literal) “Jack-Booted Thugs”. The more distrustful (paranoid) elements in these Survivalist/militia groups do not trust the Government, A.D.A. other militia groups, or anyone else for that matter, and simply isolate themselves.

To make a long story short, the Spook Squad called on the militia groups for supplies (what with their connections to Gun-Running operations and such), support and possible recruits for their secret war against the new federal government. When you need groups that will not help the government in any way, shape or form, who better than the militias and Survivalists? They are heavily armed and incredibly distrustful of the “Feds;” they would be the last ones to betray the Spook Squad. Indeed the Spook Squad has sent former Special Forces members loyal to the A.D.A. to train groups of these Militia Members, “just in case” (not to mention that “real” military training is a great bargaining tool with many of these fringe groups). Often, militia groups act as informants, run secret weapons depots, act as weapons suppliers, and are a source of potential “man-power” should the need arise. Survivalists tend to run the *really* secret weapons depots and safe-houses, as well as maintain hidden retreat points. The long range goal that the Spook Squad has with the militias and Survivalists is to secretly train an army of sorts, in case they are ever needed for a not-so-secret war.



Fringe Group O.C.C.s

Militia Member O.C.C.

The Militia Member is a person that has grown angry and distrustful of the government at large. Dark Day sent a shock-wave through society, and many people are trying to find ways to feel safe. As a result, they have moved to out-of-the-way places to avoid government pressure, and banded together with like-minded people into pseudo/para-military groups, in order to better resist the government if it ever came to that (which it just may).

Note: In the stats below, an asterisk (“*”) indicates bonuses or differences that apply to a Militia Member who was trained by the Spook Squad. The Spook Squad has taken to actively recruiting from these groups. It should also be noted that Spook Squad trained Militia Members are often not trusted 100% in militia circles.

Alignment: Most Militia Members will be considered Aberrant. They will do things that may seem evil or anti-social, but in their minds they are doing what “needs” to be done. They are well-meaning (if misguided) patriots; many view themselves as similar to great Americans like George Washington and Benjamin Franklin, who openly rebelled against England. Of course, there are also those who just want to play with guns and bombs, and use their connections for personal gain and gratification (selfish, Anarchist, Miscreant or Diabolic, depending on how far they will go).

(* = Spook Squad trained)

O.C.C. Abilities and Bonuses: +1 to Initiative (* +1 to Strike).

Special Skills:

Lore: Conspiracy Theory & Paranoid Propaganda (+10%)

Streetwise: Illegal/Contraband Weapons (+10%)

(* Can purchase the Anti-Supernatural Bonus, possessed by Team Epsilon, Special Forces and the P.A.B., at a cost of 2 “other” Skills)

O.C.C. Skills:

Native Language and Literacy (98%)

Radio: Basic (+10%; * +15%)

Military Etiquette (+5%; * +10%)

Pilot: Auto (+5%)

W.P. Rifle

W.P. Auto/ Semi-Auto Rifle

Hand to Hand: Basic

Hand to Hand: Basic can be upgraded to Expert at the cost of 3 O.C.C. Related skills (* upgrade to Expert for 2 skills).

O.C.C. Related Skills: Select 10 other skills. Plus the character gets an additional skill at levels three, six, nine and twelve. All new skills start at level one proficiency.

Communications: Any except Laser or Optic Systems (* +5% to Cryptography and Radio: Scramblers).

Domestic: Any (+5%).

Electrical: Basic Electronics only.

Espionage: Any except Disguise, Escape Artist, Forgery, Pick Pockets or Tracking (* allow Tracking, add bonus of +5% for this category).

Mechanical: Auto, Locksmith, Weapons Engineer only.

Medical: First Aid only (* allow Paramedic).

Military: Any (+5%; * +10%).

Physical: Any except Acrobatics, Gymnastics, and SCUBA.

Pilot: Auto, Boat: Sail, Boat: Motor, Horsemanship, Motorcycle, Truck only.

Pilot Related: None (* Allow Weapons Systems).

Rogue: Any except Computer Hacking, Pick Pockets, Streetwise, Streetwise: Drugs.

Science: Chemistry: Basic (used to make home-made bombs), Mathematics: Basic only.

Technical: Art, Computer Operation, Literacy, Photography, Writing only (* Any).

W.P.: Ancient: Archery, Blunt, Knife, Whip only.

W.P.: Modern: Any

Wilderness: Any (+15%).

Secondary Skills: The character also gets to select six secondary skills. These are additional areas of knowledge that do not get the benefit of the bonuses listed in parenthesis. All secondary skills start at the base skill level. Also, secondary skills are limited (any, only, none) as previously indicated on the list.

Standard Equipment: Every Militia Member begins with a large number of firearms of all types. Roll 5D4 to determine how many rolls you get on the Firearms Table (with G.M.’s discretion) — no energy weapons, tanks, artillery pieces, planes, missiles, nuclear bombs or rune weapons (keep it under control). 1D4 boxes of ammunition per gun, gun repair kit, gun cleaning kit, 1d4 firearm accessories, bulletproof vest or flack jacket (A.R. 10, S.D.C. 50), camo-compact, light camo-suit, heavy camo-suit, normal clothing (or army fatigues), backpack, radio, canteen. Possibly a pick-up or jeep, binoculars, survival knife. Various odds & ends including military memorabilia, personal items, toiletries, etc.

Money: 1D4x10,000 in cash, usually stashed somewhere (“Put my money in a government controlled bank? No thank you.”). 1D10x1000 in property, vehicles, and military collectibles, not counting firearms.

The Survivalist O.C.C.

“...shoot first... don’t need to ask ‘em no questions; we know why they’re here...”

Dark Day had the world going mad. Many saw it as the beginning of the end. Riots, mass suicides, and cults arising, were all a part of Dark Day. Since then, laws have become harsher, the news can’t be trusted, it all seems like society is breaking down. Many compared this to the fall of Rome; they thoroughly believed that society was coming apart at the seams and they didn’t want to wait around for that to happen. So they left. They retreated into the wilderness, some in small groups, some with only their family, and some all by themselves. Many had knowledge of hunting, fishing and other outdoor skills, however some had to learn the hard way. They are hard, self-reliant people that are, for all intents and purposes, self contained units that can live nearly indefinitely outside of society. Through militia groups, the Spook Squad has established contact and enlisted the help of these Survivalists in the effort against the government. Most were more than glad to help.

Alignment: Most Survivalists are of Scrupulous or Aberrant alignment, following a “live and ‘don’t come on my land’” policy. However, they can be of any alignment.



O.C.C. Abilities and Bonuses: +2 to Perception checks, +1 to P.E.

Special Skills:

Lore: Conspiracy Theory and Paranoid Propaganda (+5%)
 Streetwise: Illegal/Contraband weapons (+5%)

O.C.C. Skills:

Native Language (98%)
 Wilderness survival (+20)

Prowl (+10%)
 Climb (+10%)
 Swimming (+5%)
 W.P. Rifle
 Land Navigation (+10%)
 Preserve Food (+10%)
 Track Animals (+10%)
 Hand to Hand: Basic
 Hand to Hand: Basic can be upgraded to Expert at the cost of three O.C.C. Related skills.

O.C.C. Related Skills: Select 10 other skills. Plus the character gets to select two skills at levels three, six, nine and twelve, and 1 skill at level 15. **Note:** 2 skills must be from the Wilderness category, 1 must be from Domestic and 1 must be from Physical.

Communications: Radio: Basic, Radio: Scramblers and Cryptography only.

Domestic: Any (+5%).

Electronics: Basic only.

Espionage: Any except Disguise or Forgery (+5%, +10% to Tracking and Counter-Tracking).

Mechanical: Automotive Mechanics, Basic Mechanics only (+5%).

Medical: First Aid, Holistic and Paramedic only (+5%).

Military: Any (+5%).

Physical Any except Acrobatics and Gymnastics (+5% where applicable).

Pilot: Auto, Sail Boat, Motor Boat, Horsemanship, Motorcycle, Truck only.

Pilot Related: Navigation only.

Rogue: Any except Computer Hacking, Streetwise and Streetwise: Drugs.

Science: Basic Math only.

Technical: Any except Computer Operation, Computer Programming and Research.

W.P.: Any

Wilderness: Any (+20%).

Secondary Skills: The character also gets to select four secondary skills, plus select one at levels 3, 6, 9 and 12. These are additional areas of knowledge and do not receive the benefit of the bonus listed in parentheses. All secondary skills start at the base skill level. Also, secondary skills are limited (any, only, none) as previously indicated on the list.

Standard Equipment: Like the Militia Member O.C.C. the Survivalist O.C.C. starts with something of a stockpile of weapons. Roll 3D4 to determine the number of guns, then roll on the Firearms Table to determine what these guns are (again, G.M. discretion is advised). 1D4 boxes of ammo per gun, gun repair kit, gun cleaning kit, 4 camo suits (2 light, 2 heavy). A hiking pack, radio, canteen, binoculars, survival knife, 2D10+5 months of food stored up. 1D4 firearm accessories, first aid kit. Bulletproof vest or flack jacket (A.R. 10, S.D.C. 50) moderate wardrobe of hunting/combat clothing.

Money: 4D6x100 dollars in cash (stashed somewhere), 2D6x1000 dollars in property, vehicles, livestock, etc.



Gun-Runner/Smuggler O.C.C.

"You need these guns to fight demons from another dimension that took over the government? Okay... So do you have the money or not?"

Militia Members and Survivalists love their guns, so the Gun-Runner could not be left out. The Gun-Runner/Smuggler is an O.C.C. specializing in the procuring and selling of firearms and other military hardware. Since the Preserver Party gained power, firearms (and many other things) are virtually all illegal, consequently Gun-Runners and Smugglers, as well as what they smuggle, are very much in demand. They live dangerous lives (which is great for players) and are almost always heavily armed (also fun for players). However, they are hunted by law enforcement and must deal with shady individuals (not that they themselves are remarkably un-shady). Militias, organized crime and even the Spook Squad would have a difficult time operating without the services of Gun-Runners and Smugglers of all types.

Alignment: By definition they are professional "criminals," so most are evil or selfish. Many may see themselves as a supplier of something that is everyone's right, or perhaps a champion of free trade and capitalism ("Hey, it's the American way!"), and would be considered selfish. Many would be Aberrant, as they live by a code, they never break a deal and won't hurt innocents. A large number are in it for the money and will do what ever they please in the name of personal gain (Miscreant, Diabolic) though characters like these tend to gain reputations as untrust-

worthy and bad to do business with. A small (Unprincipled) minority see themselves as the supply lines in a valiant war against an evil oppressor. These characters tend to work for only one or a select few militias (or the Spook Squad); oddly these "weirdos" are actually right.

O.C.C. Abilities and Bonuses: +1 to Initiative and Perception rolls.

Attribute Requirements: I.Q. 9 (A high M.E. and M.A. are helpful but not required).

Special Skills:

Streetwise: Illegal/Contraband weapons (+15%)

Recognize/Appraise Weapon Quality (+10%)

Note: The Recognize/Appraise Weapon Quality skill is the same skill that one gets along with Weapon Proficiencies, however the Gun-Runner O.C.C. can appraise weapons without actually having the W.P. skill connected to that weapon. They start with the ability to appraise 4 weapon types (handguns, shotguns, knives, etc.) at first level (choose 4), and can appraise one additional weapon type at levels 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, 12 and 14; all new skills start at level one proficiency. These are in addition to the Recognize Weapon Quality skills gained from other W.P.s the character might have.

O.C.C. Skills:

Native Language and Literacy (98%)

One language of choice (+20%).

Basic Math (+20%)

Detect Ambush (+15%)

Detect Concealment (+15%)

Forgery (+5%)

Streetwise (+15%)

Radio: Basic (+15%)

Radio: Scrambler (+10%)

W.P. Two of Choice (+10% to Recognize Weapon Quality).

Hand to Hand: Basic

Hand to Hand: Basic can be changed to Expert for 2 O.C.C.

Related skills or to Hand to Hand: Martial Arts for the cost of three.

O.C.C. Related Skills: Select 2 skills from the Pilot category and 2 Modern Weapon Proficiencies at first level. Select 8 other skills. Plus the character gets an additional skill at levels three, six, nine, twelve and fifteen. All new skills start at level one proficiency.

Communication: Any except Laser (+10%).

Domestic: Any

Electrical: Any except Computer Repair (+5%).

Espionage: Any (+10%).

Mechanical: Any except Aircraft Mechanics (+5%).

Medical: Criminal Science & Forensics and First Aid Only (+5%).

Military: Any (+5%).

Physical: Any except Acrobatics and Gymnastics.

Pilot: Any except Jet Pack (+5% to Auto, Truck and Motorcycle).

Pilot Related: Any

Rogue: Any except Computer Hacking (+10%).

Science: Any except Analytical Chemistry, Archaeology and Biology (+5%).

Technical: Any except Computer Programming (+5%).

W.P.: Any

Wilderness: Boat Building, Carpentry and Land Navigation only.

Secondary Skills: The character also gets to select five secondary skills. These are additional areas of knowledge that do not get the benefit of the bonus listed in parentheses. All secondary skills start at the base skill level. Also secondary skills are limited (any, only, none) as previously indicated on the list.

Standard Equipment: Roll 1D4x5 on Firearms Table (they are Gun-Runners after all). They will usually only carry 2-4 guns on their person at any given point as *personal* weapons, while the others are stashed away. This stash is their livelihood, they will avoid using them except in the most dire of emergencies (you get a lot less money for a used gun); G.M.s should keep an eye on this. Other items include 1D4 boxes of ammo for each gun, 3D4 firearm accessories (again a max of 4 will be for personal use, the rest are strictly for sale), a personal wardrobe consisting of normal clothing as well as fatigues and military clothing. Perhaps a flack jacket or bulletproof vest (A.R.: 10, S.D.C.: 50). A calculator, small safe or strong-box, notepad, pens and pencils, gas-mask, flashlight, canteen, knapsack and various personal items. Personal car or truck (purely functional to decent condition). **Note:** Gun-Runners often operate "legitimate" businesses like a trucking business or as a seller of military memorabilia. They have access to all sorts of firearm accessories, military and para-military items (camouflage, medals, body armor, gun accessories, posters, etc.).

Money: 2D4x1000 dollars in cash, 1D4x10,000 dollars in property (military collectibles, trade items, firearms, vehicles, etc.) and cash stashed away.

Experience Tables

Militia Member,
Survivalist, &
Gun-Runner

1	0,000-1,900
2	1,901-3,800
3	3,801-7,300
4	7,301-14,300
5	14,301-21,000
6	21,001-31,000
7	31,001-41,000
8	41,001-53,000
9	53,001-73,000
10	73,001-103,000
11	103,001-138,000
12	138,001-188,000
13	188,001-238,000
14	238,001-288,000
15	288,001-328,000

Firearms Tables

A character's O.C.C. determines the number of rolls one gets on the table below. The number of rolls equals the number of guns the character starts with; the category determines what types of guns one can choose from. **Note:** This table is a nifty way to determine what is available on the black market.

Firearms Table I

01%-12%	Revolvers and Auto Pistols
13%-23%	Submachine-Guns
24%-33%	Rifles
34%-44%	Shotguns
45%-50%	Machine-Guns
51%-55%	Heavy Weapons
56%-65%	Special Guns
66%-73%	Incendiary Weapons
74%-80%	Gases & Grenades
81%-87%	Explosives
88%-00%	Pick one gun from Handguns, Submachine-Gun, Rifle or Shotgun categories.

Firearms Table II (optional)

This table simply gives an idea as to how long it might take to get certain items through a Gun-Runner. Often times they are the only way to obtain certain items. G.M.s should remember that in the **Nightbane®** world, most guns and gun related items are illegal. As with anything this table is optional, if G.M.s want to role-play the gun deals and the trips to get them, all the better (this table does not apply to guns already "in stock").

Handguns: 2D4 days

Submachine-Guns: 3D6 days

Rifles: 2D6 days

Assault Rifles: 3D6 days

Shotguns: 2D6 days

Machine-Guns: 4D6 days

Heavy Weapons: 4D6 days

Special guns: 3D6 days

Incendiary Weapons: 4D6 Days

Gases & Grenades: 5D4 days

Explosives: 3D6 Days

Miscellaneous Modern Weapons: 2D4 days

Firearm Accessories: 3D4 days

Ammunition: (same time as gun type)

Body Armor (Ancient): 2D6 days

Body Armor (Modern): 2D4 days

Body Armor (Heavy): 2D6 days

Various Other Items: 2D4 days

Combat/Hunting Clothes: 1D4 days

Relations with other factions

Militias: Most Militia characters will be from militias that are allied or at least sympathetic to the cause of the Spook Squad, and therefore have good relations with the A.D.A. Those not aligned with the Spook Squad will either be indifferent or (more than likely) distrustful of them. They have minimal knowledge of other factions and because of this will probably not trust them much at all. A good rule of thumb is, "If they don't know you, they don't trust you." Militias that have not been contacted by the A.D.A. will not trust anyone. Non-humans are always under suspicion.

Survivalist groups: Survivalist groups are even more paranoid than the militias; they simply won't trust anyone that they don't know. As far as any non-humans are concerned, you can forget it.

Gun-Runners: Very self-centered. Many only care about getting paid. Some will only work for groups whose politics

they agree with, but most will work for anyone that can pay the bill, no questions asked. Basically Gun-Runners are not a cohesive group, and who they will and won't work with is up to the individual. However they do all have one thing in common, and that is fear and distrust of the federal government (because the government can and will shut them down).

Note: Most fringe groups have little or no knowledge of the true nature of the government takeover or of the various non-human factions. What information they do have is sketchy or filled with speculation. These facts can make for interesting role-playing opportunities when dealing with non-human player characters and/or non-human NPCs (as most fringe groups have no problem *acting* on incomplete or sketchy information).

New Skills

Rogue: Streetwise: Illegal/Contraband Weapons: Characters with this skill will have contacts as well as be able to make new contacts with smugglers, gunsmiths, Gun-Runners, etc. They will also know the proper etiquette when dealing with these people. This skill also supplies one with the knowledge of current prices and availability of merchandise, as well as an understanding of the current laws and penalties surrounding the trade of such weapons. This skill does not give knowledge of how to operate or maintain any weapon. This skill is resigned to guns, explosives and even poisonous gases/toxins; it does not apply to the procuring of military hardware such as planes, tanks, missiles or energy weapons (don't go overboard).

Whether or not this is included in a game as a separate skill or as part of the regular Streetwise skill is up to individual G.M.s and players. **Note:** After a successful use of this skill, a character must still roll on Firearms Table II to see how long it will take to obtain an item (these things take time). **Base Skill:** 25% +5% per level of experience.

Technical: Lore: Conspiracy Theory & Paranoid Propaganda: Many Militia Members and Survivalists are what most people would call paranoid. They believe in every conspiracy theory, government coverup and secret society known to man (or rather, *not* known to man). In fact they actively research these types of things on the Internet (news groups, web sites, etc.) as well as in libraries and of course, they gain information through the very life blood of conspiracy theories, rumor. Oddly enough, some of this information is factual — in fact, 1/4th (25%) of a character's score in this skill is his chance of learning/recalling a real fact. So, if someone with a rank of 40% in this skill rolls 01% up to 10%, they have come up with real information that they picked up somewhere. A regular success, that is not within the 1/4th window, may sound good and reasonable, but is false.

Another purpose this skill has is as a sort of "fringe group etiquette" (knowing common/popular beliefs, what groups can or cannot be trusted, etc.). Successful rolls that do not fall into the 1/4th area that is true information are not without use, however. Skill rolls outside of the 1/4th category will impress other Militia Members, Survivalists and Gun-Runners or at least provide the ability to "talk the talk," identifying one as "the real thing." Success can increase status and trust among these groups, but a failed roll can make one look ignorant or foolish in a fringe group's eyes. A *critical* failure (99% to 100%) is considered to

be a serious faux pas and can put one under suspicion or even make one look like a fake (i.e. a spy of some sort). High status Militia Members, Survivalists and Gun-Runners (and undercover agents sent to infiltrate/study these groups) often have this skill at a fairly high percentage. **Base Skill:** 20% +5% per level of experience.

Technical: Recognize/Appraise Weapon Quality: This is virtually the same skill one gets along with a Weapon Proficiency. However, in this case one can tell what a weapon is worth (dollar value) in its current condition, and what the general consensus is on how the weapon performs "in the field." One does not always need to know how to operate/use the weapon to do this. This skill does not apply to magic weapons or alien technology. **Base Skill:** 30% +5% per level of experience.

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THE OFFICE OF DR. DESMOND BRADFORD.

CAPTAIN, THIS SITUATION IS OUT OF HAND. I WILL NOT TOLERATE ANOTHER ACT OF INCOMPETENCE REGARDING THE SECURITY OF THIS FACILITY.

I APOLOGIZE, SIR. THE MAGIC-USER OF THE GROUP HAS ERECTED SOME SORT OF ENERGY BARRIER THAT IS PREVENTING OUR CAPTURE OF THE INTRUDERS.

NO MORE EXCUSES CAPTAIN. ELIMINATE THEM.

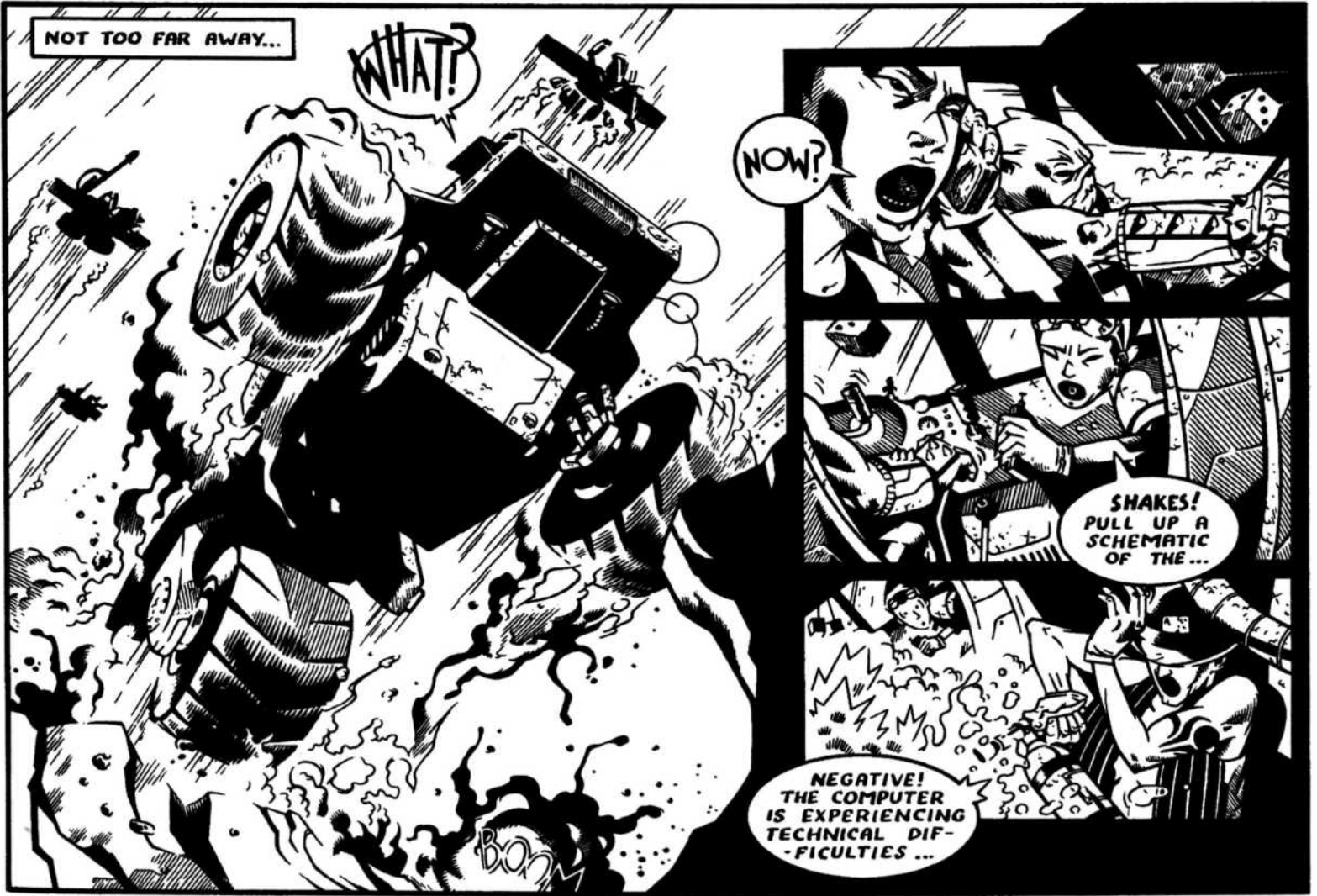
chapter five  BY RAMÓN PÉREZ & A LITTLE HELP FROM A FRIEND

WE ARE DOING OUR BEST, HOWEVER THE TARGETS HAVE TAKEN A HOSTAGE.

EXPENDABLE AND REPLACEABLE CAPTAIN. YOU HAVE YOUR ORDERS.

ELIMINATE THEM. ALL OF THEM.





NOT TOO FAR AWAY...

WHAT?

NOW?

SHAKES!
PULL UP A SCHEMATIC OF THE ...

NEGATIVE!
THE COMPUTER IS EXPERIENCING TECHNICAL DIFFICULTIES ...



INSIDE ...

YOU'RE ON YOUR OWN, CHUM.

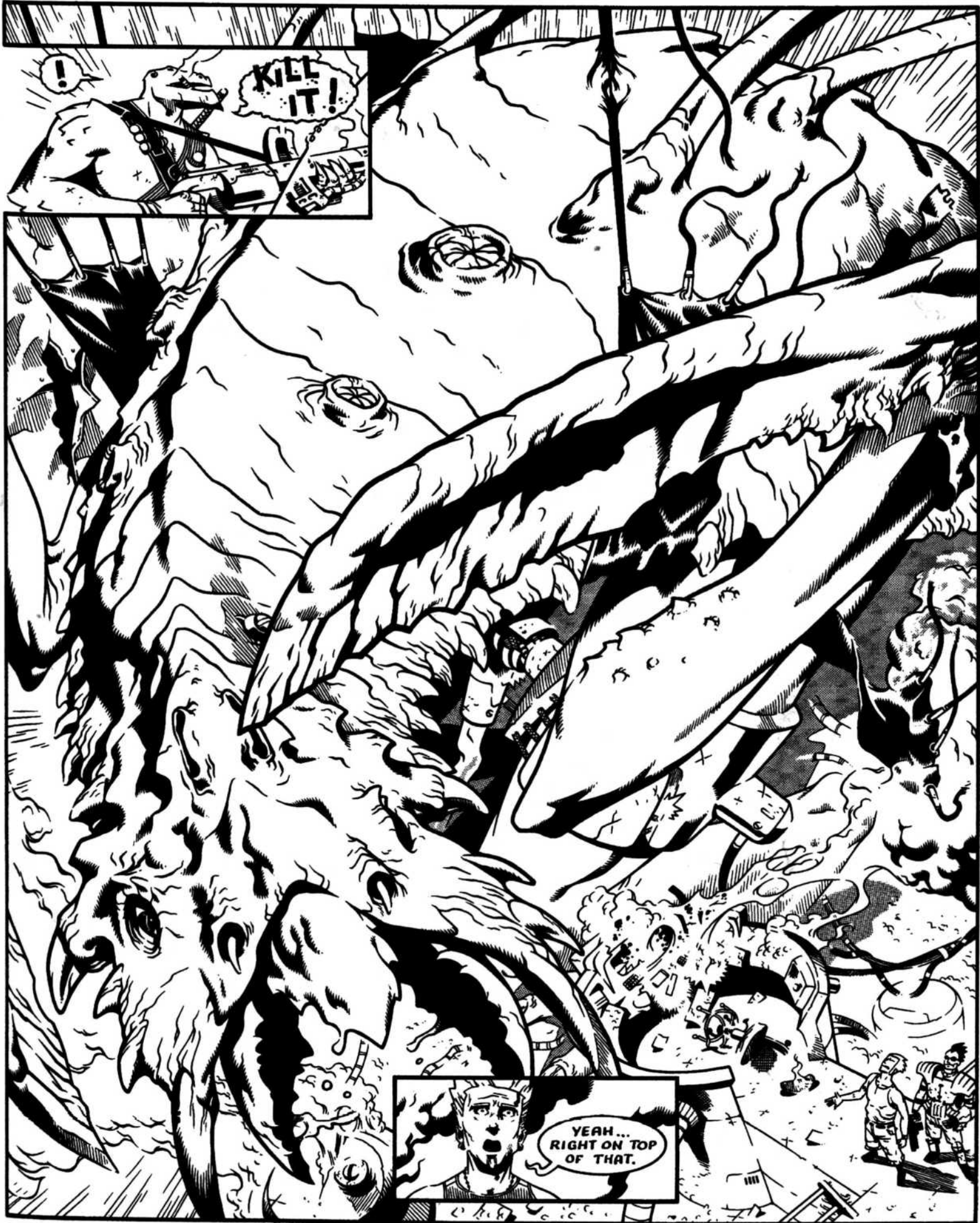


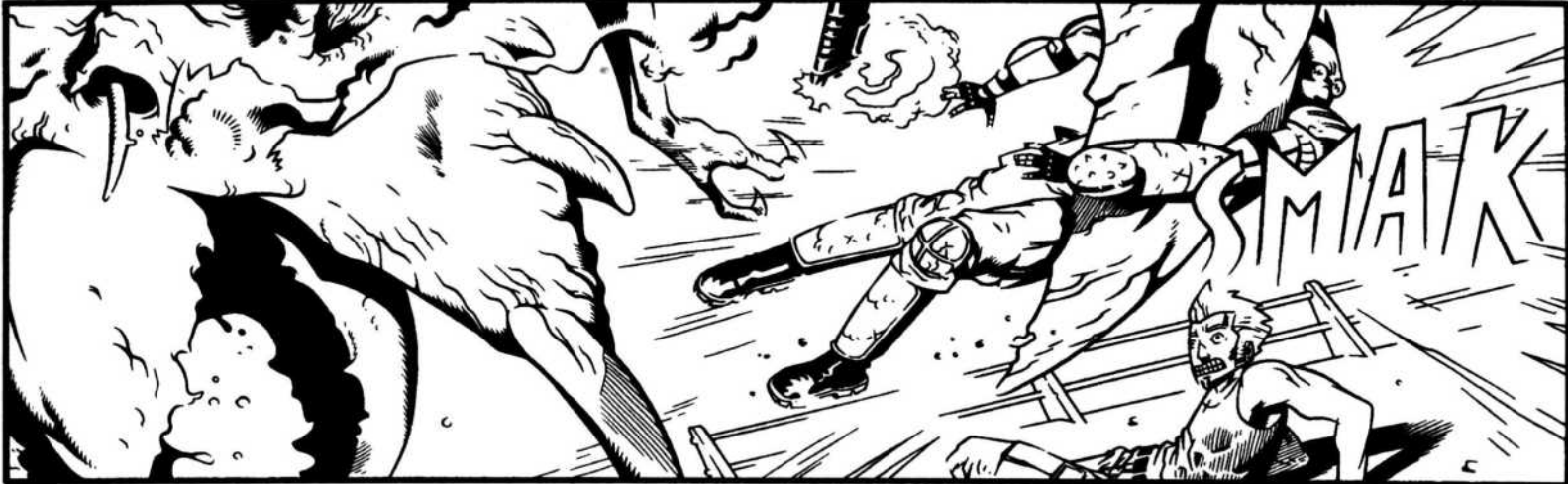
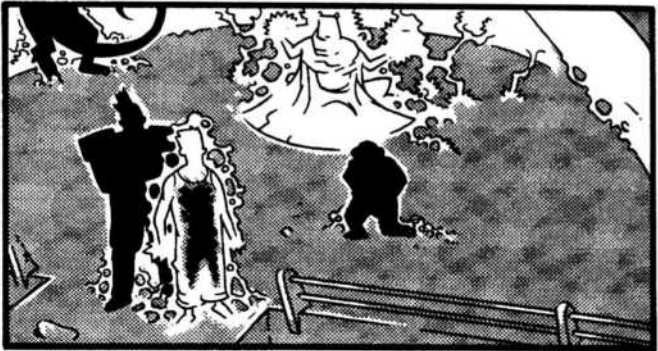
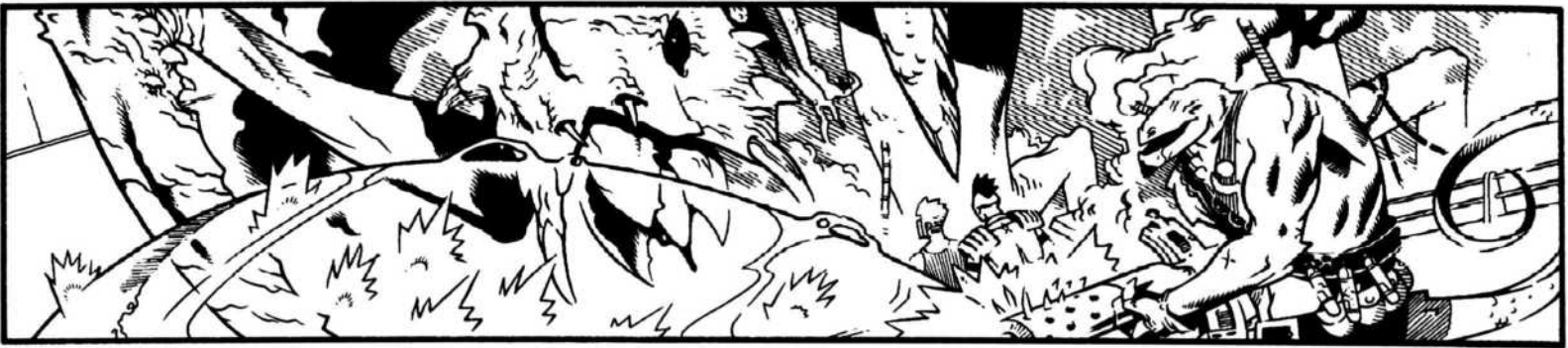
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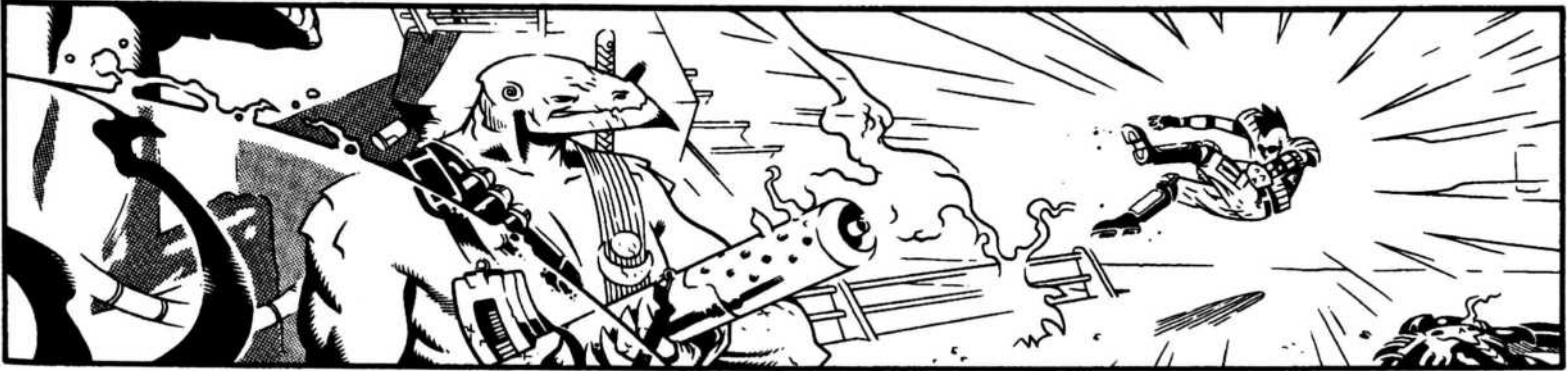


WHERE'S THE BACKDOOR CHEETAH?

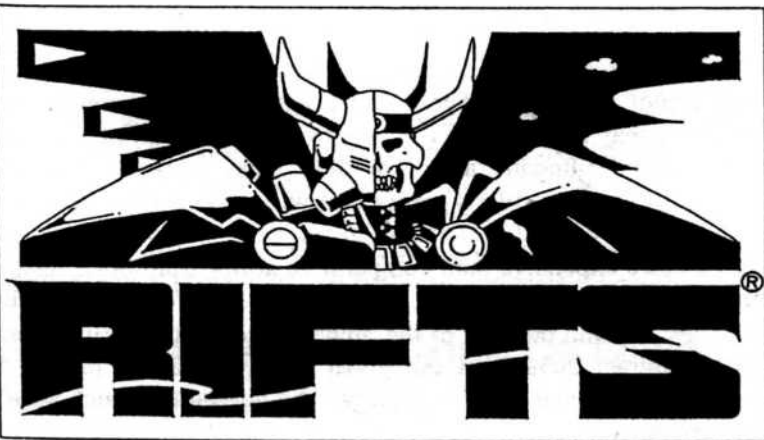












Diplomatic Relations of the City and Territory of Arzno

The Coalition States

The CS doesn't know of Arzno's existence, but has noticed the increase in TW weaponry circulating through the population in the West of late, and is currently trying to figure out where it's all coming from. If they find out about Arzno, it is likely that they would send a team to investigate, if not destroy the city. Arzno is preparing for this, and an evacuation schedule has been put in place. Drills are held occasionally to keep up the readiness, but their effectiveness would depend on what kind of strike was called.

The Vampire Kingdoms

The city is officially at war with all of the Vampire Kingdoms and employs the Arzno Mercenary Corps to help protect them. This is in addition to the Citizen Patrollers, the local militia and police force. No outright conflict has emerged except for battles with Xavier Stuart's vampire armies, and all of them have been on non-Arzno land.

Tolkeen, Lazlo, and the Magic Zone

Word has reached the Magic Zone about the exceptional TW weaponry coming from the Southwest. Models of such items as the TWW-1100 Light Blade and the TWB series batteries have reached Stormspire, and they are curious as to the source of these creative items. If they find out they will undoubtedly send representatives to Arzno in order to set up trade relations (Arzno is too far away to be a direct threat to business, and has a better chance of increasing business). Tolkeen and Lazlo will eventually find out about the city and may petition them to help against the CS. Whether or not Arzno can be of any help is yet to be seen. As for the rest of the Magic Zone, they don't really care about Arzno and the feeling is more or less mutual.

The Brotherhood of Silver and Water

This vampire-hunter guild is based in Arzno, and has wonderful relations with the city and the businesses that thrive there. About 60% of the members of the AMC are members of the brotherhood, including many officers.

The Colorado Baronies

Arzno has made no contact with the political bodies of the Colorado Baronies, but is aware they exist. If Arzno was to learn of the vampires so near them to the north, they would immediately begin a campaign of extermination, probably by finding outside assistance (possibly Demonbusters or a similar mobile organization) and sub-contracting. Ramirez is aware of Arzno and is taking care not to excite them, or Xavier for that matter.

The Golden Ones

The city of Arzno has a peace treaty with the Lyn-Srial, and respects their claim to the Grand Canyon. The two have many mutual enemies, and have found that they get along nicely. Citizens of Arzno frequent the glorious city of the Lyn-Srial, and there are several of the Golden Ones living in (and fighting for) Arzno.

Other Territories of Arizona

Territories such as Clarkdale, Hope, and others are partners in commerce, but little else.

TW Armor

When outfitted by a skilled Techno-Wizard, a suit of run-of-the-mill body armor can become comparable to even the most sophisticated power armor. When built from the ground up (construction of the armor, modification, and add-ons), a suit of the magical armor can turn any soldier into a walking powerhouse! Naturally, there are costs to such sophistication in the melding of magic and technology.

For one thing, Techno-Wizardry is expensive and armor is no exception. A suit of TW armor that has no extraordinary features and is only roughly equivalent to a mundane suit of body armor will cost twice to three times the black market cost of a regular suit. This is due to the massive overhead needed to hand-construct a single suit of armor.

Also, if the armor is constructed from dense Mega-Damage metals and alloys, it still hampers a wizard's ability to cast spells. Just because the suit has been modified by magic doesn't mean that it doesn't choke off a wizard's magical abilities like any other armor.

The pros of the armor are major as well. Techno-Wizard items, including armor, are almost always made to order. There's no such thing as a truly "ordinary" suit of TW armor, since every suit is hand-made and customized to the designer and buyer. Quality is almost always superior to factory brands, and the TW body armor is often comparable to a more expensive exoskeleton or suit of light power armor, but doesn't cost the millions of credits that such war machines do.

As with typical body armor, TW armor has many features that are standard and common to virtually all suits.

Standard TW Armor Features

Military-Grade Armor

Military-grade armor is the standard for all Arzno merchandise as listed here. This grade makes up 90% of TW armor purchases. It's a notable fact that these features are also the most

common given to armor by *all* Techno-Wizards, not just those employed by Arzno Weapons Manufacturing.

All military-grade armor has the following features:

- A minimum of 30 M.D.C.
- An insulation system, protecting the wearer from most heat or cold. Resistant to up to 200 degrees above or 75 below 0 centigrade (392 to -103 Fahrenheit).
- Polarized and light sensitive helmet visor.
- Helmet faceplate or visor is removable.
- A P.P.E. battery for use of the armor's features or any integrated weapon systems.
- A simple 10-frequency radio and scrambler, TW powered.
- All military-grade armor is *not*:
- Radiation shielded.
- A self-contained environment with breathing oxygen.
- Suitable for hostile environments such as underwater or outer space.
- Supplied with any special optics equipment.

Civilian-Grade Armor

Civilian-grade armor makes up the other 10% of Arzno sales and is typically reserved for civilian police forces, militias, emergency armor, or for home and personal protection. This quality of armor is frequently made and used by low level Techno-Wizards (levels 1-3) who lack the knowledge or the P.P.E. reservoir to create such advanced systems. They are also typical quick-fix or emergency rigs when less-than-superior materials are available. The statistics listed below are the standards for Arzno armor, but even these are not available in many situations.

Arzno civilian-grade armor has the following standard features:

- A minimum of 20 M.D.C.
 - Insulation to withstand high or low temperatures for a short period of time. Temperatures from -25 to 150 centigrade (-13 to 302 Fahrenheit) are the limits of the insulation, and these extremes can only be withstood for 5 minutes before the conditions become extremely uncomfortable. After 10 minutes the armor has no effect versus the temperatures.
 - A mundane 10-frequency radio.
- The civilian-grade armor is *not*:
- Environmental armor, radiation shielded, or any "higher" degree of protection.
 - Supplied with any optics equipment.

Communications Packages

The communications package offered with all TW armor from Arzno is simple, easy to use, and roughly identical to those used in other manufacturers' armored suits. The TW-powered radio standard with the military-grade armor runs off of the P.P.E. battery, but uses so little power that none of the mystic energy is subtracted. Mundane radio equipment runs off of a dedicated, worry-free battery that needs replacing every few months (costs about 10 credits). Civilian-grade armor can have its communications upgraded to a Techno-Wizard power source for 100 credits.

The Mundane Option

Every once in a while, someone comes along who wants to buy armor without Techno-Wizard features. For whatever reason they may have, Arzno is happy to oblige, though they would never offer mundane armor to their mass market. Although Arzno items (particularly armor and weapons) are available for less than the normal cost of TW items, the non-TW armor tends to be more expensive than comparative armor from other retailers such as Northern Gun, Bandito Arms, or other domestic sources. To find the cost of the mundane version of a suit of armor, subtract 20% from the given price. Naturally, mundane suits will not have a P.P.E. battery. The purchase of such a suit is very rare.

The P.P.E. Battery

The P.P.E. battery is a vital system of these magical suits. It allows mages to use these TW items without having to worry about their own personal P.P.E. reserve. It also makes this TW technology available to common people. Mages and psychics have an advantage, however, in using this device. In the process of activating and deactivating various Techno-Wizard features on the armor, those who are not mages or psychics require a physical anchor to use the item, usually in the form of a switch, button, or knob. The end result is that those members of society lacking paranormal powers lose an attack when activating or deactivating TW devices on their armor, just as one does when reloading a weapon. Multiple features may be activated and deactivated in just one attack, as long as the total number of actions doesn't exceed three (one activation and two deactivations, three deactivations, or any other combination). Mages and psychics have the advantage of being able to activate and deactivate features with a mere thought or word. This doesn't take an attack, and can really make a difference in an intense fight.

The Environmental Option

Note that the above descriptions specify that Arzno armor is not environmental. This means that it is not a self-contained environment capable of protecting the user against the most extreme hostile climates, conditions, and environments. Environmental suits of armor can be used in situations lacking suitable atmosphere, such as underwater or in outer space. Although the need for such a feature is rare, it also gives protection against other, more conventional problems like smoke, poison gas, nerve gas, biological warfare, and at least limited resistance to radiation. This can be accomplished by one of two methods: conventional or magical protection.

The first option is to have an armorer or other tech person install the necessary guards, computers, and equipment. This process is usually available for roughly 1,500 to 2,000 credits at a legitimate establishment, or twice as much on the black market. Black market prices soar upwards of 7,000 credits in CS territories and the modification usually won't even be considered in one of the mammoth cities. Another problem with this is that most technicians have absolutely no idea what Techno-Wizardry is or how it works, so they can often unknowingly damage the TW devices in the armor. Also, in many places (such as the CS) you can be arrested for so much as looking at a magic item, so the availability for services just isn't there.

The other and normally more practical option is to use Techno-Wizardry enhancements to provide sufficient protection

to make the armor magically "environmental". Most varieties of armor have "packages" that are prefabricated and well suited for the armor and their typical uses. They range from a simple breathing apparatus to the all-conditions environmental outfitting with radiation shielding. Any package is available with any suit of armor (unless otherwise specified). Unless noted, handmade armor (such as that built by Arzno Weapons Manufacturing and many Techno-Wizards) does not come with *any* environmental protection. All costs include installation charges.

Environmental Outfitting Packages

Package 1: Breathing Tank

This environmental package is created primarily using the spell *Breathe Without Air*. It allows the wearer to breathe in hostile conditions such as in a vacuum or underwater, and protects the wearer from gaseous chemicals and toxins.

To Create: The spells *Energy Bolt* and *Breathe Without Air*, 75 P.P.E. initially, some sort of gas mask, respirator, or other breathing apparatus, two small rubber hoses, one large smoky quartz (100 cr.) and two small rose quartz (25 cr. each). The large smoky quartz fits in the breather mouthpiece (not necessarily in the mouth of the user) and the two rose quartz fit where the rubber hoses connect to the helmet of the armor from the mouthpiece.

To Use: 5 P.P.E. activates the apparatus for 3 hours. This P.P.E. is automatically expended when the armor is put on and activated unless switched off. As long as the armor remains active, the breathing system will continue to run, draining 5 P.P.E. from the battery every 3 hours.

Arzno Cost: 20,000

Black Market Cost: 50,000 at least; very rare.

Package 2: Airtight Suit

This package offers the same effects as above, but with additional features that seal the entire suit and make the wearer resistant to heat, cold, electricity, and magic. The suit is not quite suitable for outer space, but will totally protect the wearer from the harms of the sea, including corrosion. The armor is undoubtedly heavy, and unless the character has means to help maneuver he will probably sink like a rock! Damage from pressure and the bends still apply.

To Create: The spells *Breathe Without Air*, *Armor of Ithan* and *Energy Field*, and 125 P.P.E. initially. The breather requires some sort of gas mask, respirator, or other breathing apparatus, two small rubber hoses, one large smoky quartz (100 cr.), and two small rose quartz (25 cr. each). The breather is assembled the same way as in Package 1. The sealing of the armor requires a large pendant built onto the stomach area of the armor, gold bands around the biceps, thighs, and neck (150 cr. each) and a medium-sized diamond (700 cr.). The diamond fits into a setting in the center of the pendant.

To Use: 10 P.P.E. is subtracted from the P.P.E. battery upon activating the armor, and runs this feature for 3 hours. The system drains an additional 10 P.P.E. from the battery every 3 hours, as long as the armor is active. The 10 P.P.E. activates all features of the package.

Arzno Cost: 60,000

Black Market Cost: at least 120,000; very rare.

Package 3: Environmentally Sealed Suit

Basically the same as Package 2, but totally suitable for use in any condition, including outer space and underwater. The wearer is totally impervious to all cold, heat (including magic), and can breathe normally as long as the suit is not breached.

To Create: Requires the spells *Invincible Armor* and *Call Lightning*, 250 P.P.E. initially, some sort of breathing apparatus as described in Package 1, with one large smoky quartz (100 cr.) and two small rose quartz (25 cr. Each). For the sealing, a large pendant on the stomach is required and two others on the shoulders of the armor, one large diamond (100 cr.) and two small diamonds (200 cr. each). The large diamond goes in the center of the large pendant on the stomach, and the smaller ones fit in the shoulder pendants.

To Use: 15 P.P.E. is subtracted from the P.P.E. battery upon activating the armor, and the feature runs for 3 hours. After each additional 3 hours, 15 more P.P.E. is taken from the reservoir as long as the device is active. The expended P.P.E. activates all features of the package.

Arzno Cost: 120,000 credits

Black Market Cost: A bare minimum of 300,000 credits; extremely rare outside of Arzno.

Package Add-On: Radiation Shielding

The radiation shielding is achieved through a modified *Impervious to Energy* spell, and blocks all kinds of radiation, but has no effect on conventional energy attacks.

To Create: Requires the spells *Energy Bolt* and *Impervious to Energy*, 150 P.P.E. initially, a Geiger counter, and a large blue topaz (400 cr.). The Geiger counter (no longer usable after conversion) is typically mounted on the forearm or shoulder, or integrated into the helmet.

To Use: 5 P.P.E. in addition to the P.P.E. from one of the packages above. The P.P.E. is taken from the battery with that from the package, and refreshed with its package.

Arzno Cost: 60,000

Black Market Cost: Varies, typically about 120,000 when available. Demand for add-ons is low in the black market.

Alternative Methods of Armor Construction

There are ways to get around some of the little problems with TW armor. With the recent development of new spells in the Magic Zone and throughout the world, have come new techniques in Techno-Wizardry. One such technique is Ironwood armor.

Although the TW enhancements embedded in a suit of armor are unaffected, other spell-casting abilities of the wearer are hampered by dense M.D.C. materials such as metals and plastics. Using the *Ironwood* spell, a suit of armor can be totally fashioned out of S.D.C. wood and then magically strengthened to withstand *Mega-Damage* attacks. The result is a lighter, more usable suit of armor that offers exactly the same protection as the traditional suit. If that option is taken, the following modifications to the listed armor stats are made:

- The armor is 30% lighter, decreasing prowl penalties (if existing) by 5%. So, a suit of armor that is normally -10% prowl, would instead be only -5%.

- M.D.C. of the armor is unchanged.
- Spell casting is not inhibited, and spells may be cast at full strength.
- Since the armor is still wood, it has the ability to hurt supernatural creatures vulnerable to wood. Punches do normal punch damage + P.S. bonus in Hit Points to the undead or others affected by wood. Small spikes on the armor inflict 1D6 damage, large ones vary from 2D4 to 2D6, and blades do 3D6 damage.
- One disadvantage is that one can't swim in the armor because it floats. No diving is possible, but surface swimming isn't hindered.

The conversion is expensive and is done for roughly an additional 50% to 75% over the original cost of the armor. Armor not bought from Arzno goes for about 200 to 300 credits per M.D.C. point for armor, shields, and small objects, while houses are sometimes done for about 100 credits per M.D.C. point or less (frequently charity for the citizens of Arzno). The process works only with non-magical S.D.C. wood.

New Techno-Wizard Equipment and Vehicles

TW Imitator Armor (*Updated!*)

The imitator is a unique and rare suit of armor capable of enhancing the wearer's abilities. It is very stylish, customizable, and popular with Techno-Wizards or any characters that like having a certain "zing." Many officers of the Arzno Mercenary Corps, including Gerra, the head Techno-Wizard, own these unique suits of armor. Recently, several new standard types of this armor have been developed for use in the AMC and for sale to the public. These include the additions of "Vampire" and "Angel" style armors.

Model: Arzno TWA-1250

M.D.C.: 40

Prowl Penalty: None; lightweight and extremely maneuverable.

P.P.E. Battery: This armor comes with a P.P.E. battery (50 P.P.E.) that recharges 2 per hour normally, but 10 per melee at a ley line. The battery can be used for the armor's features or other spell casting. The armor is made of high-tech metals and plastics, and therefore does interfere with spellcasting, as per the rules in *World Book 16: Federation of Magic™*.

Cost: 1,000,000 credits; high cost is for customizing and because of the difficulty of creating these versatile suits.

Description:

This armor uses a unique combination of spells at conception to allow it to give its user certain abilities. This armor is made in seven styles: Eagle, Rhino, Cheetah, Serpent, Skeleton, Vampire, and Angel. Each has its own set of powers/spells, and resembles the animal/creature it emulates. (G.M. note: The characters, with your permission, may "build their own armor" for an additional 50%. What spells are available are totally at your discretion.)

Statistics for Eagle, Rhino, Cheetah, Serpent, and Skeleton armors are available in **Rifter #2**.

Features of Vampire Armor:

Despite its somewhat frightening appearance, resembling a black and gray corpse, this suit of armor is very useful in combating a great number of different foes. This armor is sometimes used by the AMC to infiltrate areas otherwise unavailable to many soldiers and heroes. An added bonus is the offensive capabilities of the mental blast, eliminating the need to carry a weapon.

1. Aura of Death

Effect: Protects the wearer from sensors and projects an illusion of death and decay. See *World Book 16: Federation of Magic™*, page 134.

P.P.E. to Activate: 12

Duration: 10 melees

2. Mental Blast

Effect: A mental attack, causing 5D6 damage plus disorientation penalties. Double damage when delivered by touch (skin to skin). See *World Book 16: Federation of Magic™*, page 138, for further details.

P.P.E. to Activate: 15

Duration: Instant and effects last 5 melees.

Range: Touch or 150 feet (45.7 m), but target must be visible.

3. Cloak of Darkness

Effect: The wearer is shrouded in darkness and is nearly invisible at night. Those outside the 5 foot (1.5 m) radius and unaided by thermo optics are -3 to hit the wearer (-1 with optics).

P.P.E. to Activate: 6

Duration: 20 minutes

4. Armor of Ithan

M.D.C.: 60

P.P.E. to Activate: 10

Duration: 24 melees

Features of Angel Armor

Note: The Angel Armor costs an extra 150,000 credits, but has double the P.P.E. battery capacity (100 P.P.E.).

Though this armor is more expensive, it is a top seller to many champions of light, rogue doctors, and priests. In the AMC, this armor is often worn by field medics, who use its magical healing capabilities to enhance their learned, magical, or psionic healing abilities. The addition of the Awe spell gives such medics more of a chance to work on their patients and not have to worry about being attacked. The standard Armor of Ithan adds extra protection in the case that combat becomes necessary.

1. Awe

Effect: Awe Factor of 16.

P.P.E. to Activate: 5

Duration: 6 minutes

2. Greater Healing

Effect: Heals 2D4x10 S.D.C., 6D6 H.P., or 1D4 M.D.C. (can't be used on the suit's wearer).

P.P.E. to Activate: 30

Range: Touch

Duration: Instant

3. Winged Flight

Effect: The wearer sprouts ectoplasmic wings and can fly. Flying speed is 80.

P.P.E. to Activate: 35

Duration: 1 hour, 40 minutes

4. Armor of Ithan

M.D.C.: 60

P.P.E. to Activate: 10

Duration: 24 melees

TWM-2000 Hypospray

Traditionally, a device used to give medication as an alternative to injection. The TW version delivers magical aid to a sick, or in some instances a perfectly healthy, person. The device is a five-inch (13 cm) plastic tube with a hollow cavity at one end (for the insertion of the magical agent) and another small tube extending sideways off the other side. The trigger button is a medium rose quartz on the large section. The insertions are cylinders with a small blue topaz in the butt and a three-pronged jack that plugs into the hypospray. Reloading takes one melee action.

Effect: Varies with type. See below for descriptions of magical agents.

Energy Requirements: 8 P.P.E. or 10 I.S.P. for 5 charges.

To Create: 100 P.P.E., one medium rose quartz (100 credits), and a medical hypospray.

Creation Spells: Blinding Flash and Telekinesis.

Cost: 2000 credits for the hypospray. The magical agents vary in cost; see below. Prices are easily three times as much on the black market throughout the world. TW medical devices are a rare commodity.

TWM-100 Series Magical Agents

Duration: Instant and permanent.

Energy Requirements: None, activated by hypospray.

To Create: Each agent's creation cost is twice the spell's P.P.E. plus twenty, a small blue topaz (50 credits), and a small metal or plastic tube for the casing.

Effects: Each agent acts as the spell listed, with the same results. Each agent purchased is good for one use.

Spells Available and Cost:

- TWM-101: Negate Poison/Toxin, 500 cr.
- TWM-102: Cure Minor Disorder, 1000 cr.
- TWM-103: Heal Wounds, 1000 cr.
- TWM-104: Cure Illness, 1500 cr.
- TWM-105: Exorcism, 3000 cr.
- TWM-106: Stone to Flesh, 30,000 cr.
- TWM-107: Remove Curse, 140,000 cr.
- TWM-108: Restoration, 750,000 cr.

TWM-150 Series Magical Agents (Enhancements)

Duration: Varies with agent.

Energy Requirements: None, activated by hypospray.

To Create: Each agent's creation cost is twice the spell's P.P.E. plus twenty, a small blue topaz (50 credits), and a small metal or plastic tube for the casing.

Effects: Each agent acts as the spell listed, with the same results. Each agent purchased is good for one use. Each is effectively cast at fifth level.

- TWM-151: Impervious to Poison, 2500 cr.
- TWM-152: Impervious to Fire, 2500 cr.
- TWM-153: Superhuman Strength, 5000 cr.
- TWM-154: Superhuman Speed, 5000 cr.
- TWM-154: Swim as a Fish, 3000 cr.
- TWM-155: Swim as a Fish: Superior, 6000 cr.
- TWM-156: Impervious to Energy, 10,000 cr.
- TWM-157: Reduce Self, 10,000 cr.
- TWM-158: Fly as the Eagle, 12,500 cr.

A note on prices: These are the retail prices of the commercially produced products of Arzno. Black market cost for the TWM-100 series is usually triple, and the TWM-150 series is five times the cost. Most spells are available in this form, by Game Master discretion. The formula for the price is:

- For medical agents (and it must be a medical treatment with instant or near-instant duration) it is 100 times the P.P.E. cost.
- For the enhancement series, the prices are 500 times the P.P.E. cost.

Though these prices may seem high, remember that they can affect anyone as long as the person giving the treatments can use TW devices. Even the most magically ignorant soldier can be affected, making them infinitely more combat-ready.

Another common implementation of the TWM-2000 is for anti-vampire field soldiers to use it to poison or damage vampires by injecting garlic, water, or holy water into the skin of the vampire. This is dangerous for the soldier, who must get to point blank range in order to administer the hypospray. Garlic has the same effect as ingesting it, only double duration. Water does 3D6 damage and holy water does 1D4x10. Garlic cartridges sell for 500 credits each, water for 300, and holy water for 1000. These are still in the test phase, and it is yet to be determined whether they will be available for sale due to the danger inherent in their use.

Though not for sale at Arzno, this same TW technology could also be used in creating devices of torture (Agony, Life Drain, etc.). The black market price of these would be roughly 5000 times the P.P.E. cost and up.

TWE-900 Climbing Claws

These climbing claws are designed to help their user scale all types of surfaces, even those normally unclimbable such as smooth buildings or glass. Models vary radically, from simple gloves with hooks in the fingers, to plunger-style suction cups to traditional eastern claws. Each uses a smoky quartz in the handgrip of the device.

Duration: Typically 5th level, 25 minutes.

Effect: Temporarily gives the user incredible climbing skill. Skill is 98% for surfaces usually considered climbable, 60% for traditionally unclimbable surfaces such as the side of a building or inverted climbing. Knowledge of rappelling is included. Note: Only one climbing claw is needed to instill these skills.

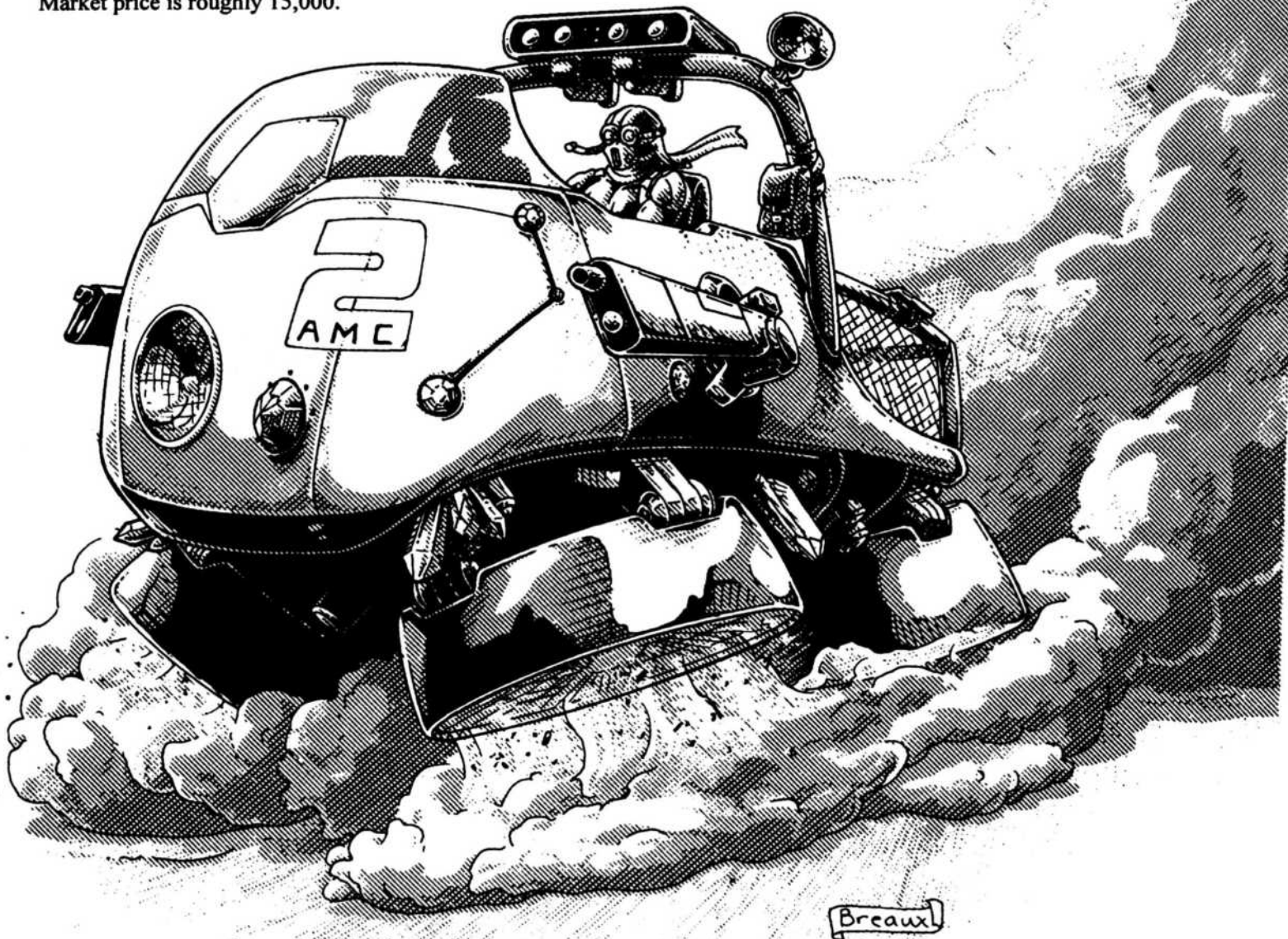
Damage: Eastern-styled claws do 1D4 S.D.C. damage. Even if some sort of Vibro-claw was used in the construction, any M.D. capacity is lost with the conversion. See the TWW-500 for details on customizing the claws.

Energy Requirements: 2 P.P.E. or 4 I.S.P.

To Create: 35 P.P.E., some sort of climbing device and one smoky quartz worth 70 credits.

Creation Spells: Globe of Daylight and Climb.

Cost: 1500 credits, TW Espionage equipment is a relatively new field and has been widely accepted on the black market. Market price is roughly 15,000.



TW Sandstorm Hover Craft

Used for every manner of task, from reconnaissance to assault, the TW Hover Craft has become more and more a part of the arsenal of Arzno. A surprise perk, the massive sandstorm these babies kick up on the open desert can be a major advantage due to the fact that it helps hide their numbers. They also function perfectly in swamps or over water. Sales have also skyrocketed in the Pecos Empire around the Rio Grande and Gulf of Mexico. The vehicle is basically an open-frame platform with three large, pivoting fans on the bottom for movement. Little protection is provided, hence the magical force field offered standard.

Model: Arzno TWV-2100

Crew: 1 pilot, 1 co-pilot/gunner, up to 2 passengers/gunners.

M.D.C. by Location:

*Movement Fans (3): 20 each

*Front-Mounted Shotgun: 10

*Side-Mounted Weapons (2) (optional): 10 each

*Headlight: 5

*Top-Mounted mini-missile launcher: 20

**Main Body: 80

Magic Force Field: 100

* a small and difficult target to hit (-3 to strike on a called shot)

**** depleting the main body destroys the vehicle**

Speed: 100 mph (160 km) max, downhill with the wind at your back. Typically about half that under not-so-favorable circumstances. Cruising considered 30-40 mph (48-64 km).

Statistical Data:

Height: 6 feet (1.8 m)

Weight: 400 lbs (180 kg) fully loaded.

Cargo: Acceptable. Five cubic feet (0.14 cubic meters), maximum.

Power System: Techno-Wizardry; Wind Rush spell (20 P.P.E.) gives a range of 50 miles (80 km).

P.P.E. Battery: Holds 100 P.P.E. (250 miles/400 km) for the engine and an additional 80 for TW and weapon functions. Recharges at ley lines at 10 per melee or elsewhere 2 per hour.

Cost: 2.2 million credits in Arzno. A similar model from Stormspire or another company would cost in the neighborhood of 2.6 million. A black market version would run 18 million minimum.

Weapon Systems:

1. Multi-Function Shotgun

Primary Purpose: Assault (Anti-Vampire)

Secondary Purpose: Defense

Weapon Options:

a) Conventional Rounds

Damage: 5D6 S.D.C.

b) Silver Rounds

Damage: 4D6 S.D.C. or 8D6 H.P. to Vampires

Rate of Fire: Equal to hand-to-hand of the co-pilot or two by the pilot.

Effective Range: 200 feet (61 m)

Payload: 6 shots

2. **Mini-Missile Launcher:** These launchers are located on top of the vehicle, mounted on a sort of roll bar. One of the few non-magic features, the manufacturers at Arzno found it more efficient to use conventional means to fire the missiles. Typically, wood or silver fragmentation missiles are used as anti-Vampire artillery. *Note: These launchers are totally capable of firing conventional missiles.

Primary Purpose: Anti Personnel (Anti-Vampire)

Secondary Purpose: Defense

Damage: Varies. Wood Fragmentation do 1D4 M.D., or 2D4x10 H.P. to Vampires.

Silver does 4D6 M.D., or 1D6x10 H.P. to Vampires. The radius on each is 10 feet (3 m).

Rate of Fire: Can fire up to its entire payload in one volley.

Effective Range: About 1 mile (1.6 km).

Payload: 4

3. **Headlight:** This high-powered headlight has a cross over it to do damage to Vampires.

Primary Purpose: Anti-Vampire

Secondary Purpose: Illumination

Damage: 4D6 H.P. to Vampires

Rate of Fire: Standard

Range: 300 feet (91 m)

Payload: Draws from dedicated P.P.E. battery; Effectively Unlimited.

4. **Other Weapon Systems:** The buyer can opt for up to two more small weapon systems, one on each side. Shotguns like the one described above can be purchased for 8000 each, or a light silver rail gun (3D6 M.D., or 1D4x10 H.P. to vampires) for 20,000 each.

Techno-Wizard features:

Armor of Ithan

M.D.C.: 100

P.P.E. to Activate: 10

Duration: 40 melees

Other magic features: None come standard, but any are available at standard Arzno rates (500x the spell P.P.E. cost in precious metals or other currency).

TW "Whirlybird" Personal Helicopter

The "Whirlybird" has become all the rage amongst the Techno-Wizards in Arzno, as its unique and fun design appeals greatly to a Techno-Wizard's style. Built primarily from cannibalized parts found at small, abandoned, pre-Rifts airports near Arzno, these small helicopters are ideal for getting around quickly in the desert, where there aren't many runways to land airplanes on. The Whirlybird is light and small enough to land on rooftops or in the middle of the street. Its versatility is unmatched, and it is used for reconnaissance, combat, and communications.

The helicopter uses a cockpit like those of a small, one- or two-man airplane. The tail extends six feet (1.8 m) behind the cockpit, with a small propeller that spins vertically. Three large blades, five feet (1.5 m) long each, sit on top of the cockpit. Skids or three small wheels serve as the landing gear and don't retract. The canopy is light Mega-Damage Plexiglas and the seat is enclosed in a small, streamlined pod. On the joystick and dashboard, all buttons are removed and replaced with a variety of crystals, mostly quartz and rubies.

Steering is accomplished with a fighter-jet style joystick, a lever on the dash, and two pedals worked by the feet. The joystick controls movement forward and backwards by tilting the small aircraft's nose. The pedals move the tail left and right, and the lever on the dash helps control altitude. With the proper training and enough practice, the helicopter can move in any direction or even hover completely still.

Like the larger Smiley Chopper and the Kamikaze personal fighter, the propulsion system of this aircraft is magically induced, but uses the magic to achieve the lift principles needed to make the 'copter fly. Through the spell Spinning Blades, the chopper actually achieves flight using Bernoulli's principals of lift (using blades to achieve flight).

Model: Arzno TWV-4000

Crew: 1 pilot/gunner

M.D.C. by Location:

*Main Body: 40 M.D.C.

*** Main Rotor (2 blades): 20 M.D.C. (10 M.D.C. per blade)

*** Back Rotor (3 blades): 15 M.D.C. (5 M.D.C. per blade)

**Front Spotlight: 10 M.D.C.

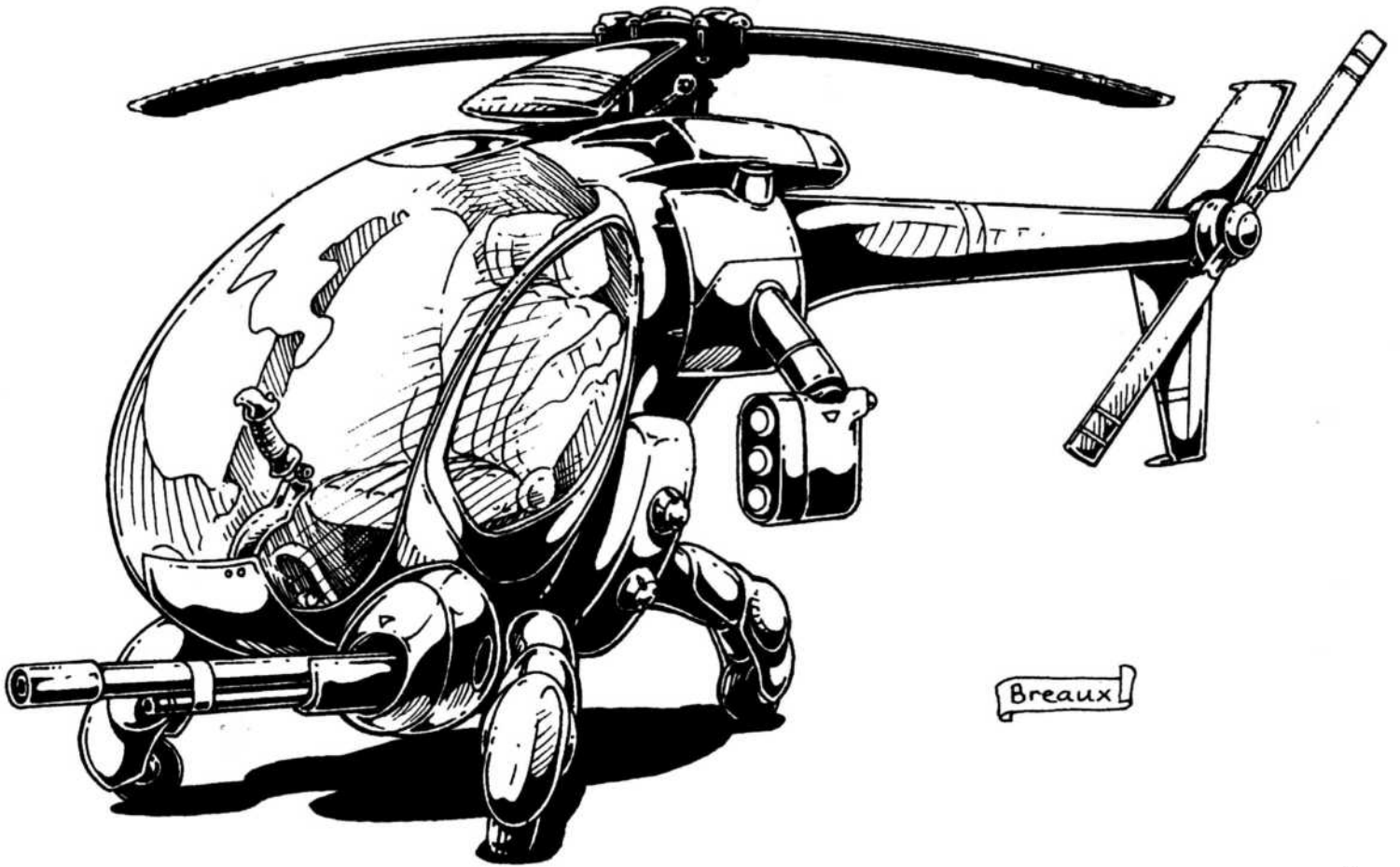
**Landing Skids/Wheels (3): 5 M.D.C. each

*depleting the main body destroys the vehicle and sends it crashing to the ground

** a small and difficult target to hit, -3 to strike on a called shot

***it is virtually impossible to hit a blade while it's moving (-8 strike, blind luck); -3 to strike while landed

Speed: 100 mph (160 km), or 200 mph (320 km) on a ley line.



Statistical Data:

Dimensions: 10 feet x 3 feet x 4.5 feet (3x0.9x1.4 m); blade diameter of 12 feet (3.7 m).

Weight: Roughly 300 lbs (135 kg)

Cargo: 10 cubic feet (0.28 cubic meters)

Power System: Techno-Wizardry; 10 P.P.E. or 20 I.S.P. will last for thirty minutes. The chopper can fly indefinitely on a ley line.

P.P.E. Battery: Holds 60 P.P.E. (3 hours). Recharges at ley lines at 10 per melee or elsewhere 2 per hour.

Cost: 2.2 million credits in Arzno. A similar model from Stormspire or another company would cost in the neighborhood of 2.6 million. A black market Whirlybird would run 8 million minimum.

Weapon Systems:

This vehicle is often used solely for transport or reconnaissance and does not need any advanced systems. However, this versatile craft is a fully capable military machine and can be outfitted with any two of the following systems:

1. Multi-Purpose Rail Gun

Primary Purpose: Assault

Secondary Purpose: Defense

Weapon Options:

a) Conventional Rounds

Damage: 1D6x10 M.D.

Range: 4000 feet (1220 m)

b) Silver Rounds

Damage: 5D4 M.D. or 1D6x10 H.P. to Vampires (10% chance of piercing heart)

Range: 4000 feet (1220 m)

c) Wooden Rounds

Damage: 1D4 M.D. or 3D6x10 H.P. to Vampires (10% chance of piercing heart)

Range: 2000 feet (610 m)

Rate of Fire: Standard; can only fire bursts.

Payload: 25 bursts of conventional or silver rounds. Railgun-dedicated P.P.E. battery allows 25 bursts of wooden rounds.

2. Twin Fire Blaster

Primary Purpose: Anti-Infantry

Secondary Purpose: Defense

Damage: 6D6 M.D. (fire damage)

Range: 2000 feet (610 m)

Rate of Fire: 4 times per melee, maximum.

Payload: Unlimited on a ley line, 5 P.P.E. per blast off a ley line. May run on the battery.

3. Missile Launcher

Primary Purpose: Assault

Secondary Purpose: Defense

Damage: As per missile.

Range: One mile (1.6 km).

Rate of Fire: Up to the entire payload may be fired in one volley.

Payload: 6 mini- or 3 short-range missiles.

4. Communications Package

This P.P.E.-driven communications package has a mundane backup system as well. Through the combination of magic and technology, the following results are achieved:

a) 20 scrambled frequencies

- b) Radio and video receivers
- c) Audio and video recording capability
- d) Video camera with 100x zoom
- e) Still camera (mundane) with film for 30 pictures
- f) A communications decoder, add +20% to Cryptography skill (through Tongues spell)
- g) Medium-range radar, range of 10 miles (16 km), capable of tracking 20 targets simultaneously

5. Carpet of Adhesion Skids

This feature allows the Whirlybird to adhere securely to a surface, be it the top of a vehicle or a landing pad. It also serves as an anti-theft device, sticking to its landing surface until the owner flips a hidden switch or magically removes the adhesion. This ability has another application which, though useful for reconnaissance and communications, requires an extraordinary pilot. The feature allows the helicopter to stick to the sides of larger vehicles, buildings, or any large structure that can hold its weight. Such a maneuver requires piloting the helicopter at nearly 90 degrees, and such a stunt earns the pilot a -35% penalty if the object is stationary, or a -50% if it is a large, moving body. Only the most experienced pilots with the most guts should attempt this extremely dangerous maneuver. A failed roll means that the Whirlybird doesn't stick and crashes into the object, then falls to the ground, almost certainly making the vehicle unusable.

6. Enhanced Carrying Capacity

The ability to carry one passenger (uncomfortable, but still possible) or an additional 10 cubic feet (.28 cubic meters) of cargo. Reduce speeds by 20 mph (32 km).

TW "Smiley Chopper" Gunship

An experiment in heavy TW weaponry, the TWV-4100 "Smiley Chopper" (so named for the toothy grin painted on the cockpit) is a converted combat helicopter, in this case a retrofit pre-Rifts chopper. When found, the wrecked 'copter was al-

ready an M.D.C. structure, but it was an early M.D.C. vehicle and required extensive work to make it suitable for combat. Still, even with the work, the damage capacity that the chopper could withstand was minimal (a chopper in better condition could have twice as much as M.D.C.). To compensate, it has been fit with a magic force field. The expensive and hard to replenish liquid fuel system has been replaced with a TW system to provide longer flight time and range.

The main weaponry of the helicopter consists of a front-mounted heavy rail gun and a weapon arm with 48 mini-missiles, capable of firing volleys of up to 8 missiles at a time. Both weapons are intended as primarily anti-infantry and power armor weapons, but are suitable for use against aircraft and structures as well. The helicopter also has a large spotlight for seek and destroy, rescue, or anti-vampire missions.

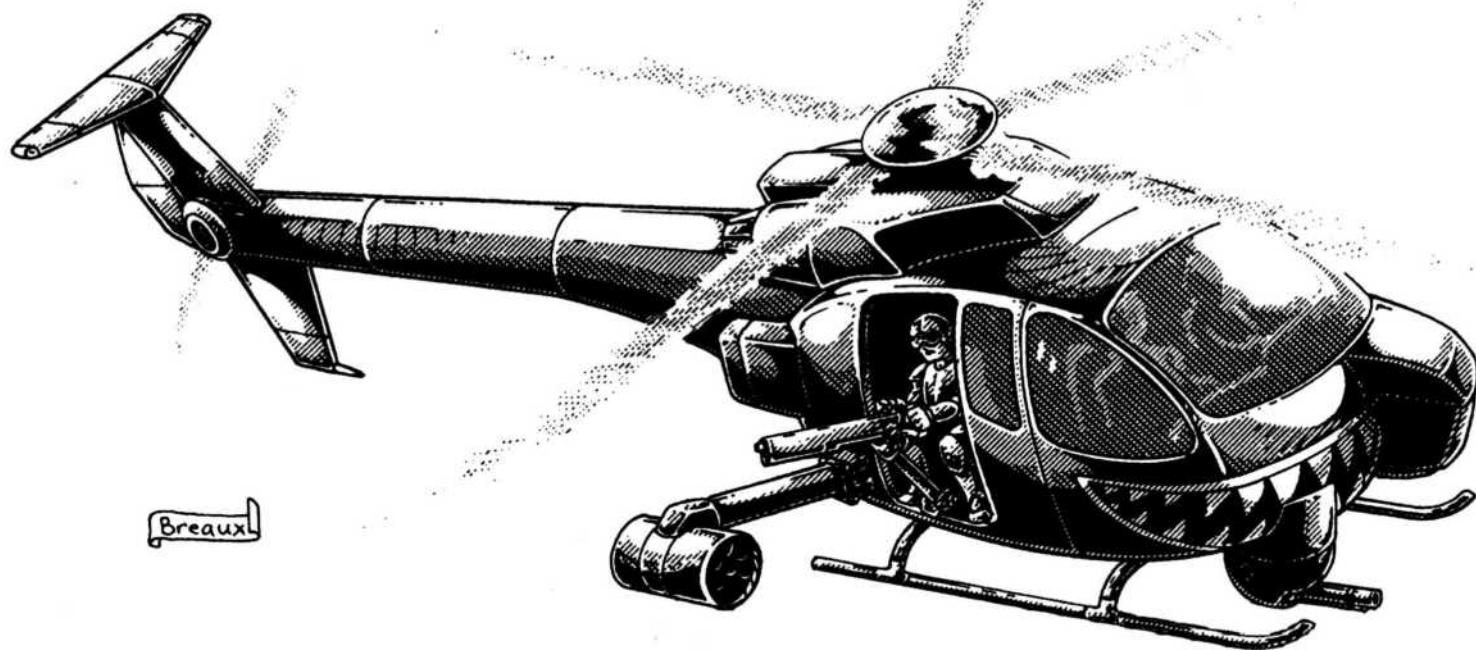
Two large, fixed skids serve as landing platforms. The canopy is light Mega-Damage Plexiglas and the pilot is enclosed in a small, streamlined pod. On the joystick and dashboard, all buttons have been removed and replaced with a variety of crystals, mostly quartz and rubies.

Steering is accomplished with a fighter-jet style joystick, a lever on the dash, and two pedals worked by the feet. The joystick controls movement forward and backwards by tilting the aircraft's nose. The pedals move the tail left and right, and the lever on the dash helps control altitude. With the proper training and enough practice, the helicopter can move in any direction or even hover completely still.

Pre-rifts military strategy regarding helicopters was to fly them in flights from 5 to 20 machines. The "Smiley Chopper" has been tested flying with 4 "Whirlybird" personal helicopters as an escort. If put into mass production, a flight of 5 would be likely, with an escort of 2-3 Whirlybirds per gunship.

Model: Arzno TWV-4100

Crew: 1 pilot, 1 copilot/gunner/communications, 1 optional door gunner, and 4 soldiers or 2 power armor troopers.



M.D.C. by Location:

- *Main Body: 90 M.D.C.
- Magic Force Field: 200 M.D.C.
- ***Main Rotor (4 blades): 40 M.D.C. (10 per blade)
- ***Back Rotor (2 blades): 10 M.D.C. (5 per blade)
- **Front Spotlight: 15 M.D.C.
- **Landing Skids (2): 5 M.D.C. each
- *depleting the main body destroys the vehicle and sends it crashing to the ground
- ** a small and difficult target to hit, -3 to strike on a called shot
- ***it is virtually impossible to hit a blade while it's moving (-8 strike, blind luck); -3 to strike while landed

Speed: 80 mph (128 km), or 160 mph (256 km) on a ley line.

Statistical Data:

Dimensions: 60 feet x 10 feet x 17 feet (18.3x3x5.2 m); (doesn't include blades, diameter 50 feet/15.2 m).

Weight: 10 tons fully loaded.

Cargo: Seats and weapons lockers for crew and aforementioned troops.

Power System: Techno-Wizardry; 10 P.P.E. or 20 I.S.P. will last for twenty minutes. The chopper can fly indefinitely on a ley line.

P.P.E. Battery: Holds 100 P.P.E. (just over 3 hours). Recharges at ley lines at 10 per melee or elsewhere 2 per hour.

Cost: 5 million credits in Arzno. A similar model from Stormspire or another company would cost in the neighborhood of 7 million. A similar black market gunship would run 12 million minimum.

Weapon Systems:

This vehicle is often used solely for transport or reconnaissance and does not need any advanced systems. However, this versatile craft is a fully capable military machine and can be outfitted with any two of the following systems:

1. Multi-Purpose Rail Gun

Primary Purpose: Anti-infantry, Anti-Power Armor

Secondary Purpose: Anti-Structure, Anti-Aircraft

Weapon Options:

a) Conventional Rounds

Damage: 2D4x10 M.D.

Range: 4000 feet (1220 m)

b) Silver Rounds

Damage: 5D6 M.D. or 2D4x10 to H.P. Vampires (10% chance of piercing heart)

Range: 4000 feet (1220 m)

c) Wooden Rounds

Damage: 1D6 M.D. or 4D4x10 H.P. to Vampires (10% chance of piercing heart)

Range: 2000 feet (610 m)

Rate of Fire: Standard; can only fire bursts.

Payload: 25 bursts of conventional or silver rounds.

Railgun-dedicated P.P.E. battery allows 25 bursts of wooden rounds.

2. Mini-Missile Launcher

Primary Purpose: Anti-Infantry, Anti-Power Armor

Secondary Purpose: Anti-Structure, Anti-Aircraft

Damage: As per missile, typically fragmentation (4D6 M.D.)

Range: One mile (1.6 km).

Rate of Fire: May fire in volleys of 2, 4, or 8.

Payload: 48 mini-missiles.

3. Optional Door Gunner

The side door may be opened and an additional gunner may have a station there. The gunner is strapped in and typical weaponry is a heavy rifle or light rail-gun. Weapon sold separately.

TW "Kamikaze" Fighter Plane

The TWV-4500 Kamikaze Personal Fighter is currently being field tested by the Arzno Mercenary Corps to be used as infantry support or as escort for larger aircraft. Initial tests show that these aircraft can be lethal against small structures such as depots and bunkers, but their anti-infantry ability is limited and far surpassed by the Whirlybird and Smiley Chopper helicopters. If put into production, some redesign would occur and the weapon systems would be altered to favor bombing runs as opposed to strafing attacks versus enemy infantry.

The plane was built from scraps found in the few pre-Rifts airfields surrounding the Arzno territory. The Techno-Wizards at Arzno Weapons Manufacturing took a modern fighter, cut the now unnecessary engines off, removed the wings and replaced them with smaller ones, and updated the weaponry. The end result was a one-man cockpit with wings attached and a propeller in front. Weaponry on the original model includes either 4 mini-missiles or 2 short-range missiles on each of the two wings, and a large TK machinegun in the nose.

Like the TW Whirlybird and Smiley Chopper, the propulsion system of the Kamikaze is magically induced, but uses the magic to achieve the lift principles needed to make the fighter fly. Through the spell combination of Telekinesis and Spinning Blades, the fighter actually achieves flight using Bernoulli's principals of lift (using wings to achieve flight). Telekinesis is used to help in takeoffs, but past that it is the spinning of a propeller that allows the plane to fly.

The cockpit is made such that the pilot virtually lies down on his back, and there is no room for any passengers. The controls are the same as any basic airplane, with a joystick, lever for throttle, and pedals for the flaps. The small size of the plane allows for great maneuverability and speed, although the ability to fly at low speeds was built into the aircraft when it was thought it would fulfill an anti-personnel role.

Plans for a second-generation Kamikaze (the 4500B) have been made, but none have been produced. The basic differences would include a smaller machinegun in the nose and enhanced missile-carrying capacity, plus an increased top speed. Whether or not these planes are ever put into production is questionable, and depends greatly on whether or not AWM gets pulled into the Tolkeen conflict.

Statistics in parenthesis are for the second-generation Kamikaze

Model: Arzno TWV-4500 (4500B)

Crew: 1 pilot/gunner

M.D.C. by Location:

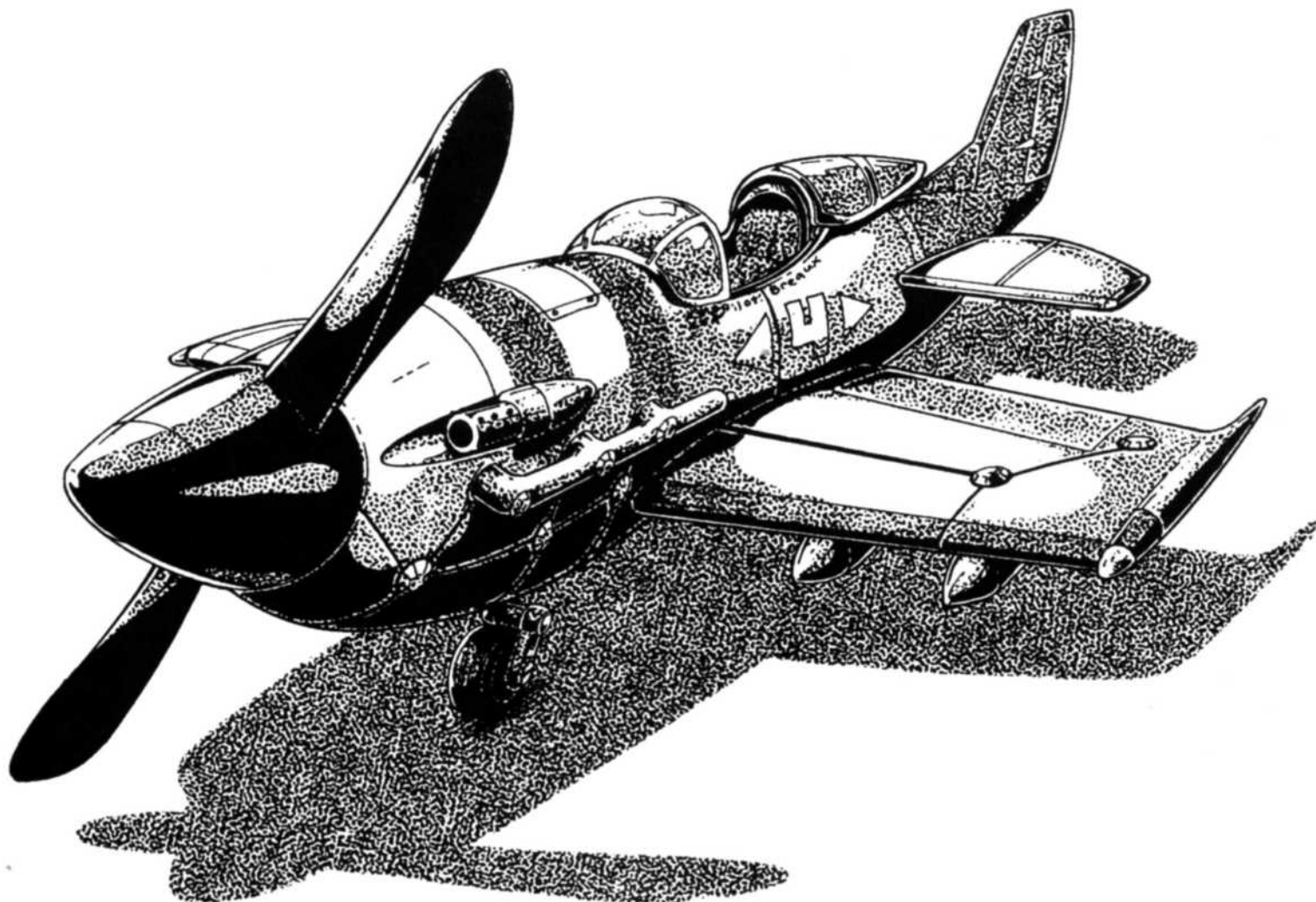
*Main Body: 100 M.D.C.

***2 Propeller: 9 M.D.C. each

**3 Landing Wheels: 5 M.D.C. each

*depleting the main body destroys the vehicle and sends it crashing to the ground

** a small and difficult target to hit, -3 to strike on a called shot



***it is virtually impossible to hit a blade while it's moving (-8 strike, blind luck); -3 to strike while landed

Speed: 150 mph (240 km), or 300 mph (480 km) on a ley line (250/500 mph [400/800 km]). Minimum speed is about 60 mph/96 km (85 mph/136 km) without losing altitude.

Statistical Data:

Dimensions: 8 feet x 3 feet x 4 feet (2.4x0.9x1.2 m). Wingspan of 15 feet (4.6 m).

Weight: Roughly 500 lbs (225 kg).

Cargo: Virtually none.

Power System: Techno-Wizardry; 10 P.P.E. or 20 I.S.P. will last for thirty minutes. Takeoff requires an additional 8 P.P.E. or 10 I.S.P. The fighter can fly indefinitely on a ley line.

P.P.E. Battery: Holds 70 P.P.E., enough for takeoff + 3 hours. Recharges at ley lines at 10 per melee or elsewhere 2 per hour.

Cost: 4 million credits in Arzno. A similar model from Stormspire or another company would cost in the neighborhood of 5.5 million. A black market Kamikaze would run 11 million minimum. (The 4500B would run about the same at Arzno or Stormspire, but about 1 million more in the black market due to enhanced missile carrying capacity.)

Weapon Systems:

1. Heavy TK Machinegun

Primary Purpose: Anti-infantry (Anti-aircraft)

Secondary Purpose: Anti-aircraft (Anti-structure)

Damage: 1D6x10 M.D. per burst (1D4x10 M.D. per burst)

Rate of Fire: Three times per melee round.

Payload: 30 (40) bursts on machinegun-dedicated battery. 10 (8) P.P.E. per burst.

2. Missile Launcher

Primary Purpose: Anti-infantry (Anti-structure)

Secondary Purpose: Anti-aircraft (Anti-aircraft)

Damage: As per missile, typically fragmentation, 5D6 M.D. (typical for the 4500B is high-explosive, 1D4x10 M.D.)

Rate of Fire: Up to the entire payload may be fired in one volley.

Payload: 8 mini- or 4 short-range missiles (14 mini- or 6 short-range).

3. Additional Systems

One major problem with the original Kamikaze is that runway space is limited, and building and maintaining runways is costly and inefficient. To rectify this, a VTOL (vertical take-off and landing) system has been created, at least on paper, using the spell Telekinesis. This option is activated with the expenditure of 8 P.P.E. from the pilot or battery reserve, and either raises the craft to a maximum height of 100 feet (30.5 m) for takeoff, or will ease the craft to the ground from a maximum of 100 feet (30.5 m) up. Landings are tricky, but by using the flaps and easing the aircraft in at speeds under about 50 mph (80 km), it is manageable. VTOL landings are -20% on the piloting roll.

The Weapon Mage O.C.C.

Magical blacksmith and warrior

Susyn took an instant to wipe the sweat from her eyes, and then quickly regretted it as she caught the blunt end of an axe square in the jaw. Stunned, but mostly unharmed, the young apprentice advanced with the superior range of her staff, thrusting it at the chest of her master. The aging but still nimble man parried, stepped forward, and let the flat side of his battle axe land in the small of his pupil's back, knocking the wind out of her.

"Too aggressive!" he told her for the thousandth time that day. "You're off balance."

Gasping to breathe, the young Weapon Mage fell to her knees, supporting her weight on the long shaft of wood that served as her temporary weapon. In between shallow breaths of air, rich with the moisture of her own sweat, she stuttered, "Easy for you... to say. You've got that... magic axe of yours."

Laughing and walking towards his fallen student, the man laughed compassionately. "You'll get yours soon enough, young Susyn. Patience."

As he stooped to offer his hand, the young apprentice gripped her staff and swung it upwards, determined to get the best of her master. She felt for a moment as if she were in slow motion, as the old man had suddenly reappeared behind her, took the staff, and gave her a good clout on the back of the head. As she groaned, the old Weapon Mage knelt beside her. "Now, you know better than that, my dear." He chuckled and headed back toward the cottage.

Susyn watched him go, longing for her training in magic to begin as well, if for no other reason than to ease the pain of the lump swelling on her head.

The origination of the Weapon Mages is a mystery. It is said that these champions came from a planet or dimension torn by war and evil. In an attempt to vanquish these evils in other places, many mages turned to more of a combat orientation and the study of enchanting objects. These masters in turn taught others, who taught others until the origin was lost. Only a few still possess the true power of the Weapon Mages.

The Weapon Mages follow a code of honor similar to that of old English knights of legend and the Rifts Cyber-Knights. They are true to justice at any cost, fair to all, and protectors of those who can not help themselves. If they settle down, these warriors raise families with the same ideals, and often their oldest child follows in their footsteps.

Weapon Mages tend to be of races that have a history of heroes, such as humans, True Atlanteans, Centaurs, and Titans. They tend to roam the better part of their lives, fighting all powers of evil across the Megaverse, such as Splugorth, Naruni, vampires, and Gargoyles. They are often the chosen heroes of gods of light, and named saints and heroes by nations and pantheons.

Unfortunately, there are those who fall and turn to evil. These few tend to concentrate on massing fortunes, ruling empires, and gaining power. They are frequently found in the company of

Temporal Raiders, evil dragons, and even dark gods. By selling services as well as their magical weapons, a master Weapon Mage can make millions in a day.

Weapon Mage O.C.C.

Attribute Requirements: P.P. and P.E. of 12 or higher.

Racial Requirements: Must be able to use magic and magic items.

Bonuses: +1 attack per melee, +1 strike and parry with their own magic weapon.

P.P.E.: 2D4x10+20+P.E. attribute number. Gains an additional 1D4x10 per level of experience.

O.C.C. Skills:

Literacy: One of choice (+10%)

Language: Two of choice (+10%)

Magic Lore (+15%)

Demon Lore (+5%)

Land Navigation (+10%)

Horsemanship (+15%)

Wilderness Survival (+10%)

Weapon Proficiencies: 3 ancient and 1 modern of choice.

Acrobatics

Hand to Hand: Martial Arts

O.C.C. Related Skills: Select 6 other skills from the following categories. Select an additional two skills at levels three, six, nine, twelve and fifteen. Select an additional W.P. at levels four, eight, and twelve.

Communication: Any

Cowboy: None

Domestic: Any (+5%)

Electrical: Basic only.

Espionage: Any (+5%)

Mechanical: Basic or Automotive only.

Medical: First Aid and Paramedic only.

Physical: Any (+5%)

Pilot: Any except Robots and Power Armor.

Pilot Related: Any (+5%)

Rogue: Any except Computer Hacking.

Science: Any

Technical: Any (+5%)

W.P.: Any

Wilderness: Any (+5%)

Secondary Skills: Select 6 Secondary Skills from the above list without benefit of the bonuses in parenthesis. These are secondary areas of knowledge which the character picks up along the way.

Special skills:

Blacksmithing: This is the ability to create beautiful weapons from scratch. This can be used to make both ordinary weapons and weapons to be enchanted. This skill also includes Woodworking. 25 + 5% per level.

Read, write and recognize runes: The ability to distinguish between true and false runes, as well as read and write them correctly. 30% + 5% per level.

At level 15, a master Weapon Mage will seek out this character and teach him the lost art of creating magic weapons. This spell of legend is quite powerful, and is only given to a Mage once he or she reaches that level of ability.

Forge Magic Weapon

This spell is used to create magic weapons such as those in the Enchanted Weapon category of Heroes Unlimited. It is a greater spell than "Enchant Weapon" found in Federation of Magic, but far less powerful than the powerful Rune weapons.

Spell Level: Spell of Legend

Total time: 2 hours to enchant plus the forge time.

Total P.P.E.: 1000 + twice that of the spells and/or other abilities being induced.

The Forging process to create a magic weapon is basically the same as any other blacksmithing, but with some magical additions. The forging must take place on a ley line and the flame must be created magically. At special points in the ritual, Fuel Flame is used to increase the temperature of the flame, and massive amounts of P.P.E. are pumped into the weapon. After the weapon is forged, any spell can be put into that weapon, provided the creator knows it and has enough P.P.E. handy to bestow it upon the new object (each spell requires twice the normal amount of P.P.E.). Any number of spells or special powers may be put on any enchanted weapon. The most common are spells such as Call Lightning, Fire Bolt, Armor of Ithan, and Superhuman Strength. A list of common abilities is below. All spells may be used as often as once per melee. If a spell is added more than once, it may be used as many times per melee as it has been added. Abilities are always in effect as long as the weapon is being used. Through the long process of P.P.E. expenditure, the weapon is made indestructible and its wielder always has +1 to strike and parry while using it (powers common to all enchanted weapons).

Specific abilities such as increased combat bonuses or heightened magic abilities may be added by pumping additional P.P.E. into the weapon during creation (no limit on the number, other than the creator's reservoir of P.P.E.). This can be used to add combat bonuses, heighten senses or an attribute of the user, increase magic abilities, and so on. Common applications and the P.P.E. costs are listed below:

- Add one point to any specific physical attribute (5 total points is the max): 100 P.P.E.
- Add one point to any specific combat roll (5 total points is the max): 100 P.P.E.
- Increase spell casting abilities by 25% (bonuses max at 100%): 150 P.P.E.
- Add a ten point aura of S.D.C./M.D.C. to the user (100 max, can't add M.D.C. to S.D.C. creatures. Damage is taken from this aura before any armor or personal damage.): 200 P.P.E.
- The object is a P.P.E. battery of 50 P.P.E. (200 P.P.E. battery max): 100 P.P.E.
- Impervious to any one type of attack (this can only be used once): 250 P.P.E.
- Do extra damage to a particular kind of being (can be instilled as many times as desired): 200 P.P.E.
- Other abilities can be made available at the G.M.'s discretion.

In addition, the universal abilities of the weapons are +1 strike and parry, and the weapon is invulnerable, at no additional P.P.E. cost. Damage of these weapons is relative to the weapon itself. Daggers will inflict 2D6 while a large sword or

axe may inflict 6D6 (or 1D4x10). Typical damage range is 2D6-6D6, though a few exceptions may exist.

Note that the spell specifically says, "weapon," but this process may be done on ordinary objects, provided they are forged (not armor). Also note that this spell cannot be used to create ranged weapons or bullets.

Magic abilities: Ignite Fire, Fuel Flame, and 1 spell per level, less than or equal to the level of the spell caster.

Equipment: A suit of personalized heavy or light body armor (any kind), two energy weapons of choice with five clips for each, one S.D.C. firearm of choice with 5 clips, a knife, and one melee weapon (either S.D.C. or M.D.C., not magic).

Alternately, the character may opt to have a suit of TW or other magic armor, one energy weapon with two clips, and one melee weapon. Under these circumstances the character gives up Black Market Items as well.

In either case, the character gets two weeks worth of rations, a gas mask and air filter, tinted goggles, a few comfortable sets of clothing, a first aid kit and basic camping supplies (includes a pack). Most importantly, the character gets his or her magic weapon.

The magic weapon (or object... doesn't have to be a weapon) is the favorite weapon of the character, created by his master before he left his side. It can be any type of weapon, but is not likely to have more than six spells/powers. Use the guidelines above to create it, or use a magic weapon from the Heroes Unlimited Enchanted Weapon category.

Cybernetics and Bionics: Starts with none and avoids them if possible. Bio systems are preferred, should prosthetics become a necessity.

Money: The character starts with 2D4x500 credits and an additional 2D4x1000 in black market items (unless the player chose to have magic armor as described above).

Hook, Line, and Sinker Adventures

First Day, No Play

G.M. Note: This is just an introduction and a way to get characters together. Plus, it's always fun for a G.M. to play drill sergeant for a little while. This can last for about 15 minutes or an entire gaming session, depending on how it's played.

Hook: The player characters have just arrived at the training facility at the AMC compound in Arzno, and are enlisted to serve in the Corps.

Line: The players have completed their paperwork, have been issued their uniforms and are settled in for their first night, with training to begin the next day.

Sinker: "The next day" is just that. As the barracks are flooded with screaming drill instructors, the characters might have time to get a glimpse of a clock that says 12:01 AM. Before breakfast at 0600 hours, the characters have run several miles, done over 300 pushups and sit-ups, and have generally been tortured. The first day is carried out this way all day long, with brief interludes for the instructors to tell the new recruits that they will never make it (Game Masters, feel free to do whatever you like). The day ends at 2000 hours (8 o'clock) with

lights out. Following days not so rough, but it's too late for the half of the group that has already quit.

All I wanna do is have some fun

G.M. Note: This HLS might be best used after the completion of a first mission, or basic training. It's great for a change of pace and a little comic relief.

Hook: The characters get their first free night out since enlisting, and are looking forward to some fun on the town.

Line: There's a lot to do in Arzno, including bars, pubs, shooting ranges, camping, hunting, card-playing and any other sport that most mercenaries and soldiers find appealing. The characters don't have to be back until 0600 hours the next morning, so have all the time they want to blow off a little steam.

Sinker: There's never a quiet day for a soldier. By luck or fate, every bad guy, scumbag, poker player, and ex-lover of one or more of the characters seems to pop out of nowhere and want to start trouble. Or, maybe the bad luck just alternates between members of the group. Either way, the characters just aren't having a lot of fun and could end up in the middle of a lot of trouble (blamed for a bank heist, accused of theft, arrested for fighting, etc.). The goal is to make it through the night with their sanity intact and, hopefully, salvage something out of the evening.

War Games

Hook: The characters have decided to enter the annual "War Games" sponsored by AWM and AMC. The week-long tourney is a major attraction of the city and brings groups from all over to compete.

Line: After about four days of competition (the characters may or may not still be in) there is an accident. One of the "stunner" rifles overheats and explodes, but causes only minor injuries to the user. The next day, one of the rifles fires a real energy burst instead of its normal harmless pulse. Luckily the shot missed, but felled a tree with ease. Obviously something is wrong and the characters (either under orders or on their own) investigate. Evidence begins to show up and it points to Gerra No'ta, a member of the AMC and a highly respected Techno-Wizard.

Sinker: The evidence has been planted and Gerra is innocent. The true saboteurs are a few members of a team who lost in the past, known as "Brazen's Bunch" after their leader, Marc Brazen (5th level Headhunter). The team is from Clarksdale and will not be happy if they're caught. The group framed Gerra due to his alien (Trimadore) nature and their racism toward D-Bees in general. If they escape, they may run to the Coalition for protection and, in the process, cause some major problems for Arzno and her magic-using citizens.

Orders are Orders

Hook: The characters' unit is assigned an easy extermination job in a small town (pop. 400) on the southern end of the Arizona/New Mexico border. The contract was independent and moderate to good in pay.

Line: The characters investigate to find that indeed there are two Secondary Vampires living within the city. One is male, one female, and they live in an abandoned house near the edge of town.

Sinker: As it turns out, the vampires are supposedly reformed. They live off blood provided by the local doctor that has gone unused and would otherwise be thrown out. The vampires took blood from humans once, after they defeated a group of Psi-Stalker marauders who threatened the village. On only two other occasions have the vampires had to feed on humans, and then they fed on criminals currently in the jail, never killing them, and always under the supervision of the doctor and sheriff. A wealthy man of the town, who owns the local hotel and claims that rumors of the vampires are scaring away his customers, issued the contract. Aside from whispers and ghost stories from the local children, he is the only one who seems to mind (however, many of the townsfolk don't know of their existence or don't believe the stories). Do the characters carry out their orders? Are there any other options? What will the townspeople say if they find out?

Air Arzno

Hook: The characters are either employed by Arzno Mercenary Corps as members, or are being sub-contracted for a job.

Line: The job is to escort a convoy north to meet with a representative from Tolkeen, who wishes to discuss the possibility of trade relations to aid Tolkeen in the upcoming war with the CS. The group will also carry plans and prototypes of various TW products to him. A large plane is contracted to carry the characters, their vehicles and equipment, plus the equipment intended for Tolkeen, most of the way north and into pre-Rifts Nebraska, where the characters will continue on the ground.

Sinker 1: The crew of the contracted plane see all of the Techno-Wizard equipment and decide they can make a little more money by killing the group, taking their stuff, and selling it to the black market. In the resulting struggle onboard, the plane crashes to the ground miles short of its intended location, stranding the characters and any of the unscrupulous pirates who survived. What can they do with the airplane's crew? Where are the characters and how do they meet their contact by the deadline? How much of their equipment is damaged? Did the CS or a local kingdom send an attachment to investigate the crash?

Sinker 2: The name and description of the contact was a secret held only by the commander of the mission, who dies in the crash. How do the characters know who to contact and who to trust?

Sinker 3: The contact has been killed and replaced by a CS sympathizer or some other menace. If he fools the characters, he may be taken back to Arzno and unveil all of their secrets, even their location.

CS Troubles

Hook: The characters are employed as soldiers in the Arzno Mercenary Corps, are independent citizens within the territory, or have some other tie to Arzno.

Line: While out traveling in Texas or New Mexico, whether on assignment or on their own, the characters hear rumors of some mercenaries in town who are asking a lot of questions about vampires, Techno-Wizardry, or both.

Sinker: These soldiers are from the Coalition States and have been sent deep into the field to investigate the possibility of vampire kingdoms in the Southwest, a possibility that the CS officially denies. Their secondary objective is to learn where the

increase in TW weaponry and equipment in the Pecos Empire is coming from. The latter spells real trouble for Arzno, as the weapons have come indirectly from them, via theft and the black market. If the CS was to find out about Arzno Weapons Manufacturing or the merc company that it supports, it would immediately wipe out the city, which would stand little chance versus any CS attack. This scenario has many further possibilities. What if Arzno is able to educate these CS soldiers in the extermination of the vampires? What if some soldiers from Arzno, armed with TW weaponry, save this group from a horde of the undead? How then will the characters be viewed by this small group, if not the CS as a whole?

Power Clash

Hook: The characters, under the employ of the AMC, meet up with the famed Reid's Rangers.

Line: The characters and Rangers become friends, possibly fighting a threat together and sharing stories over a few drinks. Word gets back to Reid of this large outfit and he arranges to meet with some of its officers, even with Onra himself.

Sinker: Doc Reid is infuriated that anyone should try and outdo him. His huge ego doesn't allow him to see anyone else in his profession as anything except bumbling idiots who don't understand his mission or purpose. He assumes that it is the goal of the AMC to run him out of business. If the meeting takes place, Reid will do his best to make the AMC look bad, and even try and portray them as frauds, gold-diggers, and murderers. Eventually the characters and/or some of the officers will begin to see through the evil Doc Reid. Will they expose this false hero for what he really is? Onra, with his high values and honor, will be particularly disgusted with Reid and want to expose him. How will they do it? What will others think of them if they try to expose this legend, who is revered as a hero to so many people?

The Environment of Space



Optional Rules and Material for Rifts® and Other Games

By Ewen Cluney

Introduction

In many game settings, characters may often find themselves traveling in space. In *Rifts*®, whether *Mutants in Orbit*™ or *Phase World*™, as well as in *Heroes Unlimited*™, technology has reached the point where space travel is commonplace. However, the environment of space is a hostile one. Between the cold vacuum, strange gravitational forces (or lack thereof), and other phenomena, space holds not only adventure, but great danger as well.

Varying Gravity Rules

The following rules are for when characters are forced to function in increased, reduced, or zero gravity. One G (short for Gravity) is equal to the amount of gravitational force exerted by the Earth (Mars exerts about 0.38Gs, and it's about 0.17Gs on Earth's moon). Also, remember that these attribute changes are *relative*. That is, a character will always have normal attributes

in whatever environment he grew up in, be it Earth, the moon, or whatever. Modifiers are halved for power armor and robots.

Increased Gravity: For every 0.1G increase, reduce the character's effective Spd. by 2, and P.S., P.P., and P.E. by 1. An attribute cannot be made to go below one fourth its normal level, unless the gravity is more than four times what the character is used to, and can never be forced below 1.

For example, let's say our hero, Neil, is from Earth (1.0Gs) and has a Spd. of 16, and P.S., P.P. and P.E. of 15. On a planet with a gravity of 2.0Gs, his Spd. would be reduced to 4 (normally would be -20 points, but can't be reduced beyond one-fourth until 4.0Gs), and his P.S., P.P. and P.E. would each be 5.

Reduced Gravity: For every 0.1 G decrease, increase Spd. by 2, and P.S., P.P., and P.E. by 1.

For example, on the moon (0.17Gs), the hero mentioned above would experience a decrease of about 0.8Gs. This would increase his effective Spd. to 32, and his P.S., P.P., and P.E. to 23.

Zero Gravity is a bit different, however, and a number of things need to be taken into consideration. When there is no gravity, one is not bound to any ground, which greatly reduces resistance to movement. When an object is set in motion, it will stay in motion until some other force stops it. And in space, that isn't too likely. Thus, when in combat in space, you must plan moves carefully, pushing yourself off of something with more mass when you want to move. Anyone without the Zero-Gravity Movement & Combat skill is at -15% on skill performance, -1 attack per melee, -2 on initiative, and all combat bonuses, and generally Spd., are halved. When putting all his effort into pushing off of something big and heavy, a character can achieve, at most, a Spd. equal to his P.S. times two. The trick is stopping.

Vacuum: In space there is a near total vacuum (except for the occasional hydrogen molecule). In this environment, the same basic modifiers apply as for Zero Gravity, but the ranges of energy weapons are doubled (no air resistance). The effective



range of projectile weapons is also doubled in zero-gravity (this is how far the weapon can be aimed accurately, not how far a shot will go, which is more or less forever).

Decompression: A normal person cannot survive in a vacuum, especially that of space. The unbelievably intense cold, near total lack of pressure and air, and fierce stellar radiation will kill any normal human or near-human without protection within 1D4x10 seconds.

Most of the more powerful supernatural creatures will fare a little better, only taking 1D6x10 M.D. per melee. Creatures who live in space have no such troubles, however.

Variant Humans: Characters born and acclimated to a different strength of gravity will have slightly different attributes. A high-gravity world will cause people to become more bulky and physically powerful, while a low-gravity one will make them tend to be very thin and lightweight. General attribute modifiers are listed below. Low gravity covers characters adjusted to 0.1 to 0.7 Gs. For 0.8 to 1.3 Gs, roll attributes normally, and high gravity covers 1.4 Gs or more.

Low Gravity: -1D4 to P.S. and P.E., +1D6 to P.P.

High Gravity: +1D6 to P.S. and P.E., +10 to S.D.C.

Comets

A typical solar system has thousands of comets orbiting the star, but these are a relatively minor danger, as they spend most of their time in deep, interplanetary space. A comet consists of a nucleus, which is typically a mile across (1.6km) and is made up of dust, ice, and sometimes rock, and a coma, which surrounds the nucleus to a distance of 60,000 to 600,000 miles (96,000 to a million kilometers), and two tails. The visible tail is made of dust and can be millions of miles long. The second tail is the plasma tail, consisting of streamers of electrons and ions, which always points away from the sun. A comet will have a long, elliptical orbit.

Passing through either of a comet's tails can cause problems. The dust tail can cause great damage and interfere with electrical equipment. In general, contact with the dust tail will inflict a minimum of 1D6x10 M.D. Radio range is reduced by half while the comet is in the area.

The plasma tail can be even more dangerous because it is invisible, and creates a strong magnetic field that can interfere with electronic instruments. If a vessel is caught in the tail, it will take damage equal to that of the dust tail, plus there is an 01-81% chance of it being knocked 4D6x100 miles (640-3840 km) off course, and unshielded electronics (quite possibly including the navigation equipment) may be damaged. There is also a 01-25% chance of the tail hitting especially hard, doing an additional 3D6x10 M.D. to everything caught in its path.

Galaxies

A galaxy is a large group of stars. An average galaxy has many billions of them, and as such, a galaxy is a pretty big place. And yet a single galaxy is tiny compared to any full-sized universe. Galaxies are not stationary either, and not only rotate (albeit very slowly), but slowly move through the universe and sometimes form groups that interact in different ways.

There are four basic types of galaxies, named for their shapes. An *elliptical galaxy* looks like a partially flattened, luminous sphere. The degree to which it is flattened varies; some

are closer to pancakes, while others are almost completely spherical. Elliptical galaxies tend to be composed of older stars. A *spiral galaxy*, like our own Milky Way, is shaped like a disc, with a small, bulging nucleus at the center. The stars will be concentrated at the center, with the rest in groups that make up the spiral arms. A *barred spiral galaxy* is similar to a spiral galaxy, except that the nucleus, to which the spiral arms are attached, is bar-shaped rather than circular. Lastly, there are *dwarf galaxies*, which typically have relatively few stars ("only" about 10 billion). These have no standard shape, and are frequently attached to a spiral or elliptical galaxy.

Stars

Stars come in a number of sizes, and Earth's sun is a fairly typical one. A star is typically formed by the gradual condensation of a cloud of gas in space, which rises in temperature as its own gravity compresses it until, about 20 million years later, the hydrogen ignites in a nuclear fusion reaction, and after while, you have a full-fledged star. Any given star is constantly burning hydrogen, producing intense heat and light. Anyone foolish enough to enter even the corona (the outer layer of gases) of a star will be almost instantly destroyed (the heat of the star would inflict about 2D6x1000 M.D. per minute).

Life Span of a Star: A star's mass will determine its life span, ranging from a million or so to a few trillion years. Interestingly enough, it is the larger stars that last the shortest amount of time; although they have more fuel, they use it even more quickly than other stars.

White Dwarfs: Stars undergo various changes over the course of their existence, until finally they die in some way. A small star will become a *white dwarf*, which consists primarily of the original core of the star; the rest of its mass will have been lost during the reactions that caused it to become a white dwarf in the first place. A white dwarf will gradually cool down, although its gravity can easily be over a hundred-thousand times that on Earth.

Supernovas: Larger stars (those which are about four times the mass of our sun), have a different, and more spectacular way of finishing. The core of the star undergoes changes in composition, creating a chain reaction that ultimately results in an incredible release of light and heat. This release will strike the rest of the solar system as a massive shock wave, inflicting 5D6x10 M.D. per minute to everything it strikes, for several years. A pressure wave originates at the core of the star, and forces the outer layers of the star outward, into space. This wave will inflict an additional 1D6x100 M.D. per melee. The exploding star reaches over a billion times its previous radiance. If a supernova happened not too far away in our galaxy, it would literally be visible with the naked eye in daytime.

Neutron Stars: A neutron star (also known as a pulsar) is a rather rare celestial object, which results from a star undergoing an unusually violent supernova, which compresses the material in the core to the point that the electrons and protons actually combine and cancel each other out, leaving only an incredibly dense mass of neutrons. The stuff of a neutron star is probably the densest material in the universe, the only possible exception being the mind-bending super-dimensionally dense matter of a black hole. While a neutron star has the mass of a typical sun, its diameter is only *ten to twelve miles* (16-19.2 km). To give you an idea how dense this is, our sun is over 800,000 miles

(1,280,000 km) in diameter, and a neutron star will have started out being at least four times that size.

Neutron stars are also known as *pulsars* for the fact that they emit brief, regular radio pulses. The exact reasons for this are uncertain, but the pulses are extremely regular and never stop. Because of that, neutron stars are relatively easy to detect with the proper equipment.

Black Holes: A neutron star normally has a limited density that keeps its size around ten miles/16 km (due to the natural force of repulsion between neutrons that are too close), but if the neutron star is extremely massive, its gravitational force can overcome that, and the neutron star can further collapse, its size being reduced to a few miles. The result is a celestial object so dense that its gravity is sufficient to pull in even light. To give you an idea of the density of a black hole, if the entire Earth were compressed that much, it would be *almost a centimeter* (0.39 inches) in diameter. Black holes are rather difficult to detect, unless you are close enough to detect its gravitational field; any other warning signs would be sucked into the black hole along with all the light, matter, and so on.

It is possible to go within detection distance of a black hole without getting killed, but there is a certain point, called the *event horizon*, at which the gravitational forces become so intense that escape is impossible. The effects of entering a black hole are unknown (for obvious reasons), although it is theorized that in less than a hundredth of a second, objects entering into a black hole would be torn into molecules, then subatomic particles, and then individual quarks.

It has also been theorized that there are objects called *white holes* that spit out whatever a corresponding black hole sucks in, although the existence of these has yet to be proven.

Star Systems

A star system consists of a sun, and whatever planets, planetoids, and so on might orbit it. In a star system, there can be more than one sun (Alpha Centauri, the star system nearest to our sun, has three), although one is usually considerably bigger than the other(s). The planets are usually composed of material expelled from the star during its formation. There are two basic types of planets: solid and gaseous. Solid planets are like Earth, Mars, Venus and Mercury. Gaseous are like Jupiter, Saturn, and so on, and tend to be considerably more massive, but less dense.

The various planets orbit around the most dense sun, and many planets (although not all) will have moons or occasionally rings around them. Most planets with rings are gas giants, and many of these rings will be invisible.

Spatial Phenomena

Magnetic Storms

Magnetic storms are rare, but when they occur, their effects can be devastating. A magnetic storm takes the form of a whirling vortex of invisible electromagnetic waves, like an unseen tornado of energy. These can range from around 50 feet to 5000 miles (15 m to 8000 km) in size, although the largest ones are mostly in interstellar or intergalactic space.

A magnetic storm can be detected as a big blob on most EM detection gear. Electronic equipment will usually be damaged,

and the storm will seriously disrupt radio communications (range is reduced to one tenth, assuming the communications equipment still works).

Wormholes

The existence of wormholes was theorized on Earth as early as the twentieth century. Basically, a wormhole is a path through the wrinkled fabric of spacetime, which allows one to traverse incredible distances in a relatively short time. The physical laws governing these are not fully understood by mankind, but their existence is quite real. A wormhole functions as a two-way portal between two points in space. In function, it is similar to a Rift, although its composition is totally different, and it only allows passage through physical space.

Most wormholes are unstable and short-lived. It is theorized that this is because the permutations in the fabric of the universe that allow wormholes to exist (and allow spacefold drives to work) are unstable, and a wormhole can easily have its middle ground torn away, causing the two portals to collapse. If anything is caught in a collapsing wormhole, it will be trapped in a dimensional limbo, more or less permanently. A few wormholes are fairly stable, but those account for less than 1% of the wormholes in existence.

It is rumored that a few races have the technology to create wormholes, but how this could be done is not at all certain. In theory, the material necessary to do this would have to be so dense and strong that it could not exist within the bounds of conventional physics.

Ley Line Activity On Other Planets

On planets other than Earth, ley lines exist and function in basically the same way. If a planet is devoid of life, reduce the amount of P.P.E. available to one fiftieth of the normal amount.

However, on other planets, certain conditions may or may not occur that affect the state of the ley lines; the number of suns, moons, and so on is often different, and as a result eclipses and other celestial events are often a bit different as well.

In game terms, this affects the amount of P.P.E. available from the ley lines, as well as random Rift behavior, in the following manner:

- An alignment of seven or more planets is equal to a total eclipse of the sun.
- The alignment of two suns is equal to a solstice.
- The alignment of three or more suns is equal to a total solar eclipse.
- The alignment of two or more moons is equal to a lunar eclipse.
- A total solar eclipse resulting from the alignment of two or more moons is equal to a double-strength total eclipse of the sun.
- If there is no moon, eclipses of all kinds are in no way a factor.

Celestial Ley Lines

While ley lines certainly aren't unique to Earth, very few realize that not all ley lines are planet-bound. These celestial ley lines are like a spider's web, spread over the entire Megaverse, even through empty space. However, ley lines are exponentially

stronger when anchored to a planet, and many times more so when that planet supports life.

In general, the amount of P.P.E. that can be gained from a celestial ley line is one hundredth of that available at one on Earth, rounded down. Obviously, because a celestial line is not on a planet, conditions such as noon, midnight, equinoxes, solstices, eclipses, and so on, are not a factor. However, when a line is in close proximity (within 500,000 miles/800,000 km) of a planetoid, an additional 1 P.P.E. per level of experience can be drawn (3 P.P.E. per level if that planetoid is high in magical energy, like **Rifts**® Earth, or if it is a sun).

Space-fold

Space-fold is an unusual form of faster-than-light space travel, used only by a select few races. This is mainly because of the fact that the name is a largely accurate description of what it does. Through a sort of dimensional manipulation, not fully understood by anyone, the space-fold drive makes a jump through space, theoretically by actually creasing the fabric of space-time for a brief moment. When such technology is developed, it is frequently actually discovered in some alien artifact (as was the case with the Arkhons; see **Rifts**®: **South America 2** for details).

The range of a space-fold drive (sometimes called a "punch drive") is generally astronomical, but so is the power requirement. The amount of energy necessary for a space-fold can drain the power supply of even the largest spacecraft for anywhere from a few hours to a few months. Furthermore, space-fold drives sometimes have a nasty habit of vanishing without a trace.

Space Magic

The following spells are all related to space travel or some associated concept. They are generally available most anywhere that both space travel and magic are common, which includes the Three Galaxies. Some of these spells are quite powerful, but usually equally dangerous, and as such should be used with great care. Also note that Celestial Mages (see below) can select any of these spells, regardless of their origins, although spells that are directly related to vacuum and space travel will be very rare if space travel is not a factor for the character.

Some of the spells included below are extremely expensive, especially those related to travel between planets. However, there are rumored to be even greater spells of unbelievable power, exceeding even the ancient Spells of Legend. There are legends of powerful Celestial Mages setting off Supernovas, creating moons, destroying asteroids, and so on. Such spells, if they existed, would (appropriately) take astronomical quantities of P.P.E., and incredible amounts of time, to put into motion.

Using Magic In Space

There are a few things to keep in mind when using magic in space:

- If a character is in a vacuum (and able to survive), speech is still required to cast spells normally, *unless* the character is a supernatural creature native to vacuum. The Vacuum Speech spell will allow for normal spellcasting in space. If a character cannot speak, however, he can still cast spells. To do so

requires that the mage concentrates deeply, saying the incantation in his mind. However, if this is done, only one spell can be cast per melee, and it counts as three attacks.

- However, sound-related spells, such as Thunderclap, don't work at all without air. Magically created air or mist will have its duration cut to one fifth, as the vacuum will tend to cause it to disperse very quickly. Also remember that water will evaporate and disperse almost instantly in a vacuum.
- Spells can be cast within a vehicle or spacesuit more or less normally, although the mage will need to be able to see in order to aim spells properly.

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- Vacuum Speech (8) — 4th level
- Vacuum Wings (26) — 7th level
- Zero-Gravity Movement (20) — 6th level

Anti-Electrical Field

Range: 30 foot (9.1 m) radius, plus 10 feet (3 m) per level.

Duration: 3 melees per level.

Saving Throw: Special.

P.P.E.: 60

Level: 10

This difficult spell causes the physical laws to be altered in a small area so that electricity does not behave as normal. Electricity-based magical and mundane attacks are useless, as are electronic devices, but the real danger of this spell is that it dis-

rupts the electrical impulses in the brain and body. Anyone in the field effectively loses 3 points from ALL attributes until they leave it. If they remain in the field for more than 3 minutes, they must make a saving throw vs magic to avoid being *totally* paralyzed. If total paralysis appears, the character WILL die within four minutes from lack of oxygen to the brain unless removed from the field.



Antimatter Blast

Range: 1000 feet (305 m) per level.

Duration: Instant.

Damage: 5D6 M.D., plus 1D6 M.D. per level of experience.

Saving Throw: Dodge.

P.P.E.: 45

Level: 9

With this spell, the caster projects a minute amount of antimatter (a totally microscopic amount — a few dozen antiprotons at most). When the antimatter comes in contact with *any* normal matter (including air!), the antimatter and an equal amount of normal matter react, and they are converted to energy, resulting in a tremendous explosion. If this spell is cast in an atmosphere, it will usually blow up in the caster's face (literally), when the antimatter hits the air. In a vacuum, however, the chances of it exploding before coming into contact with a desired target are pretty small (though there are a few hydrogen particles around).

Close Wormhole

Range: 5 miles (8 km) per level of experience.

Duration: Instant.

Saving Throw: Special.

P.P.E.: 400 for a typical wormhole, 1200 for a stabilized one, plus (in both cases) 1D4 from the caster's permanent base.

Level: 14

This spell will cause a wormhole within range to collapse. Anyone inside this wormhole when it closes will be trapped in a dimensional limbo. The wormhole affected gets a saving throw against being closed, at +2. This spell is normally cast as a ritual.

Cosmic Armor

Range: Self.

Duration: 3 minutes per level of experience.

Saving Throw: None.

P.P.E.: 90

Level: 10

This rare and powerful spell creates a facsimile of the cosmic armor worn by the Cosmo-Knights! When cast, the spell calls into being a suit of silvery armor with 200 M.D.C., plus 20 M.D.C. per level of experience. The armor allows the caster to survive in a vacuum, and any damage done to the armor by energy attacks is reduced to one tenth (rounded down). The armor also provides the following bonuses while it is worn: +6 to P.S., +2 to parry and dodge, +3 on initiative, and +2 on all saving throws.

The shape that this armor takes depends on the wearer; he cannot consciously shape it, but instead, his subconscious determines how it looks. No matter how he might seem on the outside, the armor can be beautiful, monstrous, or in-between, depending on the wearer's true nature.

Understandably, the Cosmo-Knights strongly disapprove of the use of this spell by anyone. While it is rare, some mages have actually used it to convince authorities that the Cosmo-Knights committed crimes.

Create Air Force Bubble

Range: Up to 20 feet (6.1 m) away per level of experience.

Duration: 1 minute per level of experience.

Saving Throw: None.

P.P.E.: 18

Level: 6

This spell creates an airtight bubble of air, contained by a force field. The air bubble measures 10 feet (3 m) in diameter, and has 50 M.D.C., plus 20 per level of experience. However, when the bubble contains people who are breathing normally, it begins to weaken, losing 3 M.D.C. per melee, per person. Thus it is possible to inhale the bubble apart, especially with several people inside.

Create Vacuum

Range: Up to 10 feet (3 m) away per level of experience.

Duration: 1 melee per level of experience.

Saving Throw: Special.

P.P.E.: 16

Level: 6

This spell creates a spherical area of vacuum of up to 2 foot (.6 m) radius per level. Within this vacuum, anyone who needs air to survive will begin to suffocate, and must make a saving throw vs non-lethal poison (16 or higher) to stay conscious.

Create Wormhole

Range: Special.

Duration: Special.

Saving Throw: Special.

P.P.E.: 400

Level: 13

This spell creates a temporary wormhole in space. The fabric of space itself gets a saving throw vs magic, at +2, to prevent the wormhole from being formed. One entrance to the wormhole must be within 500 feet (152 m) of the caster, while the distance for the exit should be rolled on the following table:

01-10% 4D6 million miles (6.4-38.4 million km)

11-20% 3D6x10 million miles (48-288 million km)

21-30% 1D4x100 million miles (160-640 million km)

31-40% 2D6 light years

41-50% 6D6 light years

51-60% 1D6x10 light years

61-70% 1D6x100 light years

71-80% 3D6x100 light years

81-90% 1D4x1000 light years

91-00% 1D6x1000 light years

How long the wormhole will stay open and stable varies as well. Roll on the following table:

01-20% 4D6 minutes

21-40% 2D4 hours

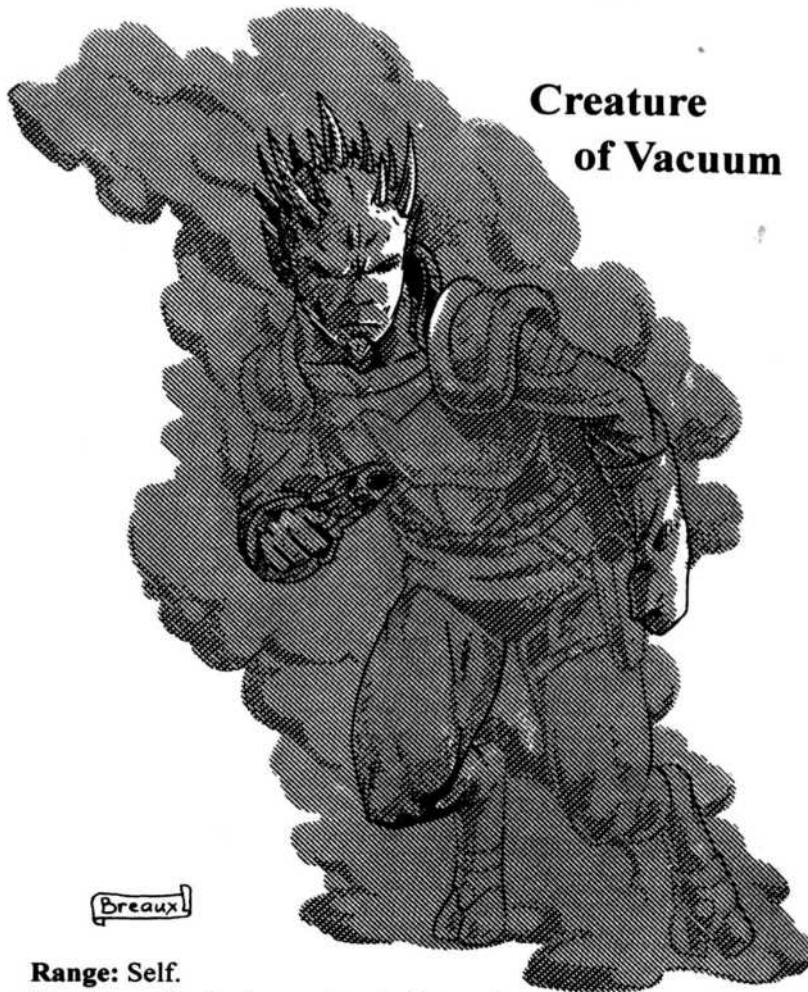
41-60% 2D6 days

61-80% 2D4 months

81-90% 1D6 years

91-97% 6D6 years

98-00% Permanent!



**Creature
of Vacuum**

Range: Self.

Duration: 5 minutes per level of experience.

Saving Throw: None.

P.P.E.: 380

Level: 13

This spell transforms the caster into a semi-elemental form of vacuum. The caster is surrounded by an aura of darkness, like a thick, black smoke, although the caster can see through it perfectly. The character is in no way adversely affected by vacuum. Furthermore, he has 50 M.D.C. and supernatural strength, and can fly through space at 100 times his normal Spd. attribute.

Crushing Hand of Jupiter

Range: 6 feet (1.8 m) per level of experience.

Duration: 1 melee, plus one melee at levels 3, 6, 9 and 12.

Saving Throw: Standard.

P.P.E.: 45

Level: 9

This grisly spell increases the effects of gravity on one target to the point that they are crushed to the ground. Under the equivalent of over 10Gs, they take 1D6 S.D.C. (1D4 M.D. for M.D.C. creatures) per 15 pounds (6.75 kg) of their normal weight per melee. Fortunately for victims, this spell is costly and difficult to maintain very long.

Disrupt Wormhole

Range: 10 miles (16 km) per level of experience.

Duration: Instant.

Saving Throw: Special.

P.P.E.: 250

Level: 12

This spell will disrupt a wormhole, causing it to lose some stability, so that it will likely collapse after a while. The wormhole gets a saving throw (no bonuses, unless it is a stabilized one, in which case it is +3 to save) to prevent being disrupted. If the spell succeeds, roll on the following table to determine the results:

01-30% *Wormhole* closes within 2D6 melees.

31-55% *Wormhole* closes within 1D6 hours.

56-70% *Roll on the table* under the Create Wormhole spell to determine the remaining life span of the wormhole.

71-80% *The wormhole's basic nature is disrupted*, and it becomes a dimensional Rift, which will close after 4D6x10 hours.

81-90% *The wormhole's basic nature is disrupted*, and it becomes a temporal Rift; entering it will transport one forwards or backwards (50/50 chance of each) in time by 3D6x10 hours.

91-00% *The wormhole is disrupted* in such a way that its energies are released violently; at both entrances to the wormhole, energy is spewed forth, inflicting 2D6x10 M.D. per melee, for 2D6 melees, to everything within 100 miles (160 km).

Energy State

Range: Self.

Duration: One hour per level of experience.

Saving Throw: None.

P.P.E.: 500

Level: 14

This unusual and extremely powerful spell allows the caster to transform into a form of pure energy. In this form, the caster has M.D.C. equal to his Hit Points and S.D.C. combined (or

double M.D.C., if an M.D.C. creature), and cannot be affected by any physical attacks of any sort. Furthermore, the character can easily zoom along at any rate up to 2 times the speed of light, although going at or above the speed of light inflicts 3D6 M.D. per minute to the character.

Hyperdensify

Range: Self or others by touch.

Duration: 1 minute per level.

Saving Throw: Standard for an unwilling recipient.

P.P.E.: 25

Level: 7

This spell causes a person or object to become extremely dense (physically, that is). Their weight is increased by 600%, but they suffer no ill effects from it because the strength of their body is proportionally increased as well. Reduce P.P. and Spd. by half (if applicable), but the character or object also gains 10 S.D.C. per level of the caster (M.D.C. for M.D.C. creatures/items).

Induce Kinetic Energy

Range: 100 feet (30.5 m) per level.

Duration: 1 melee per level.

Saving Throw: None.

P.P.E.: 10

Level: 4

This spell is very useful in space, (and to a lesser extent, anywhere), as it allows the caster to cause any object within range (including himself) to begin (or stop) moving. In game terms, this can cause 50 pounds (22.5 kg) per level of experience to accelerate (or decelerate) by 10 miles per hour (16 km), per melee. Thus, a fourth level mage could cause a 200 pound (90 kg) person or object to travel at 40 mph (64 km) after four melees. Alternately, he could speed that person up to 20 mph (32 km), and then stop him again, over four melees.

Lunar Armor

Range: Self.

Duration: 1 minute per level of experience.

Saving Throw: None.

P.P.E.: 18

Level: 6

This spell calls into being a suit of glowing, silvery armor on the caster. This armor has 20 M.D.C. per level of the caster. The light from the armor is conspicuous, and will softly illuminate a 30 foot (9.1 m) area.

Magnetic Vortex

Range: Up to 100 feet (30.5 m) away per level of experience.

Duration: 2 minutes per level.

Saving Throw: None.

P.P.E.: 60

Level: 9

This powerful spell creates a whirling vortex of electromagnetic energy. It is only barely visible, like the ghost of a tornado, 100 feet (30.5 m) high. Its effects cover a 50 foot (15.2 m) diameter area per level. Firstly, objects made of metals that are affected by magnetism (i.e. iron, steel, etc.), will be picked up, and spun around by the vortex (which can be rather unpleasant when you're wearing armor made of iron). It will also wipe out any magnetically stored data and interfere with electronic equipment, and tends to magnetize the aforementioned metals.



Nova

Range: 500 feet (152.4 m) per level of experience.

Duration: Instant.

Saving Throw: None.

P.P.E.: 200

Level: 11

This incredibly potent spell creates a blast of plasma, similar to a violently exploding star. The dimensions of this spell are incredible, covering a 200 foot (61 m) radius, per level, with fiery death, inflicting 6D6 M.D. per level of the caster. This spell is expensive and dangerous, and can only be used in space.

Personal Relative Gravitation

Range: Self / An object up to 100 feet (30.5 m) away, per level.

Duration: 2 minutes per level of experience.

Saving Throw: None.

P.P.E.: 25

Level: 7

This spell causes the caster to be pulled towards the gravitational center of an object, which must weigh at least ten times as much as he does, as though it were producing a significant amount of gravity. The obvious usefulness of this becomes apparent when one is stuck in space, trying to reach a ship with nothing to grab on to. It's also useful when the caster has to perform work on the outside of a ship. The relative gravitation only applies to the caster and his possessions, and can be anywhere from 0.1 to 2 Gs.

Radar Sense

Range: Self / 1500 feet (457.2 m) per level of experience.

Duration: 1 minute per level.

Saving Throw: None.

P.P.E.: 8

Level: 3

This spell allows the character to sense what is around him, much like radar. That is, he sends out a radio pulse, and can automatically interpret what (if anything) is reflected back.

Recompression

Range: Self.

Duration: Permanent.

Saving Throw: None.

P.P.E.: 16

Level: 6

This spell is extremely helpful, and can literally be a lifesaver, both in outer space and underwater. Basically, it returns the character to an equilibrium of pressure in a matter of seconds, without any ill effects. Thus, it totally prevents decompression sickness, as well as the bends. The spell is designed to automatically adjust to the pressurization the character is in, so NEVER cast it in space.

Refresh Air

Range: Touch.

Duration: Permanent.

Saving Throw: None.

P.P.E.: 10

Level: 4

This spell converts carbon dioxide into oxygen, thus creating breathable air. It affects up to 3 cubic feet (0.085 cubic meters) of air, per level of experience.

Resist Vacuum

Range: Self or others by touch.

Duration: Two minutes per level of experience.

Saving Throw: None.

P.P.E.: 26

Level: 7

The recipient of this spell is unaffected by the vacuum of space (i.e. they don't begin to quickly die when exposed to it), and can breathe normally (as a Breathe Without Air Spell).

Sense Matter

Range: 2000 feet (610 m) per level of experience.

Duration: 1 melee per level.

Saving Throw: None.

P.P.E.: 9

Level: 4

This spell allows the caster to sense the presence of any matter of greater quantity than a molecule within range. Thus the numerous hydrogen particles in space are too small to "see," but not the bigger stuff, which would be more important to not run into.

Spaceflight: Lesser

Range: Self.

Duration: One hour per level of experience.

Saving Throw: None.

P.P.E.: 18

Level: 7

This spell allows the caster to zoom through space at 600 mph (960 km) per level of experience. This spell can NOT be used anywhere other than space.

Spaceflight: Sublight

Range: Self.

Duration: One hour per level of experience.

Saving Throw: None.

P.P.E.: 150

Level: 11

This spell allows the caster to zoom through space at sublight speeds; 20,000 miles per second (32,000 km), per level of experience. The speed of light is 186,000 miles per second, so this can be condensed to about 0.1 the speed of light per level. This spell can NOT be used anywhere other than space.



Spaceflight: Superluminal

Range: Self.

Duration: One hour per level of experience.

Saving Throw: None.

P.P.E.: 600

Level: 14

This rare and powerful spell allows the caster to fly through space at 1.2 times the speed of light, plus 0.1 times the speed of light per level. The speed at which the caster can travel is mind-boggling, and allows for interplanetary travel with relatively little trouble. This spell can NOT be used anywhere other than space.

Spaceflight: Superior

Range: Self.

Duration: 1 hour per level of experience.

Saving Throw: None.

P.P.E.: 38

Level: 8

Like the lesser Spaceflight spell, this spell allows the caster to zoom through space, but even faster, at 3000 mph (4800 km) per level of experience. This spell can NOT be used anywhere other than space.

Stabilize Wormhole

Range: 10 miles (16 km) per level of experience.

Duration: Special.

Saving Throw: Special.

P.P.E.: 2000

Level: 15 *

This spell will cause a wormhole that it is cast on to become more stable, and thus become far less likely to collapse. The fabric of space-time gets a saving throw, at +2, to prevent this. If the spell is cast successfully, roll on the following table:

01-20% Wormhole's remaining life span is tripled.

21-40% After the wormhole's normal life span is exceeded, there is only a 10% chance per each week of it collapsing.

41-60% After the wormhole's normal life span is exceeded, there is only a 7% chance per each week of it collapsing.

61-80% After the wormhole's normal life span is exceeded, there is only a 2% chance per each week of it collapsing.

81-100% The wormhole is made permanent!

Starblade

Range: Touch.

Duration: 2 melees per level.

Saving Throw: None.

P.P.E.: 15

Level: 6

This spell creates a coherent blade of plasma which can be wielded in combat. It inflicts 2D6 M.D. at first level, and an additional 1D6 M.D. for each level thereafter, and is +1 to strike and parry in combat.

Starflame

Range: 600 feet (183 m) per level of experience.

Duration: Instant.

Saving Throw: Dodge.

P.P.E.: 36

Level: 8

This powerful spell fires a blast of superheated plasma, which inflicts massive damage (5D6 M.D., plus 1D6 M.D. per level, starting at level two).

Starlight

Range: 15 foot (4.6 m) radius per level of experience.

Duration: One minute per level of experience.

Saving Throw: None.

P.P.E.: 2

Level: 1

This spell softly illuminates the area of effect, as though it were a moonless night. Visibility is around 20 feet (6.1 m) at most, but characters with nightvision can see quite well. Regardless, there is not enough light to distinguish colors.

Sunbeam

Range: 250 feet (76.2 m) per level of experience.

Duration: One melee per level of experience.

Saving Throw: Standard.

P.P.E.: 12

Level: 5

Like Moonbeam, this spell creates a continuous beam of light, which can be aimed. Unlike the moonbeam spell, it is an intense beam of *actual sunlight*. If aimed at someone's eyes (+3 to strike), they must save vs magic or be blinded for 1D6 melees (-8 to strike, parry, and dodge). Vampires struck by this take 1D6 damage per strike and are repelled as per a Globe of Daylight spell.

Teleport: Interplanetary

Range: Special.

Duration: Instant.

Saving Throw: Unwilling travelers can make a standard saving throw, but at -3.

P.P.E.: 2000

Level: 15

This spell transports the caster, and up to 1000 pounds (450 kg) per level of experience, to another planet (or planetoid) in the same solar system.

The following tables indicate the chance of a success and the results of a failed teleport. This can be a dangerous spell to use, especially if the caster is not prepared for the possibility of failure.

Chances of a successful teleport:

1. Teleporting to a familiar location or a destination visible from one's starting point (through a high-powered telescope, perhaps): 99%.
2. A place seen only a few times before (2-6 times): 85%.
3. A place seen in a photo (the photograph is being looked at during the moment of teleportation): 80%.
4. A place never visited before, but described in detail: 58%.
5. A place never before visited and known only by name or brief description: 20%.

Results of an Unsuccessful Teleport

Roll percentile dice:

01-40% Appear at the wrong place, no idea of present location. It is the correct planet, just 3D6X100 miles (480-2880 km) away from where intended.

41-75% Appear at the wrong place. In fact, on the wrong planet entirely, which may be evident right away, especially if it is one without atmosphere. The G.M. will have to randomly determine which planet or planetoid in the solar system it is.

76-98% Teleport a couple hundred miles above the ground, in orbit of the intended planet. If the target was a small planetoid, then the caster appears in space, 1D4X100 miles (160-640 km) away from it. Either way, everything and everyone teleported is now in space, even if they can survive, they may be stranded.

99-00% Teleport into a planet; instant death.

Teleport: Translunar

Range: Special.

Duration: Instant.

Saving Throw: Unwilling travelers can make a standard saving throw, but at -3.

P.P.E.: 600

Level: 14

A less powerful version of Teleport: Interplanetary, this spell transports the caster and up to 500 pounds (225 kg) per level to or from a moon or other satellite of the planet they are on.

The chance of success is identical to the Teleport: Interplanetary spell. The results of an unsuccessful teleport are nearly the same, except if 41-75% is rolled, they appear either on the wrong moon (if possible), or 3D6X100 miles (480-2880 km) away, on the planet they started on.

Vacuum Speech

Range: Self or others by touch.

Duration: 2 melees per level of experience.

Saving Throw: None.

P.P.E.: 8

Level: 4

This spell allows the recipient to speak normally in a vacuum, and be heard by anyone who would be in earshot were they not in a vacuum. This spell in itself does not help the recipient breathe in a vacuum.



Vacuum Wings

Range: Self or others by touch.

Duration: 2 minutes per level of experience.

Saving Throw: None.

P.P.E.: 26

Level: 7

The recipient of this spell sprouts wings, which can be used to move and maneuver, even in a total vacuum, at 60 mph (96 km), plus 10 mph (16 km) per level of the caster.

Zero-Gravity Movement

Range: Self or others by touch.

Duration: One minute per level of experience.

Saving Throw: None.

P.P.E.: 20

Level: 6

This spell allows the caster to move about easily when in zero-gravity, more or less like a Fly as the Eagle spell, except that they can reach a top speed of 80 mph (128 km).

Space Magic

O.C.C.s

Celestial Mage O.C.C.

The Celestial Mage is a master of magic relating to stars and vacuum, and is one of the foremost users of Space Magic. Given enough P.P.E., a Celestial Mage scarcely needs a spacecraft to travel from one planet to the next. Such mages tend to be even more cryptic and philosophical than most, mainly because they spend so much time studying the stars.

Celestial Mages are fairly rare throughout the Megaverse, although in the United Worlds of Warlock (see **Rifts®: Phase World™**) they are relatively common. A few can be found in Earth's orbit as well, and a handful on Earth itself, although Celestial Mages generally prefer being in space (even if on stations and spacecraft) to planetside.

Magical Abilities of the Celestial Mage

1. Astrology: The Celestial Mage has studied the stars for many long hours, seeking meaning in their movements. As the saying goes, "the stars control everything." A Celestial Mage can see the meaning in their patterns, and can even predict the future based on the stars. **Base Skill:** M.E.x2 +26%, +4% per level of experience.

To use this power, the Celestial Mage must observe the stars for at least a few minutes (preferably for an hour or so, although they enjoy occasionally spending whole nights watching the sky), and then makes a skill roll. If successful, he will get a general idea of trends that will be coming in his life, and the lives of people close to him. This will be something like "danger," "prosperity," "stagnation," and the like; only a very vague hint.

2. Celestial Trance: The Celestial Mage can also enter a sort of trance, in which he can receive even greater insight from the stars; this can only be attempted when the character has a clear view of the stars. The character spends 5 P.P.E., and rolls on the Astrology percentage. If successful, a beam of light comes from the stars, striking him in the forehead. At that point, the character enters a trance, which is essentially the same as the Clairvoyance psychic power. If the roll fails, however, the same beam of light instead inflicts 1D6 S.D.C. to him (1D4 M.D. if a Mega-Damage creature).

3. Initial Spell Knowledge: The character will initially know Starlight, Lunar Armor, Resist Vacuum, Vacuum Speech, Zero-Gravity Movement, and a total of nine spells of choice, se-



lected from levels one through six of common spells, and levels one through eight of Space Magic spells. At each new level of experience, the character can select one new spell (from common or Space Magic spells) of a level equal to his or her new level of experience (e.g. when the character reaches third level, he or she can select a new third level spell).

4. Learning New Spells: Additional spells may be learned or purchased at any time, regardless of level. See *Pursuit of Magic, Rifts® RPG*, page 164.

5. Bonuses. +4 to save vs. Horror Factor. +1 to save vs magic at levels one, two, three, six, nine, twelve and fifteen. +1 to spell strength at levels 3, 7, 10 and 13.

6. P.P.E.: Equal to P.E. attribute, plus 3D4x10, plus 10 per level of experience.

Attribute Requirements: I.Q. 13, M.E. 12.

O.C.C. Skills:

Astronomy (+25%)

Astrophysics (+15%)

Language: Two of Choice (+15%).

Math: Basic (+20%)

Lore: Magic (+20%)

Radio: Basic (+10%)

Zero Gravity Movement & Combat (+10%)

Hand to Hand skills must be selected as O.C.C. Related skills. Basic counts as one skill, Expert counts as two, and Martial Arts (or Assassin if evil) counts as three.

O.C.C. Related Skills: Select ten skills, plus two at level three, and one at levels six, nine and twelve.

Communications: Any

Domestic: Any (+10%)

Electrical: Basic Electronics only.

Espionage: Disguise, Escape Artist, or Intelligence only (+5%).

Mechanical: Automotive, Basic, and Spaceship Mechanics only.

Medical: Paramedic or Holistic Medicine (each counts as two skill selections), or First Aid only (+5%).

Military: None

Physical: Any except Boxing, Gymnastics, and Wrestling.

Pilot: Any (+5% on spacecraft).

Pilot Related: Any (+5%)

Rogue: Any (+5%)

Science: Any (+10%)

Technical: Any (+15%)

W.P.: Any

Wilderness: Any

Secondary Skills: The character also gets to select four secondary skills from those listed. These are additional areas of knowledge that do not get the advantage of the bonuses listed in parentheses. All secondary skills start at the base skill level.

Standard Equipment: Robe or cape, set of clothing, spacesuit or light or medium environmental M.D.C. body armor, backpack, six wooden stakes and a mallet, canteen, binoculars, tinted goggles or sunglasses, air filter and gas mask.

Weapons will include a survival knife, automatic pistol, two energy weapons, and several clips of ammunition.

The vehicle of choice is often something very light and fast, possibly a motorcycle or hovercycle, or a TW vehicle if

on a planet, or a space TW vehicle or small, maneuverable spacecraft while in space.

Money: 1D6x1000 credits, and 2D4x1000 in gems and precious metals.

Celestial Line Rider O.C.C.

The Celestial Line Rider is basically a cross between a Ley Line Walker and Celestial Mage. The character has an understanding of space and the stars, as well as the flow of the ley lines, especially the celestial ones. A Line Rider has abilities similar to a Line Walker, although their sensitivity to magic and lines is more acute, mainly because it needs to be for the weaker celestial lines.

O.C.C. Powers/Abilities

1. Sense Ley Lines and Magic Energy: As the Ley Line Walker ability, except that the ranges are tripled, and the percentages are all increased by +10%; a Line Rider needs to be considerably more sensitive to the weaker celestial lines (which characters will be at -15% to detect).

2. Read Ley Lines: As the Ley Line Walker ability.

3. Ley Line Phasing: As the Ley Line Walker ability.

4. Ley Line Flight: As the Fly as the Eagle spell, except that it costs the Line Rider only 2 P.P.E., only applies to the Line Rider, and only works on a ley line.

5. Astrology: As the Celestial Mage ability.

6. Initial Spell Knowledge: Select any fifteen spells of choice from common spells of levels 1-7, and space magic spells of levels 1-10. At each new level of experience, the character can select one new spell (from common or Space Magic spells) of a level equal to his new level of experience (e.g. when the character reaches third level, he can select a new third level spell).

7. Learning New Spells: Additional spells may be learned or purchased at any time regardless of level. See *Pursuit of Magic, Rifts® RPG*, page 164.

8. Bonuses. +4 to save vs. Horror Factor, +1 to save vs magic at levels one, two, three, six, nine, twelve and fifteen. +1 to spell strength at levels 3, 7, 10, and 13.

9. P.P.E.: Equal to P.E. attribute, plus 3D4x10+20, plus 10 per level of experience.

Attribute Requirements: I.Q. 14, P.E. 12.

O.C.C. Skills:

Astronomy (+20%)

Astrophysics (+15%)

Language: Two of Choice (+15%).

Math: Basic (+20%)

Navigation: Space (+15%)

Radio: Basic (+10%)

Zero Gravity Movement & Combat (+10%)

Hand to Hand skills must be selected as O.C.C. Related skills. Basic counts as one skill, Expert counts as two, and Martial Arts (or Assassin if evil) counts as three.

O.C.C. Related Skills: Select eleven related skills, plus two at level three and one at levels six, nine and twelve.

Communications: Any (+5%)



Domestic: Any (+5%)

Electrical: Basic Electronics only.

Espionage: Disguise, Escape Artist, or Intelligence only (+5%).

Mechanical: Automotive, Basic, and Spaceship Mechanics only.

Medical: Paramedic or Holistic Medicine (each counts as two skill selections), or First Aid only (+5%).

Military: None

Physical: Any except Boxing, Gymnastics, and Wrestling.

Pilot: Any (+10% on spacecraft).

Pilot Related: Any (+10%)

Rogue: Any (+5%)

Science: Any (+10%)

Technical: Any (+15%)

W.P.: Any

Wilderness: Any

Secondary Skills: The character also gets to select four secondary skills from those listed. These are additional areas of knowledge that do not get the advantage of the bonuses listed in parentheses. All secondary skills start at the base skill level.

Standard Equipment: Robe or cape, set of clothing, spacesuit or light or medium environmental M.D.C. body armor, backpack, canteen, binoculars, telescope, tinted goggles or sunglasses, air filter and gas mask.

Weapons will include a survival knife, two energy weapons, and several clips of ammunition.

The vehicle of choice is often something very light and fast, possibly a motorcycle or hovercycle, or a TW vehicle if on a planet, or a space TW vehicle or small, maneuverable spacecraft while in space.

Money: 1D6x1000 credits, and 2D4x1000 in gems and precious metals.

Space TW Items

The following are various Techno-Wizardry items and features relating to space and space magic.

Armor Features

The following spells, in addition to those mentioned on page 93 of *Rifts*®, can be added to body armor.

Induce Kinetic Energy: This spell is activated by thought and 10 P.P.E. or 20 I.S.P.; works the same as the spell, as though cast by its creator. Initial Creation Cost in P.P.E.: 200. Cost: 60,000 credits.

Lunar Armor: This spell is activated by thought and 18 P.P.E. or 32 I.S.P.; works the same as the spell, as though cast by its creator. Initial Creation Cost in P.P.E.: 320. Cost: 60,000 credits per level of the spell.

Personal Relative Gravitation: This spell is activated by thought and 25 P.P.E. or 50 I.S.P.; works the same as the spell, as though cast by its creator. Initial Creation Cost in P.P.E.: 500. Cost: 120,000 credits.

Resist Vacuum: This spell is activated by thought and 26 P.P.E. or 52 I.S.P.; works the same as the spell, as though cast by its creator. Initial Creation Cost in P.P.E.: 520. Cost: 180,000 credits.

Spaceflight: Lesser: This spell is activated by thought and 18 P.P.E. or 32 I.S.P.; works the same as the spell, as though cast by its creator. Initial Creation Cost in P.P.E.: 320. Cost: 100,000 credits.

Vacuum Speech: This spell is activated by thought and 8 P.P.E. or 16 I.S.P.; works the same as the spell, as though cast by its creator. Initial Creation Cost in P.P.E.: 160. Cost: 60,000 credits.

Zero-Gravity Movement: This spell is activated by thought and 20 P.P.E. or 40 I.S.P.; works the same as the spell, as though cast by its creator. Initial Creation Cost in P.P.E.: 400. Cost: 160,000 credits.

Vehicles

All of the aerial TW vehicles described in the **Rifts® RPG** (pages 94-96) can function in space, although they may need some modification, and most do not have enclosed cabins/cockpits. Space-related vehicle features are described in detail below.

Vehicle Features

Refresh Air: This magic is activated by thought and 10 P.P.E. or 20 I.S.P. When activated, it casts the Refresh Air spell, as though cast by its creator. This feature only works on vehicles with an airtight cabin/cockpit. Initial Creation Cost in P.P.E.: 250. Cost: 120,000 credits.

Spaceflight: Lesser: This spell is activated by thought and 18 P.P.E. or 32 I.S.P.; works the same as the spell, as though cast by its creator. Initial Creation Cost in P.P.E.: 320. Cost: 100,000 credits.

Spaceflight: Superior: This spell is activated by thought and 38 P.P.E. or 76 I.S.P.; works the same as the spell, as though cast by its creator. Initial Creation Cost in P.P.E.: 700. Cost: One million credits.

Space Magic Items

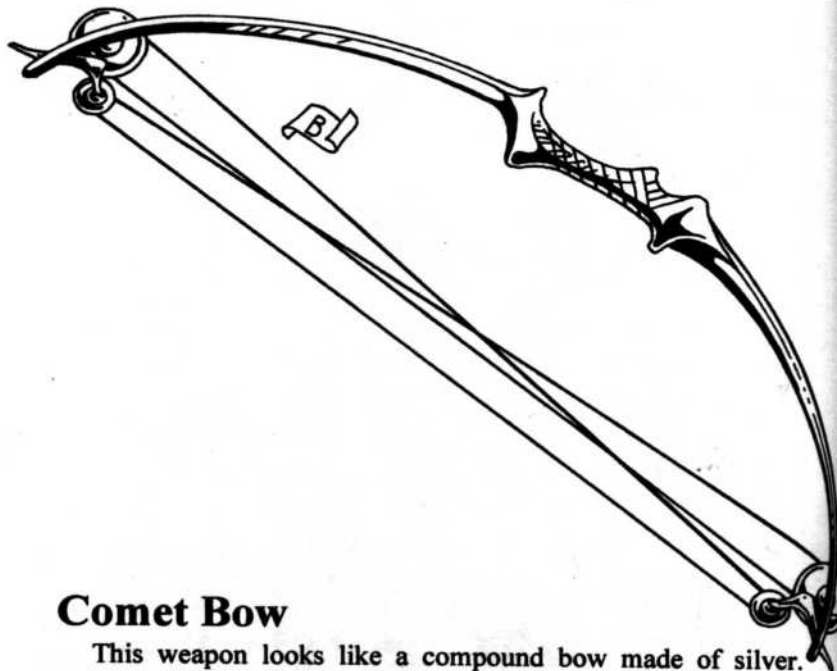
The following are several magical items that can be found in different areas where space travel is common. Several relate directly to space, or at least space travel, while others are, for the most part, simply named after something in space. These items are all fairly rare, though some of them are produced by the *Splogorth*.

Amulet of Vacuum

This is a fairly typical magical amulet. The wearer always has *Breathe Without Air* and *Resist Vacuum* in effect on them, and the amulet can cast *Zero-Gravity Movement* and *Personal Relative Gravitation* each up to three times a day (equal to a 6th level casting).

Armor of Mercury

This is a rare, magical suit of golden plate mail. The armor is weightless and silent, with no prowling penalty, and has 300 M.D.C. When worn, the armor will conform to the wearer (provided he or she is not over 7.5 feet/2.29 m tall). The armor also constantly provides the effects of *Resist Vacuum* and *Breathe Without Air*. Also, twice each per day, the armor can cast *Sunbeam* and *Starblade*, equal to a 6th level casting.



Comet Bow

This weapon looks like a compound bow made of silver. When the bowstring is pulled back, an "arrow" made of energy appears behind it. Thus, the Comet Bow is never without ammunition. The bolts fired by the bow look like little comets. Range: 500 feet (152 m), Damage: 6D6 M.D.



Helm of Phobos

This helmet looks like part of a typical ancient Greek soldier's armor. Once placed on someone's head, it cannot be removed by anyone but the wearer.

The helmet has 200 M.D.C., and constantly provides the effects of the spells *Breathe Without Air* and *Resist Vacuum*. Also, up to three times per day each, it can cast the following spells: *Cosmic Armor*, *Starblade*, *Vacuum Wings*, and *Zero-Gravity Movement*.

Nova Saber

A silvery-blue colored rune sword, which has a picture of an explosion engraved in the bottom of the hilt. It possesses the eight standard abilities, plus the following:

- Inflicts 2D6x10 M.D. Double damage to creatures vulnerable to heat.
- Inflicts *full damage* (2D6X10 Hit Points) to vampires!
- Capable of firing a *Sunbeam*, as the spell (equal to a 6th level casting), up to 6 times a day.

- Capable of producing a third-level Nova spell, once per day.
- Supernova. This is a special power, unique to the Nova Saber. It can produce a titanic version of the Nova spell (inflicts 3D6x100 M.D. to a one mile/1.6 km radius), but the sword must be at ground zero, and is destroyed in the process (along with its wielder, most likely).

Pulsar Gauntlet

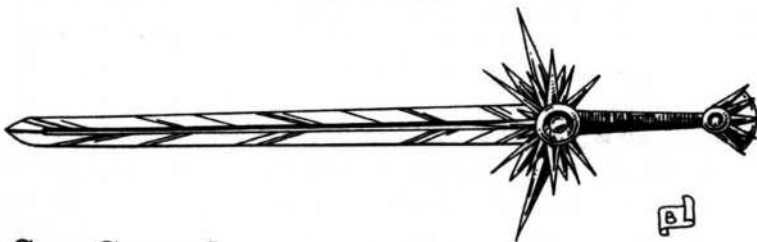
This heavy, armored gauntlet is actually a Splugorth rune weapon, made of dark red metal. It possesses the eight standard abilities (I.Q. 15) plus the following:

- Inflicts 1D6x10 M.D. on a punch.
- Magically increases the wearer's P.S. by 6 points, and it is now considered to be supernatural.
- The gauntlet can fire plasma blasts at will; range is 400 feet (122 m), inflicts 1D4x10 M.D.
- Allows the wearer to use Spaceflight: Lesser and Resist Vacuum (equal to a 10th level casting), each up to three times per day.

Star Slayer

This is a greater rune weapon that was the creation of the Splugorth. It appears as a two-handed sword, made of ebony metal, and with the hilt shaped like a sleeping Dragon. It possesses the eight standard abilities (I.Q. 15) plus the following:

- A drinker of souls/life essences.
- Inflicts 2D4x10+10 M.D.
- Spell Magic: Can cast these spells as often as three times each per 24 hours: Lunar Armor, Nova, Spaceflight: Lesser, Spaceflight: Superluminal, and Sunbeam.
- The wielder of the weapon has the spells of Sense Matter and Resist Vacuum constantly in effect.



Sun Sword

An unusual sword, that continually sheds light as bright as a sun (equal to a 4th level Globe of Daylight, but is always coming from the blade of the sword). The sword is indestructible and inflicts 2D4x10 M.D., and does double that to vampires (4D4X10 Hit Points).



The Siege Against Tolkeen

By David Haendler

Chapter 42

Deep within the bowels of an unholy pyramid, Lord Splynncryth shuddered. When a Splugorth shudders, it is a terrible thing to behold. His writhing tentacles and sub-tentacles splashed around in the pool of nutrient fluid he continually bathed in, throwing gallons of the foul, brackish liquid into the air. His massive eye began to roll around frantically in its socket, and whitish goo with the texture of thoroughly soured milk oozed out of his many mouths.

"What is wrong, my lord?!" demanded one of his attendant High Lords, as soon as the fit of panic was done. The insectoid monstrosity looked pale, or at least as pale as a member of his race could be. There were few things in the Megaverse which could make a Splugorth shudder, and none of them were particularly pleasant.

"I had... a rather unsettling premonition," growled Splynncryth, feeling unusually edgy. "My thrice-cursed clairvoyance was acting up again, filling my brain with thoughts of the future."

"What did you see, my lord?"

"It was unclear and shadowy. Premonitions always are. I saw a great battle. Tanks and robots were ravaging the defenders of a city, while bombers reduced entire boroughs to heaps of slag. There was a massive pyramid in the midst of the city, and that was where the true battle was happening. I couldn't see the battle inside, but from the terrible sounds I heard in my vision..."

Splynncryth paused for a moment, and his attendants feared that he was going to shudder again and drench them with more of his nutrient bath. But the alien intelligence somehow resisted the urge, and began to continue. "From the sounds that I heard, it sounded like gods were at war within the pyramid. Cosmic forces are loose in North America."



"Sir, are you sure that these events shall come to pass? Your clairvoyance has failed you before. Remember the incident of a few months ago?"

"Of course I do!" snapped Splynncryth, terrifying the High Lord with the anger in his voice. That incident had been weighing heavily on the Splugorth's mind for a while. He had seen a vision of enormous black things, flying towards Atlantis at great speed. Fearing a nuclear strike from the Coalition States, he had put his air forces on full alert, disrupting the military and panicking many of Atlantis's citizens. When the winged ravagers finally arrived, they turned out to be a flock of harmless pterodactyls. The embarrassment that Splynncryth suffered over the affair had kept him in a dark mood for weeks.

The lord of Atlantis had no desire to repeat anything like that, but he also had no intention of dying a preventable death. He knew better than anybody that clairvoyance was a double-edged sword, but he also knew not to gamble with his life when there was no great prize at stake.

"Fetch me all of our intelligence reports on North America," ordered Splynncryth. "I am especially interested in the reports on the state of the Coalition-Tolkeen war. From everything that I know of current affairs, Shaard is the only sorcerer on that continent with the mystical firepower and the raw desperation to try something like what I saw."

The High Lord gestured to a nearby Kittani technician, who scrambled out of the inner chamber toward the records room. He knew full well that to be tardy with the orders of Splynncryth was to risk torture, mental reprogramming, or even execution.

"I have one other order for you," said Splynncryth to the High Lord. "Prepare my dimensional transport chamber. I do believe that I shall be vacationing for a few weeks in my palace on Eylor."

"Of course, my lord," said the High Lord, as a second Kittani technician bolted out of Splynncryth's inner chamber.

* * *

"These are your armaments for tomorrow's anti-terrorist action!" barked Lucius Mallen, holding one of the Naruni energy rifles high. "I want every member of the tactical team to take one basic rifle, and two clips of plasma cartridges! Heavy weapons forces, I want half of you bringing along the heavy energy cannons with the fusion packs. The other half should be carrying light rocket launchers with A.P. missiles! We're going to be running into heavy opposition tomorrow, and I want all of you to be fully prepared."

One of the SWAT police in the briefing room tentatively raised his hand. "Does the brass know about this, sir? Use of nonstandard weapons is strictly prohibited without the proper authorization beforehand."

"The brass has approved it," said Lucius, hating himself for the lie. "The solstice is in just a couple of days, and as we all know, the pyramid and the military are going to need every bit of ambient magical energy available. We're too low-priority to use the standard Techno-Wizard weapons, so we're going to have to improvise."

Another policeman spoke up. "If they can't spare us enough juice to power energy rifles, may I assume that they ain't gonna give us any para-critters as backup?"

The Wolfen detective nodded grimly. "You've got it. No Elementals. No demons. Nothing but ourselves. I know it's dangerous and risky to go into a terrorist lair without any heavy support, but we're going to have to. Are there any other questions?"

Looking around, the Wolfen saw no raised hands. "Alright, then," he announced, banging his gavel to end the briefing. "Tomorrow, we make our assault on the Human Freedom Association at precisely 10:15 AM. You've all got your orders and your attack vectors. Get a good sleep tonight, and make your peace with any gods you believe in. Tomorrow, we go to war."

As the men filed out of the room, Mallen let out a sigh. When he had first entered the police force, he had never thought things like this would happen to him. Leading men to fight and die was a responsibility greater than any he had ever expected. The Wolfen wondered how military officers slept at night, as a few explosions from the ever-encroaching front reached his ears.

* * *

Jack Perrin slept on a hard, fetid mattress in the HFA headquarters. His rest was fitful, and he tossed and turned like a man whose mind had been invaded. He was dreaming, and his dreams were not pleasant. But then again, there had been no pleasant dreams ever since he had entered the city of Tolkeen.

In his nightmare, Ragnarok had come at last. The Coalition's forces were making a final attack on Tolkeen. Sleek, black bombers swooped down from the heavens, devastating entire neighborhoods. Gigantic, menacing robots climbed over the walls, their weapons blazing. Legions of skeleton-garbed infan-

trymen charged in through the broken gates, wildly unleashing their weapons on the defenders of Tolkeen. Meanwhile, the Tolkeenites were lashing out with weapons of equal destructiveness. Sorcerers enveloped thousands of troops with great gouts of hellfire, and gigantic demons battled robots in the streets like monsters from pre-Rifts Japanese movies. Neither side cared about the damage they were doing to Tolkeen, as fires both mystical and natural swept through the city.

And then Shaard, huge and terrifying, rose up out of the shadows. The great pyramid began to move and to glow, and suddenly it was gone. In its place, there was a great pillar of light. The pillar grew and expanded, until all the world was a bright blanket of white.

When the light cleared, Jack saw the streets of Chi-Town. The protective walls still stood, but everyone inside them was dead. The corpses of children, Dog Boys, city rats, soldiers, workers, and bureaucrats, all of them were lying dead in the reeking, fly-infested streets. "Don't let us die," the corpses begged pitifully, their putrescent mouths falling apart as they spoke. Suddenly, Jack saw the streets of Tolkeen. The city was still standing, its spires and buildings higher and prouder than ever before. But, as in Chi-Town, everyone was dead. D-Bees and humans lay on the pavement, burnt to skeletons and cinders. Their blackened corpses let out a wailing that could break one's heart, begging, "Don't let us die."

Jack was suddenly wide awake, his heart full of terror and his body bathed in sweat. Realizing that he needed his rest tomorrow, he tried to get back to sleep, to no avail. Rest was one thing that Jack Perrin's inner demons did not approve of.

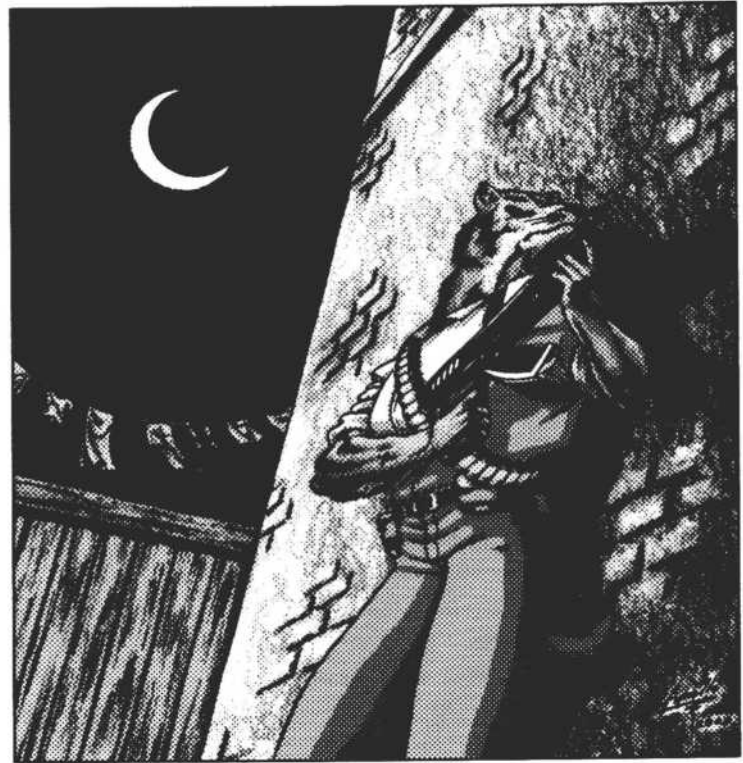
Chapter 43

At precisely midnight, the winter solstice occurred. The ley lines of Tolkeen flared up for a moment, shining with a bright and beautiful light. But then, the excess mystical energy was sucked up towards the great pyramid. Crackling bolts of pure power began flowing over the massive structure like water flowing over a stone. The CS soldiers fighting their way towards Tolkeen, seeing that the ley lines were being drained dry, redoubled their efforts. It was clear to even the lowliest grunt that the leaders of Tolkeen were up to nothing good.

The Coalition forces had a far easier time that night than one might have expected. For as the ley lines withered and shrank, so did the area's ambient P.P.E. base. Mystical cannons that would have once torn apart tanks found themselves barely capable of taking out grunts in body armor. The Techno-Wizard rifles and sidearms of the soldiers became worth little more than ancient muskets against the incoming horde. Faced with such handicapped foes, the Dead Boys easily cut a bloody path toward the gates of Tolkeen.

* * *

At 5 AM in front of the Human Freedom Alliance's beer hall, Lucius Mallen found himself huddling in an alleyway, clutching a Naruni plasma cartridge rifle to his chest. His men were set up all around the building, waiting for his signal. Any minute now, as soon as he felt ready to begin, he would perform the biggest police action of his career, one of the biggest in Tolkeen's his-



tory. It didn't feel particularly grand, though. Mallen knew that what he was doing was right; he hated bigots with a passion, and the world would be far better off with this particular bunch of skinheads in prison. But still, he had never pictured himself like this. When he joined the force, he had thought that detectives went about solving mysteries and unraveling conspiracies all day, like the ones he saw in old Earth movies. He hadn't seen any detectives leading strikes against terrorist cells in those films. This seemed like a duty that somebody else should be doing.

Mallen forced himself to remember why he was here. He was here for the dozens of innocent victims of the serial killer. He was here for Uziel, killed in the line of duty. He was here for his partner Pete Fransisco, who would most likely never be able to cast spells again due to his wounds. Suddenly, it all seemed right.

"Attack!" he shouted into his headset, as he leapt up to his feet. Dozens of policemen jumped out of their hiding places and charged into the building, going in through every door and window they could find. The enemy needed to be left with no escape route. Mallen himself kicked down a side door and strode inside the dark, stinking beer hall, his rifle ready.

Inside, half a dozen kids were lying around loading Naruni plasma cartridges into clips and calibrating broken laser rifles. The oldest of them couldn't have been more than twenty. They weren't children, though. Their eyes said that. Looking into those eyes, Mallen saw hate, xenophobia, and cynicism. It was eerie, to see people so young with so much anger inside them. A couple of the kids reached for nearby handguns. Mallen pulled the trigger, and watched the little monsters fly apart. The stink of blood and plasma began to fill the air, overwhelming the old odor of weak beer.

"What's going on?" barked Perrin, waking up as the door to his room was kicked down. A couple of police officers barged in, both of them carrying plasma rifles.

"Hands up!" screamed one of the officers. "You're under arrest!"

"Arrest this!" replied Perrin. Before either one of the Tolkeen policemen could react, he scooped up a hand grenade from his night stand, pulling the pin and tossing it in one fluid motion. There was an explosion and a flash of steel, and the cops were blown apart. The leader of the HFA stepped over the crater, and looked out of his room at the battle that was unfolding.

Lots of the less experienced members of the organization had been sitting around in the front rooms, sleeping or getting weapons ready for the day's battle. The police were tearing through them like a machine gun blasting through a box of Kleenex. Most of the more experienced veterans, who had been planning to take part in the raid against Shaard, were getting pinned down. Energy blasts were flying all over the place, and every few seconds some poor slob would scream out as a plasma slug found its mark. The HFA boys were better trained, but they were also half-asleep, surprised, and out of armor.

This was turning into a massacre.

Perrin scooped up one a fallen man's plasma cartridge rifle, and began spraying the SWAT team with bursts of white-hot death. "Get to the basement!" he screamed to his men. "Use the escape route! We've got to abandon our base here! I'll hold them off!"

The veterans of the Human Freedom Association scrambled for the basement, as the cops scrambled for cover from Perrin's relentless barrage. As the CS pilot ducked back inside the doorway to reload, he did a quick mental count of whom he had seen. He needed to know which of his men were still alive. He had seen Donald Hartman, Reiser, and Possman running down into the basement. Sonja and Rick Freedom had been sleeping at their apartments. He hadn't seen Nick Thompson, though. So far, so good. Most of his elite team was still alive, although entirely too many of the other HFA troops were gone. And they were going to lose the safehouse where lots of their weaponry was stored. This couldn't have come at a worse time.

"You're dead!" Perrin yelled, rolling back into the doorway. He pulled down the trigger, and felt the familiar kick of the rifle. A few more of the SWAT cops fell before the gunfire. They were keeping their distance, and that was good. That would buy him some time.

Upstairs, Nick Thompson slapped an E-Clip into his laser pistol. He was a heavy sleeper, and by the time that he was awake, the battle was already well underway. He wasn't about to miss this fight. The former mage slammed open the door to the room where he had been sleeping, and strode out into the hall.

Arrayed before him was a scene of carnage. The dead were strewn all over the floors, the walls were covered with blood, and Tolkeen police were all over the place. Thompson's heart sunk into his belly as he realized that Jack Perrin was the only one holding them at bay. Then he saw the sights of a sniper pointing directly at his boss. It was too late to stop the man from getting off a shot, and far too late to warn Perrin. Thompson did the only thing he could think of. He dove for it.

"NO!" screamed Jack, as the plasma cartridge hit Nick in the guts. There was a cracking noise, and the thick, pungent scent of burning flesh. Nick Thompson fell, his entrails spilling out of him.

* * *

"What's this?!" snarled Rick Freedom, as he stood outside the HFA meeting place. There was a war going on inside! The building had literally been shot to bits, with enormous holes blasted into the walls. Fires were burning in several places, and the sound of the gunfire was deafening. Freedom had spent years with this as his headquarters. He would not be robbed of his past, his men, and his destiny by Tolkeen's pathetic defenders. If defeating them meant losing whatever semblance of control he maintained over his mind, so be it.

The Crazy's M.O.M. implants began clicking and whirring as insanity fell over him like a comforting blanket. He pulled his Vibro-sabers, and leapt into the burning building.

The lunatic cut a swathe of destruction through the Tolkeenites. They hadn't expected an attack from behind, especially not from a super-powered god of war like Freedom. The cops, already hurt and scared after the pitched gun battle, broke and began to flee. Only a few of them stayed in the burning building, and one of them was Mallen. The Crazy leapt towards the Wolfen detective, shrieking a war cry and raising his blades.

Mallen raised his gun and fired. It blew a massive hole into Rick Freedom, knocking the Crazy backwards into a wall. The fearsome warrior collapsed into a bloody mass, twitching and smoking. Lucius Mallen turned towards where Jack Perrin had stood, only to see that Perrin and Thompson were both gone.

Furthermore, a nearby door had been shut behind them. Big chunks of Naruni plastique wired to the door made it clear that attempting to follow would be a lethal mistake.

The detective sighed, and looked around the battlefield. The dead and wounded littered the filthy floors, and his superior sense of smell, never much of a blessing, was now driving him mad by presenting him with the vivid stench of death. He had badly disrupted the plans of these monsters, whatever those were, and that at least was good. But he had to wonder if it had been worth the terrible price they paid. He barked out a command to his men to bring everyone who was wounded outside, and then walked off to give the fire department a call.

* * *

"What are we gonna do, Jack?" asked Possman, as the CS Ranger tried to put a bandage on the bloody stump that had been one HFA member's hand. "Our plans've been shot to bits, we've lost most of our guys and our guns, and the bad guys'll probably be coming down those stairs in a few minutes. I hate to say this, but I think we've lost."

"No," replied Perrin coldly, shaking his head. "I will not permit our enemies to blow up everyone back home just because I didn't have the sense to put on enough perimeter guards. I will not let everyone down just because we weren't prepared for that. We're going to go over to that pyramid, and we're going to burn it down and then stomp on its ashes. By the end of the day, I'm going to be making a bathtub out of Shaard's skull, and a new belt out of his hide."

"Are you alright, man? I don't think I've ever seen you like this before."

"The stakes have never been this high before. Let's get everyone over to the garage and get ready to roll. We've got to pick up everyone who isn't dead, visit our other arms caches, and then be on our way."

* * *

The Alien Intelligence paused to look over the city of Tolkeen, while hovering a few hundred feet in the air. It was truly a beautiful city. All of its protection magics were gone now, and its Elemental defenders hovering in the air looked anemic from lack of energy. There were planes circling in the sky, but these flimsy inventions of man were nothing compared to the magical forces which Tolkeen had once enjoyed. Those precious energies were now concentrated in the pyramid, which pulsed and glowed with an unwholesome light. The crystals orbiting around the structure were screaming, at a pitch that none but gods could hear. They, the fragments of a monster god, were terrified beyond words.

"You will be free," said the Alien Intelligence. "Be calm, for help has arrived." The Alien Intelligence then unsheathed his sword and flew towards the pyramid, on an unholy mission of mercy.

Chapter 44

It was a chaotic, frightening day in the city of Tolkeen. The fear of war gripped everyone by the throat, as the Dead Boys came closer and closer to achieving their murderous imperative. Most people were huddled inside their homes, listening to battery-powered radios for news from the front. A few residents had built shelters in basements and abandoned buildings, praying that they would be able to avoid the wrath of the Coalition States by hiding. But most people were just hoping for the best. Why bother hiding from an enemy whose mutant shock troopers can just sniff you out? Why build flimsy barricades against guns that can cut through solid steel?

In a city of magic, to suddenly lose all sorcerous power is especially damaging. Common Techno-Wizard appliances, taken for granted by most, were suddenly useless, and everyone felt their loss. A few people were forced to go to the hospital when their magical augmentations or prostheses shut down, and quite a few patients on Techno-Wizard life support equipment were plunged into critical condition or worse. The most common means of transportation and communication were shut down, forcing a state of solitary confinement on the innocent people of Tolkeen. There were only two places in town where large numbers of civilians had gathered.

One of these was the religious district, the area of Tolkeen where most of its churches had been built. People crowded inside to pray, to make their peace with whatever gods they worshiped, and to take comfort from each other's presence. Even those who didn't believe in any divine presence and those who just hadn't stepped inside a house of worship for years ducked into various temples.

The other place was the Rift-gates. They had been shut down to conserve magical energy for Shaard's ritual, but hundreds had come anyway, in the hope that they would be allowed to flee if things went bad. This was a truly chaotic place. Entire families

huddled together, their possessions carried in carts or suitcases. A few enterprising souls were selling extra suitcases and shopping carts at exorbitant prices, proving that capitalism thrives under even the most adverse conditions. A mighty guardian Seraph carrying a sword watched over the masses, making sure that everything was orderly, even as would-be lords and unmentionable beings tried to spread chaos for the fun of it. Groups of scholars passed the hours in heated conversations. Occasionally some of them, their nerves already tensed by the war, would start to fight, but these scuffles were broken up quickly by the vigilant angel. There were indeed some odd characters in that motley crowd. A wandering Necromancer, newly arrived in town to take advantage of the many war dead, amused a small group of children by animating hot dog wieners. A robotic crow set up a money-changer's table, offering currency conversion to the refugees.

Gargoyles, lunatics, wizards, and even stranger folk were all gathered at that meeting place, talking and laughing and trying to enjoy themselves a bit in the face of utter calamity. In the back, a ghoul wearing a scavenged CS uniform scribbled down notes about the scene, thinking that maybe he would publish a book about it someday.

* * *

The D-bee mercenaries guarding the Great Pyramid looked around nervously. Their best weapons, those powered by sorcerous energy, were now worthless. The walls of the pyramid behind them were hot to the touch, and a couple of the Brodkil guards had burned themselves badly against it. And even worse, they could hear the guns of the Coalition getting closer and closer. Flashes of artillery fire lit up the horizon like distant thunder, and every few minutes a burning aircraft would plunge to the earth like a shooting star. The fact that the mercenaries weren't very trusting of their employer (trusting one's employer was like suicide in their profession) didn't help one bit.

Suddenly, there was a flash of blue light, and what looked like an Elf in jet-black armor appeared in front of the main gates. Before anyone could react, it walked through the electrified barbed wire fence as if the metal was nothing more than string. The monstrous guard hounds ran from the intruder, yelping in panic. The guards manning the brick wall panicked as well, opening fire on the Elf. They were armed with Atlantean, Triax, and Mindwerks weapons, some of the finest firearms in the world. The guns did nothing, bouncing off the armor of this intruder. Then the Elf looked up, and the guards caught fire.

The wall exploded, bringing several more of the mercenaries down with it. From the left, a wave of Gargoyles and Brodkil soldiers charged. With a flick of his wrist, the monster solidified the air around them, stopping them dead in their tracks and suffocating them horribly. From the right, guards crouched behind any cover they could find as they plinked energy blasts off of his armor. The Elf looked at them, said a word, and they all aged centuries in seconds, turning to dusty skeletons before even hitting the ground. The mighty defenders of the pyramid were now dead, dying, or fleeing for their lives. The Elf smiled, and turned to his prize.

The doors were well-warded. Breaking them down or passing through without permission would be nearly impossible. Like-

wise, the walls had been enchanted to resist any physical or magical assault. Fortunately, Shaard had not been crafty enough to weave such potent magicks into the floor of his fortress. The monster turned insubstantial for a moment, dove into the ground, and then rose up again into the pyramid. The fiend knew that there would be many more wards and guards before he could face Shaard, but knew that he could reach the wyrm in time. It wouldn't be long now.

* * *

"What the heck happened here?" asked Jack Perrin, as his APC pulled up to the streets surrounding the Great Pyramid. A portion of both the exterior and interior barricades had been knocked down, and dead guards littered the ground. Some of them seemed to have been roasted from the inside out, almost as if a plasma grenade had gone off inside their stomachs. Some of them were suspended in midair, forever trapped in their dying moment. Some of them were only skeletons and ashes. And a few had just been blown to bits.

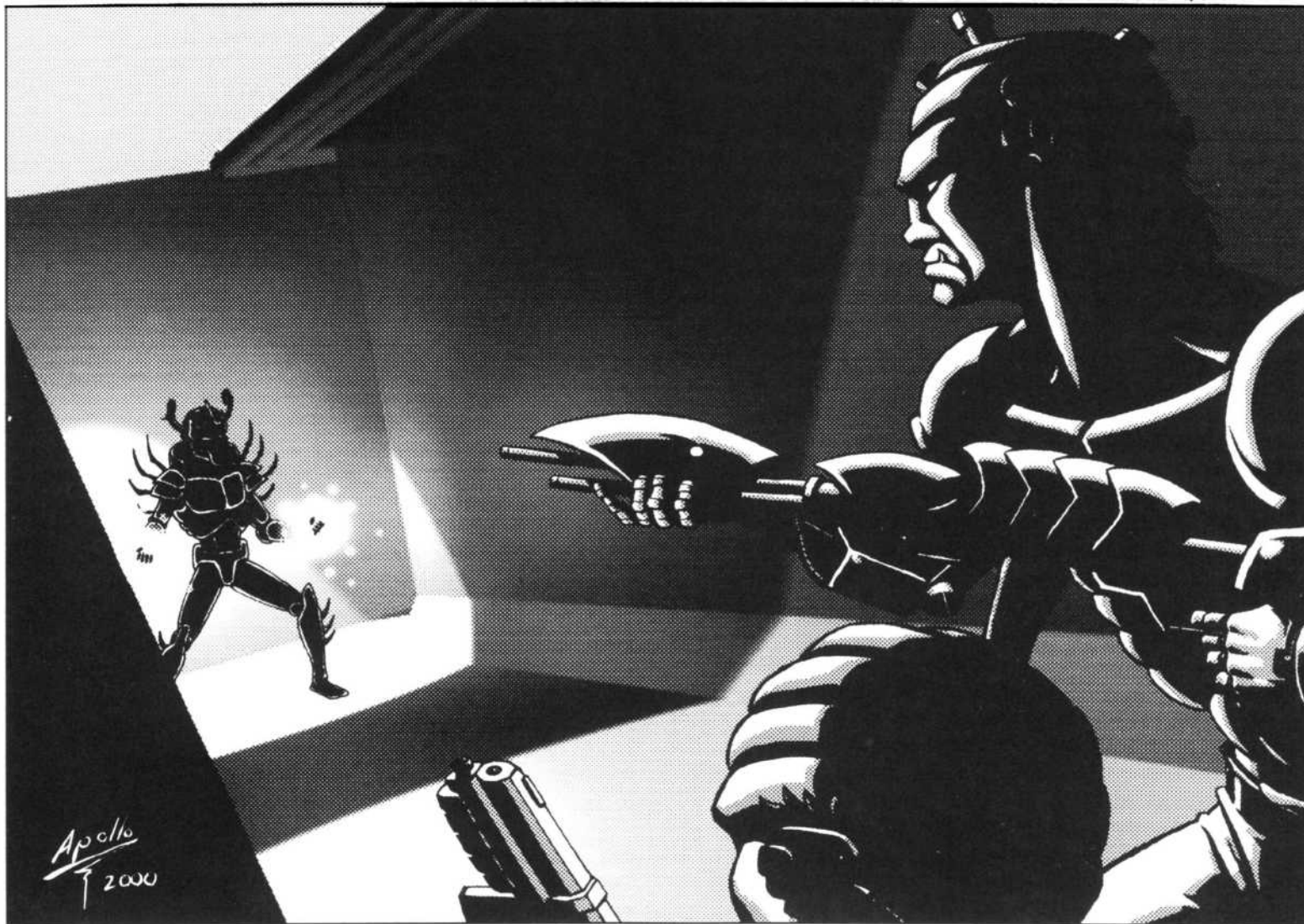
"I don't know, but it's a good thing it happened," said Possman. "We were short-manned due to this morning's raid. Doesn't look like it's going to be a problem now."

"Could still be trouble," replied Perrin. "Remember, the rest of the Tolkeen army isn't going to take this lying down. I want everyone to take strategic positions along the interior wall. Tell the men to grab up any weapons they see lying around, because it looks like the bad guys had better ordinance than we do. And then find me the people I picked out for the strike team, at least any who are still alive. We're going in."

As the Human Freedom Alliance troops took up positions along the interior wall, Perrin stormed towards the main doors, only to see the glowing runes carved into them. "Aw, shoot," growled Perrin. "Should've expected it. How are we supposed to get into this place now?"

* * *

"Stay back!" cried the elite guardsman. The sorcerer-soldier cast a powerful spell at the Alien Intelligence, a spell which the monstrosity barely managed to deflect. These mortals were surprisingly powerful. The monster drew its sword and bisected the human in one fluid movement. In that moment of distraction, another of the guards managed to get off a clean head shot. A beam of intense, searing energy blasted into the side of the Alien Intelligence's skull, instantly charring off most of the



flesh. Although the monster's energies had somewhat fortified the flesh of its host body, it was not enough to deal with this attack. Most of the left side of its face was blown clear off, exposing the bone underneath. The fluids inside of its left eye instantly turned to steam, bursting the eyeball like an overinflated balloon.

A new one grew out from underneath. But this new eye was different from the old one. The old eye, the eye of the Elf host, was blue and remained inside of the socket. This replacement was bright yellow, and was at the end of a three-inch tentacle growing out of the skull. New waves of greasy, blue-white flesh instantly re-grew where the laser had hit. They constantly moved and receded over the affected area, like an ocean made of some impossibly thick fluid.

Impossible, the monster thought, as it decapitated the guard who had shot it. *The energies of this place are strong enough to remake me as I was! By killing Shaard, not only will I save my ally, I will heal my old wounds and regain my former body!* The monster laughed, an unimaginably horrible sound, and charged into the other guardsmen with a terrible zeal.

* * *

"Hey!" shouted Perrin, as the rune-encrusted doors of the pyramid suddenly burst open. Two Tolkeen soldiers ran out, screaming with terror. One of them sprinted past Perrin, only to be shot down by the HFA gunmen manning the walls. Jack managed to grab onto the second one, twisting his arm to hold him in place.

"What's happened?" Perrin asked, noting the shocked expression on the young man's face.

"M-monster!" the soldier replied, pointing into the dark bowels of the pyramid. "We can't even slow it down! It's killed everyone! Everyone!"

Perrin frowned for a moment, calculating this new twist. "Good," he finally remarked. "Less guards for us to fight. If we're real lucky, maybe it'll even soften up the dragon for us." He tossed the panicked soldier out into the street, and watched him flee.

"Everyone who I picked out, get in here with me!" he ordered. "Be careful, we don't know what to expect in here." With the HFA's elite at his sides, he walked into the darkness, not knowing whether or not he would return.

* * *

"I must leave for a moment," said Shaard to the other sorcerers. "I trust that you will be able to channel the energy without me." With that, he teleported to his sanctum, carefully hidden in the catacombs of the pyramid. The others, caught up in the ritual, wouldn't have noticed that he was gone if not for the sudden extra strain. Shaard's portion of the P.P.E. channeling had been so large that his sudden absence was felt by everyone.

Inside his personal chamber, Shaard peered into a row of crystal balls. In one of them, he saw the monster tearing through his best guards, slowly shedding its flesh as it did so. In a few minutes, it would no longer be remotely humanoid. Furthermore, it would be almost as powerful as the entity whose death

would provide the explosive force behind the ritual. In another, he saw Perrin and his commandoes advancing through the tunnels of the pyramid. He saw the black-garbed CS troops charging ever closer towards Tolkeen's walls, and the decimated remains of several of Tolkeen's bases.

"This might be a problem," growled the dragon. "I can deal with the entity or Perrin, but not both at once. How fortunate that I already had a countermeasure. He motioned to the construct of flesh which was crouching in a corner of the room. "I have need for you, my dear," he said. As the construct, a horrid assembly of claws and armor and fangs, stood, as its features melted into those of Jack Perrin's dead wife.

Chapter 45

The monstrous, shambling creature lurched towards the HFA commandoes, wickedly sharp claws and fangs emerging from the hairy, flabby mass. There were several bursts of laser fire, piercing the monster's scabrous hide and splattering thick, black blood on the walls and floor. The beast fell to the floor, wailing pitifully.

"Watch your backs," ordered Jack Perrin, visibly shaken by the attack. Ever since entering the pyramid, the squad had been under constant assault by men, monsters, and constructs of magic. Time was clearly running out, and the dragon had yet to show his face. All around the pyramid, reality was breaking apart as the spell reached conclusion. Stone walls melted and ran like wax, the laws of physics and geometry became irrelevant one by one, and the horrific mental screams of the trapped Alien Intelligence sang within everyone's minds. It was easy to lose track of one's sanity in such a place under such conditions.

The squad advanced slowly through the darkened tunnels of the pyramid, weapons ready. At long last, they came upon a massive central chamber. There, the greatest sorcerers of Tolkeen sat in gold-encrusted thrones, chanting and concentrating as they channeled cosmic amounts of power through themselves and through the pyramid. It was clear that the strain upon them was immense. Veins stood out clearly upon their foreheads, their very breath was tinged with blueish-red magical energy, and every few moments one of them would cough up a little blood or be a little burned by some little flare of power. They stiffened as Perrin and his commandoes walked in, clearly frightened by the intruders but unwilling to break the spell. As long as they kept the spell going, there was at least the chance that they would be saved by Shaard. If they failed, they were doomed. So, they kept on chanting, even as the HFA commandoes leveled their guns at the magi.

"Stop!" yelled Perrin to his own men. "I've got something to say." He turned to address the sorcerers, shielding his eyes against the blinding energy that was enveloping them. "I want to get this out of the way first. I think that you are a pack of vile monsters, who commune with evil gods and kill wantonly. I think that you and your treacherous kind are one of the chief reasons why our world's so screwed up, and I will cheer when you're ground back into the dust like the filth you are. But I also think that all the innocent people in Tolkeen shouldn't suffer just because their leaders didn't have the sense not to play with demons. So I'm here to cut a deal. All the energy that you're channeling... I want you to channel it in a different direction. I want you to channel it into Tolkeen itself. Open the Rift-gates,

and teleport the residential sectors of Grand Alamar and any other nearby towns, to Lazlo. Tough job, I know, but you've clearly got enough energy to do it."

"We will lose the war if we do as you say," said one of the Lizard Mages, its voice speaking directly inside Perrin's brain.

"You're gonna lose the war anyway!" shouted Perrin, trying to make his voice heard over the din of crackling energy. "Even if you do drop the big one on Chi-Town, it'll still be hours before the news gets to the troops up here! In those hours, they will destroy this city and kill everyone in it! Do you want that?!"

The sorcerers took a moment to mentally commune with another. "We shall do as you say," said the Lizard Mage. "But only if you protect us from Shaard. He is what you humans call a zealot. The death of Tolkeen matters little to him, as long as the Coalition is also destroyed."

"Will do." Jack motioned to several of the HFA commandoes. "You guard these guys with your lives!" he ordered.

"But if they try any monkey business, gun them down. Got it? Good. Everyone else, come with me. We've got an appointment with Shaard himself."

* * *

"Die!" screamed the Alien Intelligence, smashing through the stone walls of Shaard's inner sanctum like they were made of kindling. The transition to its true form was nearly complete now. The substance which the monster's soul was made of, a substance akin to rotten ectoplasm, was tearing its way out of the comparatively frail body which it was encased in. The gooey, crawling new flesh was working its way into every crevice of the armor, so as not to lose the protection of the star-forged steel. The rune sword which the monstrosity used, plunged deep into the dragon, leaving a trail of white-hot energy in its wake. The wyrm retaliated with its razor-sharp claws and unbearably cold breath, and the battle of the titans began.

The Alien Intelligence was never quite as powerful as its kin were, and it was badly distracted by its reversion to its true form and the screams of its brother. Shaard, on the other hand, was an experienced warrior who had been prepared for such an assault. The battle was going well for the dragon. The armor of the Alien Intelligence was nearly torn to bits after only a few minutes of fighting. With a sudden gesture, Shaard invoked iron chains to bind the entity in order to administer a crippling blow. However, in the split-second after raising his claw, the dragon happened to glimpse some of the crystal balls lying on a nearby table. The Rift-gates were open, and refugees were pouring through, escaping from the city. Entire blocks of the residential district were disappearing, drawn away by sudden Rifts.

"No!" screamed Shaard. "I am betrayed!" Suddenly, a searing burst of plasma blasted the dragon in his back. The dragon turned, to see Jack Perrin standing in the doorway, and the HFA elite streaming in.

"Worse than that, ugly," growled Perrin. "You're dead."

"Take care of this!" barked the dragon, as the beast dove towards a locked chest on the other side of the room. Without warning, a volley of high-intensity laser beams shot out of the shadows, blasting one unfortunate gunman's head clean off of

his shoulders. The commandoes turned, to see a lithe humanoid figure dressed in jet-black armor.

"Prepare for your doom," said the killer, in a voice like poisoned butter. "I am Sunaj, and it is my happy task to end your lives."

"You'll have to wait in line like everyone else," replied Possman, as the CS Ranger let loose a volley of energy rifle fire. With inhuman grace, the assassin leapt over the fire, landing clear on the other side of the room.

Donald Hartman attempted to grab the killer, only to have his foe turn to smoke, slip through his SAMAS suit's fingers, and re-materialize behind him.

Sonja tried to intervene, and caught a boot in the face for her troubles.

As the fight went on, Perrin raised his plasma rifle. He got a clean shot ready, only to suddenly have the rifle knocked out of his hands. He turned, instinctively drawing his pistol to kill whatever was opposing him. The pistol clattered out of nerveless fingers as he saw his dead wife standing before him.

"E-Elizabeth...?" he asked plaintively, his already overtaxed mind now on the verge of falling apart. "Y-you can't..."



"I am," she said seductively, wrapping her arms around him and hungrily drawing her body towards his. "When I was hurt in the crash, Shaard saved me. He restored my life. You can't kill him, darling. If he dies, I'll die along with him. You don't want that, do you?"

"Perrin!" yelled Possman, as the ranger hurled himself out of the way of a laser blast. "Get over here! This guy's killing us!"

"No, no... this isn't right. You're dead, and death is forever."

"The only thing that's forever is magic. Shaard has shown me the way. Oh, if only you could stop fighting long enough to see that!" Elizabeth threw herself against Perrin's body, kissing him tenderly yet with great passion. For a moment, Perrin gave

in, feeling the warmth of his wife's mouth against his and enjoying the sensation of love, a sensation he hadn't felt for entirely too long. He was only snapped out of it by the realization that his lover's teeth were beginning to elongate into fangs.

Snapping out of the trance, Perrin threw himself backwards, sprawling out onto the floor. The creature that had been his wife suddenly changed, growing fur, fangs, and claws. The horrific beast leapt atop the pilot, clawing and scratching at him. Perrin felt the monster's talons rending his armor even as the voice of his wife whispered for him to come away, to feel peace after a lifetime of war. With one hand, Jack struggled to keep the creature's wide, fang-filled mouth away from his unprotected face. With the other, he groped on the floor for his lost pistol. His eager hands finally latched onto the gun, which he drew up into the she-beast's stomach and fired. For a moment, the monster reverted to its human form, allowing Jack to watch his wife fall apart. When the dazed soldier stood again, he was covered in its/her blood.

"You're dead, you monster," Perrin spat, lunging at Shaard as the great wyrm rummaged through its magical treasures.

The Sunaj assassin had by this point managed to take out most of the HFA commandoes. Their corpses lay scattered about the room. He was now fighting with Sonja. The two warriors battled with superhuman speed and strength, leaping around the room at a pace almost too fast for a normal human to see. Although Sonja was chemically augmented, and a skilled warrior, even she was no match for the dreaded Sunaj. She let down her guard for a fraction of a second, and an instant later her right arm went sailing across the room. The assassin raised his blade to deliver the fatal blow, only to be tackled by Possman.

The two wrestled around on the floor for a moment. The assassin wound up on top, his knife pressed against the ranger's exposed throat. "Any last words?" the Sunaj asked.

"Yeah. Look behind you."

The Sunaj began to turn, only to find Hartman's armored gauntlet around his neck. Before the killer could turn to smoke again, Hartman squeezed, snapping the assassin's neck like a flimsy piece of kindling.

"I have it!" cried Shaard, holding aloft a golden scepter inlaid with crystals and ivory with one claw while it held the frenzied Perrin at bay with another.

"The traitors didn't realize that their life forces had been bound to me!" The scepter began to glow and shimmer with power. Above, in the central chamber, the high sorcerers of Tolkeen each fell dead, drained of life in an instant by the talismans they wore, talismans which had been given to them by Shaard. Their channeling abilities were concentrated into the scepter, and the scepter was controlled by the dragon. On the crystal balls, the great wyrm saw that the city was no longer teleporting away from him. Wisps of ectoplasm began to emerge from the cracks in the walls.

"Everyone get out of here!" said Perrin. "I think this place is about to blow up or something!"

"What about you?" yelled Hartman, as he pulled the injured Sonja and a wounded HFA member through the doorway.

"I'm stopping Shaard."

"All by yourself?! He'll kill you!"

"Maybe so. Just get everyone else out of here. I'm going down fighting."

The power armor commando nodded, then retreated through the doorway with the remaining HFA members. The only ones left in the room now were Perrin, Shaard, and the Alien Intelligence, which was rapidly breaking free of its chains.

Thick gobs of ectoplasm emerged from the floor like droplets inside a lava lamp, rising, falling, and constantly changing their shapes. Perrin charged the dragon again, only to be swatted away like a fly.

"Think what you're doing, you maniac!" shouted Perrin, scraping himself off of the floor. "You're about to kill millions of innocent people? Doesn't that mean anything to you?!"

"The gardener must trim the weeds from his flowerbed, must he not?" asked Shaard, as he directed bolts of pure force through the scepter into the struggling Alien Intelligence. "Only the creatures of magick can restore this shattered land, and we can only do it if weeds such as your Coalition are removed. We are humanity's last chance for salvation, and the only way that humankind shall ever regain its proper place in the Megaverse!"

"Let me guess," growled Perrin, grabbing a fresh plasma rifle up from the ground. "Our proper place as your servants? Our proper place as your worshippers?"

The ice dragon seemed to smile. "At last, a human who seems to understand the way that the world must work. Such a pity that you insist on fighting that understanding."

"Yeah, well we lesser races are funny that way." Perrin raised the plasma rifle to fire, prompting a chilling laugh from the dragon.

"The power of the nexus, collected and purified in the pyramid, and distilled through the veins of my dead comrades, is flowing through this scepter and into me," said Shaard. "I have cosmic power at my disposal. And you think that your puny pop-gun is going to pierce my scales?"

Perrin fired. The Naruni plasma shells sailed through the air, smashing into the scepter and knocking it out of the dragon's claws and across the room. The wyrm, the dark god, and the man all simultaneously dove for the artifact. As luck would have it, Perrin's hand was the first to close around the mystic device.

Instantly, he felt pure power running through him, like a jolt of lightning up his spine. The scepter was unbelievably hot to the touch, melting the already battered armored gauntlet which held it, as well as the hand inside. Perrin didn't notice much, caught up as he was in the thrill of the magic. For the first time, he understood what exactly it was that made people covet the power of sorcery.

"The scepter's been set to channel the energy into the spell no matter who controls it," snarled the dragon. "The spell is still in motion!"

"Maybe so. I'll handle that in a moment. Right now, I want both of you to finish what the other sorcerers had started. Open the Tolkeen D-Gates, and teleport Tolkeen's residential sectors to Lazlo. Now."

"You realize what will happen if you fire that thing," growled Shaard, as the dragon began manipulating the plentiful ambient energy. "You'll burn yourself out. Just holding that thing is tearing you apart. Using it will kill you."

"Yeah, but you two would both go down, too. Sounds like a fair enough tradeoff."

The dragon frowned, and reluctantly began channeling energy along with the Alien Intelligence. On the crystal balls and magic mirrors strewn across the room, Perrin watched, as Tolkeen and its provinces slowly began to vanish. Buildings disappeared one at a time, and crowds of people surged through the open D-Gates. After a few moments, the residential sectors had been practically deserted. However, the scrying devices suddenly became clouded and distorted by static. The images displayed on them faded away, yielding to mundane reflections displayed in the polished glass.

"What have you done now, Shaard?!" barked Perrin. "Why aren't those things working?"

"We must be out of range," replied the dragon, chuckling malevolently under his breath.

"Out of range? But that would mean... oh no. Oh no!"

* * *

The few survivors of the HFA retreated down the corridor, weapons blazing behind them. Most of the commandoes were badly wounded, and had to be helped along by their allies. The only thing that kept some of the demoralized soldiers going was the knowledge that they were close to the exit, close to escaping from this surreal nightmare. Hartman expended the last of his armor's ammunition in dispatching a bizarre shambling creature, then kicked open the door. He almost made the mistake of stepping outside without looking, and that mistake would have cost him his life.

From their point of view by the open doorway, the HFA soldiers could see the Chi-Town metropolis a few hundred feet beneath them. The Burbs were on fire, as looters, rioters, and demons took to the streets in a suicidal frenzy. Military transports were streaming out of the city itself like rats out of a sinking ship, speeding away from the throne of the Coalition States at the greatest velocity their engines would allow. Although artillery, flying power armor, and attack planes were all bombarding the pyramid, their efforts did not seem to be doing any good.

"This isn't going well at all," muttered Possman angrily, as the ranger took a small grappling hook and cable out of his backpack. "I sure hope Jack knows what he's doing in there."

Chapter 46

"Change it NOW!" screamed Jack Perrin, leveling the scepter at Shaard. There was fear and hate in the ice dragon's cold eyes, but also a feeling of victory. "Teleport us back to Tolkeen!"

"No. Even if I tried, the strain would probably tear me apart."

"Then it'll tear you apart, you monster. There are millions of people who will die if we stay here."

"There is a dream that dies if we go back to Tolkeen."

"Your dream is already dead! No matter what happens here, Tolkeen is going to be burnt to the ground. Shaard, you've lost!"

Shaard chuckled. "If I'm the one who lost, then why are you begging me to save Chi-Town? No, this is a case where nobody's won. My dream is dead, but so are your people." The

dragon now laughed, looking inhumanly pleased. "The difference is, I have thousands of years to create another dream. But I doubt that your little city will ever be rebuilt."

At that moment, an inhuman scream pierced the minds of all present. It was a horrible, terrifying sound, the kind of sound one would expect to hear only in a demon's nightmare. In Chi-Town and the surrounding Burbs, hundreds of people suddenly went mad. Fuel containers, missile silos, and many other explosive devices suddenly burst into flames. Psychics and Dog Boys writhed in pain, their minds invaded and attacked by the sound.

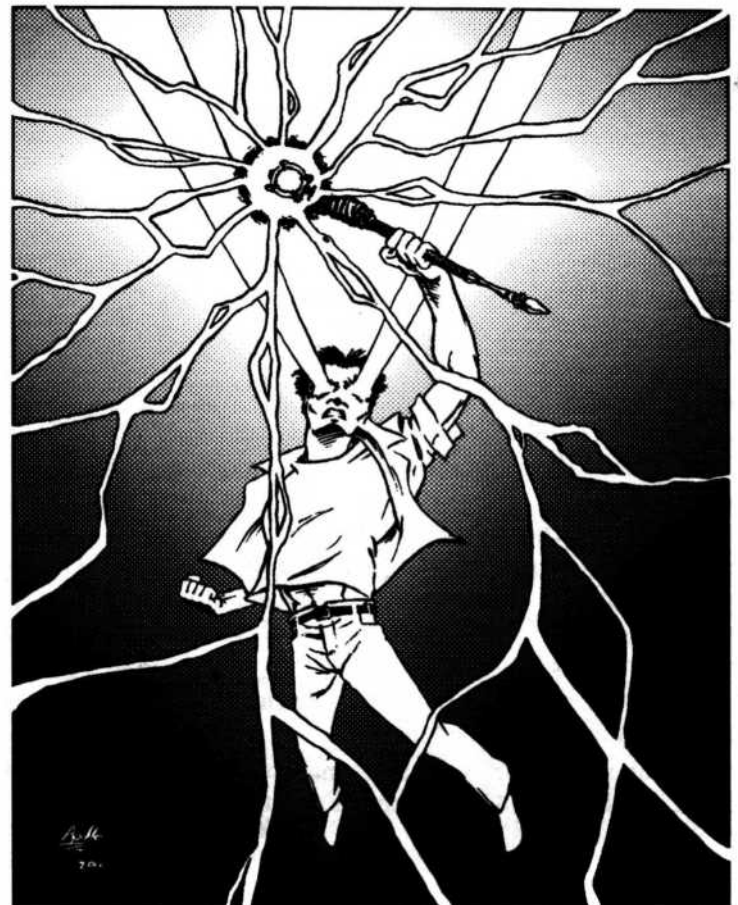
"Hear that?" asked Shaard. "That's the sound of a god dying. His death is inevitable at this point. As is the explosion that his final deathscreeam will produce."

The Alien Intelligence, which had been watching the proceedings cautiously, suddenly was filled with a deep and terrible rage. It lunged towards Shaard, knocking the dragon off of his feet. The two entities rolled around on the floor, shredding each other with fangs and claws. Jack Perrin, suddenly aware of the burning pain that was shooting through his arm, had a sudden epiphany.

"I know what to do, Shaard," he said grimly. "I don't know how to redirect the energy flowing through this scepter. I don't know how to shut the process down. But I do know how to get rid of this energy without destroying Chi-Town." He aimed the wand at the two wrestling monstrosities.

"Y-you can't!" shrieked Shaard. "You'll die!" The dragon, realizing the perils of his situation, tried to teleport to another dimension, but it was already too late.

"Yep," replied Perrin, as he began channeling the scepter's energy into a bolt of force. He felt the sheer power wrapping



around him, simultaneously suffocating him in its burning embrace and sustaining him with cosmic might. His feet rose off of the ground for a moment, and every brittle object in the room suddenly shattered as if hit by a hammer. His arm trembled ferociously, as the scepter began bucking and shaking violently. When the vibrations had reached a fever pitch, Perrin let go.

A bolt of crackling, blue-white energy leapt out of the scepter, enveloping Shaard, the Alien Intelligence, and most of the room. It burnt straight through the stone walls, shooting onwards and onwards until it burst out the sides of the pyramid. Those on the streets of the Burbs, staring up at the floating structure, saw a beautiful and terrible display of pyrotechnics, as the beam of force consumed the floating structure from the inside out. Many of the Chi-Town troops flying around the pyramid, blasting away at it in vain, were consumed by the blue flames or crushed by flying chunks of rock.

Perrin was at the epicenter of the inferno. The flames crackled all around as he hovered in the air, staying mere inches away from his unprotected body. He was dying from the inside out, but felt strangely calm. His insides were melting, his nervous system was popping like a string of firecrackers, and his flesh was falling off of him. But the raging sensation of the magic, the screaming sounds and feelings and emotions that came with controlling the force of a hundred atomic bombs, was so much more powerful than the pain, that the pilot felt little agony. He raised the scepter upwards, bringing the force to bear on the clouds of the heavens themselves.

The beam was more powerful now, unencumbered by the stone walls of the pyramid. The steady blue beam shot upwards, parting the clouds around Chi-Town. Pieces of rubble from the pyramid, from the Chi-Town walls, and from the surrounding Burbs, flew up around it, forming a spiral pattern around the column of energy as they burned up. The crystals orbiting the pyramid, which held the dead Alien Intelligence, were burnt to cinders, and the limp bits of darkness within them disintegrated in the burning light. The pillar of blue flame shot through the skies, out of the atmosphere, and into the harsh vacuum of space itself. After a few minutes, the beam began to flicker, and then faded away to nothingness. The pyramid, now a blackened and broken structure, remained hovering over Chi-Town, held up by the last remnants of the energy.

Jack Perrin sat on the hot charcoal floor now, his power all but gone. He stared at the scepter intensely, his bleeding eyes still full of grim determination. He was using the magic to keep his organs together for just a few more minutes, using crude telekinetic commands to pinch his wounds closed, to squeeze just a few more moments of life out of his heart and lungs. The Alien Intelligence that had been fighting Shaard was dead now, shriveled up like a slug tossed into salt water. The ice dragon, now just a blackened hulk of bones and burnt flesh, still clung onto some measure of life. Shaard managed to push his body up for a moment, and looked up at Perrin. In their current condition, the man and the dragon looked rather similar.

"You're demons, you know that?" croaked out Shaard. "No mortal could have done that. Not many dragons either, probably. You humans... must be demons. All this time I thought I was fighting men... really fighting monsters. If only I'd known..." With that, the dragon slumped over and died.

Under Perrin's mental control, the ruined pyramid made a slow descent to Earth. It was a mentally taxing task, and one that the pilot was barely up to.

The pain was beginning to set in now, and he was fighting a losing battle with consciousness. "Easy now," Perrin grunted, coughing up blood. "Didn't save city from explosion, just to get it killed from falling rocks. Come on, just a few seconds more, just a few seconds..."

Suddenly, he felt the jolt of the rocks he was sitting on landing against the ground. Relieved immensely, he dropped the scepter from nerveless hands, looked up at the city of Chi-Town, its walls standing like a great concrete monolith, and collapsed.

* * *

In the CS High Command chambers, onboard a Death's Head Transport that had fled Chi-Town, there was the sound of champagne bottles clinking. On dozens of television screens, they watched their victory. There were views of civilians from the Burbs walking amongst the wreckage, and of some of the HFA fighters who had emerged from the pyramid being given a hero's welcome. From inside Tolkeen itself, they saw soldiers rampaging through the city, looting, destroying, and venting their rage on the empty town. The fact that the city was so utterly deserted seemed unsettling, but the battle-weary soldiers shown on the screens seemed quite grateful for the lack of armed opponents.

In one corner of the room, Joseph Prosek II and some of his advisors were already working on the propaganda. They were selecting images to put on their posters, inspirational messages to work into the victory speeches, planning out the parades. In another corner of the room, Cabot, Underhill, and a few other of the Coalition's warlords were plotting out what do next, trying to figure out how quickly they could secure the area and how many troops would be freed up for the campaign against Free Quebec. Emperor Prosek himself sat in his throne, staring at the screens and feeling rather empty inside. He, above all the others, realized how close his empire had come to complete annihilation.

How many others were there, in the pits of Atlantis or the cults of the Magic Zone, building pyramids of their own, super-weapons of their own? He feared that the number was more than he could count. Fear gripped the emperor of humanity, as he watched smoke rising from the rubble around his city.

* * *

In Lazlo, thousands of refugees wandered through the streets, looking for help, or lost loved ones, or simply a place to buy a cup of coffee and a sandwich. Cyber-Knights had taken over much of the responsibility for these displaced souls, dispensing emergency supplies, food, and aid to whoever needed it. The streets were clogged with tents, vehicles, and people. On the outskirts of town, hundreds of buildings had arrived out of nowhere, and now needed connections for water, power, and other amenities. It was a busy, frightening, tiring day, but was pervaded by a sense of optimism. Many of the refugees had been

forced to leave some material things behind, but they had their lives, their friends, and their families. This was still a crisis, to be sure, but there was a feeling that not only would Lazlo survive the crisis, it would be greatly strengthened by it.

"I managed to find a store where they still had some groceries left," said Lucius Mallen, as the Wolfen walked into the tent where he and his wife were staying. "You should have seen the prices, though. Anyone come by while I was out?"

"Sir Theodore popped in," she remarked, looking through his shopping bag. "He said he wanted your help putting up a shelter today."

"Yeah, I ran into him on the way in here. I figured I'd have a bit of lunch, and then go over and do some carpentry with him. The sooner we can get those communal barracks up, the sooner we can have a real roof over our heads. And this evening I'm going to see if I can find Pete Fransisco, and some of the other guys from the station."

"Don't get that shelter up too soon," his wife said slyly, taking groceries out of the bag. "I have to admit, it's nice and cozy in this little tent. Intimate... if you know what I mean."

"Why, you wild animal," he chuckled, embracing her in his fur-covered arms.

Chapter 47

Jack Perrin opened his eyes, the dim realization that he was still alive dawning upon him. He managed to look down at the rest of his body, and saw that it was still blackened and shattered. Oddly enough, he didn't feel anything other than some dizziness and a bellyful of nausea. Perrin then looked up, and for a moment he thought that he had indeed died and gone to hell. A pack of doctors in oxygen masks and blood-smeared surgical gowns and caps were standing over him, poking him with needles and slicing him apart with laser-edged knives and circular saws. "Nurse!" cried one of the surgeons. "He's opened his eyes! We need more gas!"

"We can't give him any more, doctor!" replied a harried female voice. "It'll kill him for certain!"

"Most of the new systems are in already. He can stand it!"

Despite this disturbing talk, Perrin felt oddly detached from the scene, as if it was something that he was watching on television rather than something that was happening to him. The knowledge that he was being carved up like a turkey on an operating table, hanging between life and death, didn't disturb him in the slightest.

"Do you think he's going to make it?" the female voice asked again.

"Too early to tell. Getting him into a new body shouldn't be too bad, but he's sustained a lot of damage."

Perrin suddenly felt a cold, hard mask clamp over his nose and mouth. He smelled an acrid, antibiotic smell, and tasted something sour in his dry mouth. He felt himself become much dizzier, and suddenly passed away into the darkness of sleep.

* * *

"Impressive," said Karl Prosek, as he looked out upon the victory rally. Thousands of the Coalition's citizens had gathered in the Imperial Square of Chi-Town, a large plaza built for the sole purpose of such celebrations. Some of the wealthier people in attendance had paid thousands of credits for choice seats.

"The ratings are through the roof, sire!" said Bill, an elderly man who worked on Joseph Prosek II's staff. He had been outfitted with special cybernetic sensors which allowed him to monitor the television and radio usage of all Chi-Town. "Practically everyone is watching!"

"Excellent," muttered Karl, gazing out over the plaza. Some of the rabble from the HFA were sitting in chairs on the stage, most of them decked out in borrowed armor or finery. Two IAR-4 Hellraiser robots stood at attention at each end of the stage, while a company of Dead Boys in carefully polished armor stood in front of the platform. Holograms showing scenes of the CS troops sacking Tolkeen flickered in the air of the stadium. Massive banners bearing the insignia of the Coalition States hung from the walls. Above the podium was a sixty foot tall television screen, so that even the people in the back could see. And best of all, Shaard's cleaned and polished skull was in a case on the stage, where everyone could see it. "You've really outdone yourself this time, Joe," chuckled Prosek to his son. "I'm going to raise your allowance when this is over."

Joseph Prosek II laughed. "Gee dad, you're swell! Now get out there. You think the setup is impressive, you should see the speech that I've written for you. If this doesn't get the proles behind us, nothing will!"

Karl Prosek strode out on stage, to wild applause and cheers from the audience. The large TV screen showed a close-up of his beaming face, full of phony love for his people. On his way to the podium he tapped the case holding Shaard's skull, and felt a great sense of accomplishment. Tolkeen was gone, razed to dust, and it was all due to him.

Pity he went into politics, thought Jack Perrin, watching the Emperor from his reinforced chair. *He would have made a great actor*. Suddenly, Perrin winced, as his head filled with modem noise and electronic snow. Ever since his bionic conversion, he had been getting static in his thoughts. It had been really bad at first, to the point where it was hard to maintain his train of thought for more than a few minutes. The doctors said that it would eventually become much less noticeable, but that he'd never get over the problem for good.

As the static went away and the Emperor started warming up the crowd with a rant against demonkind, Perrin began contemplating this new body of his. The doctors had given him one which looked reasonably human, and he was grateful for that. His cyborg body was tall and broad-shouldered, but not unreasonably so. His artificial flesh was cool to the touch and didn't have quite the right texture, but at least it was better than bare metal. Still, nobody would ever think him to be a normal human. His arms and legs were too rectangular and disproportionate to be organic, and a network of plugs and wires sprouted from the back of his head, like fiber-optic hair.

Worst of all, Perrin himself knew that he wasn't entirely human anymore. He couldn't taste or smell things anymore, everything sounded like it was broadcast over a PA system, and whenever he touched things it felt like they had been wrapped in cotton. Voices in his head were constantly giving him system

updates and reminding him to change his filter caps, clean his neural uplinks, or perform similar acts of maintenance. Bar graphs and pie charts in the upper right corner of his field of vision kept him apprised of how well his body was working. It was unsettling, to say the least, to have to change the batteries in his eyes every few weeks.

Looking over his shoulder, Perrin saw some of the other Human Freedom Alliance members who had survived the final battle against Shaard. Donald Hartman and Hubert Possman were sitting on the stage in CS dress uniforms, neither of them looking entirely comfortable under the harsh spotlights, along with about a dozen low-ranking HFA thugs in borrowed finery. Hans Reiser wasn't at the ceremony. Perrin had heard that the German had already booked passage on a cargo flight back to Europe. Sonja wasn't here, either. She was at Lone Star for detoxification and medical treatment. From what Perrin had heard, she'd probably make it, although the drugs and the battle had done some serious damage. Sonja would live, but she'd never be quite whole again.

The crowd suddenly burst into fervent applause and cheering, and Perrin suddenly noticed that Prosek was gesturing at him to come forward. The pilot, realizing that it was his turn to give a speech, slowly got out of his chair and walked up to the microphone.

"So, Jack," asked the Emperor, the old man's face glowing with insincerity. "How did it feel to save millions of human lives?"

"It was very gratifying," replied Perrin. "When I saw that the people of Chi-Town had been saved, I knew that everything we had suffered and every battle we fought had been worth it. And when I had recovered from my wounds, I was doubly gratified to hear that the military had taken Tolkeen with a minimum of bloodshed." Inside, Perrin chuckled, hoping they would never find out the reason why they had been able to take Tolkeen itself with so little bloodshed.

"Hey," growled Joseph Prosek II. "That isn't the speech I wrote for him."

The Emperor seemed momentarily puzzled by the war hero's divergence from the prepared speech, but went on anyway. The last thing that he wanted was for the TV cameras to pick up his confusion. "Do you have anything you'd like to say to everyone who's watching us today?"

"Yes. My experience in Tolkeen taught me, above anything else, that life is precious. We can't afford to waste any moments of our lives, when death and tyranny are all around us. Don't just sit there in your living rooms with your televisions and your holovids and your synthetic food, scared to experience anything that hasn't first been homogenized, sterilized, and stripped of everything that might possibly offend you. Get up! Think! Live! Because in an uncertain, imperfect, transient world like this, you never know how much longer you have."

There was a smattering of polite applause. Oh well. Perrin hadn't been expecting an overwhelmingly positive response. After all, here he was, at the Coalition's moment of triumph, telling people that the Coalition was wrong. Still, there were millions of people watching this. He was bound to have reached at least a few of them.

"Son of a..." muttered Joseph Prosek II. "Nobody gets away with talking like that on television. Put Jack Perrin on the secret

list of suspected enemies of the state. And if he ever comes back here, he goes right onto the list of confirmed subversives. I will not put up with criminal talk like that."

* * *

A few hours after the ceremony. Perrin walked into the Soldier's Tomb, a memorial designed to honor the fallen warriors of the Coalition States. It was a simple (some would say stark) little room, with walls made of marble and a statue in the center depicting a human warrior clad in full Dead Boy armor. Dozens of wreaths, letters, and tiny flags had been placed at the base of the statue by mourners. Although Perrin suspected that the room was bugged, it didn't matter much. He'd already earned the enmity of High Command, and would be gone in a few hours anyway.

"Perrin, Elizabeth," he said. There was a faint whirring sound as a computer mainframe in the base of the statue ran through its database. "Perrin, Elizabeth," replied a cold computer voice, as the dead woman's holographic image was projected over the statue's head by hidden devices. It was just a file image of Elizabeth, and not a tremendously flattering one. Still, Jack's heart was warmed by the sight.

"Hi, honey," he said quietly. "I've come to say good-bye. I'm leaving the Coalition, and I don't think I'll ever be back here again. W-we were wrong, Elizabeth. D-Bees aren't the enemy. Mutants aren't the enemy. There's some that are bad, some that are good... just like humans. We spent our lives fighting people who weren't even the bad guys. We weren't fighting for the future of humanity or anything like that. We were fighting because some jerks sitting around on the upper levels wanted to add some more territory to their borders. You shouldn't have had to die for that, honey. Nobody should have." Perrin knew that if he was still made of flesh and bone, he'd be crying like a baby. Renouncing his entire life was a painful business.

"When I was in Tolkeen, I saw things that I had never seen before. Amazing things. There were plenty of terrible monsters over there, but there was great beauty alongside them, beauty I'm never going to find in Chi-Town. I want to see sights like those again. I want to learn about the things which they refused to teach us here. And I want to see if redemption is possible for someone who's seen as many atrocities as me. I'll always remember you, Elizabeth, but... but we were wrong." As the holographic image of Elizabeth faded away, Jack walked out of the room, knowing he would never return.

* * *

Jack Perrin walked out of the armored gates of Chi-Town, all his possessions stored in a backpack slung over his shoulders. Mutant dogs and Dead Boys manned a maze of machine-gun emplacements, turnstiles, and barbed-wire fences separating the Burbs from the city. Once he crossed out into the wilds beyond the CS, there could be no turning back. But turning back was the farthest thing from Jack Perrin's mind.

The war hero maneuvered his way through the barricades, trudging through the checkpoints and weapons detectors one by one. A small army of people were gathered at the customs

booths, asking for permission to enter Chi-Town. Jack was the only one who wanted to leave.

As he entered the Burbs and its squalid jungle of tarpaper shacks and cinder block houses, Perrin looked over his shoulder one last time. Maybe looking back wasn't the smartest thing to do, but he knew that he could never completely turn his back on such a large part of his life. Most of Jack's life had been spent in grey, ugly little places like Chi-Town. It was long past time for him to get a look at the rest of the world. Jack slowly turned his gaze away from Chi-Town and towards the horizon and the setting sun. He had a lot of catching up to do.

THE END



The Hammer of the Forge

By James M.G. Cannon

Chapter Ten Chase Music

"The S'hree Vek Confederacy is one of those anomalous alliances that pepper the Three Galaxies. Based in the S'hree Vek system in the axis of the Corkscrew Galaxy, they share no major allegiances with either of their closest neighbors, the Transgalactic Empire or our own Consortium of Civilized Worlds. The Confederacy is not allied with the Splugorth, the United Worlds of Warlock, or Naruni Enterprises. They are a small power, controlling only about ten systems of their own. Yet they can afford to remain independent, even with the Naruni breathing down their necks.

"In other words, it is best not to take the Confederacy lightly.

"The six major species that make up the Confederacy all hail from the S'hree Vek system, and it is there that their alliance was forged, tested, and proven. From that system they have spread out into the Three Galaxies at large, using their unique psi-drives to navigate the heavens and their motto of "free trade" to infiltrate nearly every market in the galaxies. While the Naruni watch them like hawks, the Confederacy specializes in slavery, biotechnology, and psi-tech, which means they rarely clash with the Naruni over customers or markets.

"But it means that the Consortium of Civilized Worlds and the S'hree Vek Confederacy are at odds, and will be until they realize all sentients have certain basic rights. So you need to be aware of the Confederacy's policies, culture, and military strength, which is quite impressive for such a 'small' power. While their warships don't have nearly the firepower of a Protector class ship or a TGE Doombringer, every S'hree Vek ship has a complement of Celestines on board.

"Your average Celestine can toe the line with your average Cosmo-Knight. And they come out of the S'hree Vek factories at an alarming rate."

— preface to a lecture by Captain Hiram Starling, Consortium Armed Forces Fleet Command Diplomacy Seminar

"Watch yourself, Caleb," Lothar told the young Cosmo-Knight, and it was the use of his given name that made Caleb pay attention rather than Lothar's tone. "Center may seem like a big deal to you. A mile high, six hundred million sentients call it home, and hundreds of ships leave and arrive every day. It makes Xerxes look like a deserted waystation. But never lose sight of the fact that at its heart, Center is rotten. The Prometheans who run the city bend their knees to the Transgalactic Empire and worse, like the Splugorth or inter-dimensional entities. All in the name of free trade, which includes slavery, blood sacrifice, and less savory practices."

Lothar sighed, adding, "You're about to enter the most wretched hive of scum and villainy in the Three Galaxies."

"You're trying to scare him," Doctor Abbot interrupted, jabbing at Lothar with his cane. "Caleb's a bright lad. He'll be fine."

Caleb thanked Abbot, but silently promised to follow Lothar's instructions. He was a stranger in the Three Galaxies, after all, still unused to the customs and cultures of this corner of the universe. Raised on the planet Earth in a galaxy far, far away from anything Lothar, Abbot, or their friend Kassiopaea Acherean found familiar, Caleb was still learning about his new home, the Three Galaxies. A crash course on the history of Phase World and the planet's capital city Center thanks to his friends and the ship's computer had given Caleb a working knowledge of the place he was about to visit. But one of the few things Caleb knew for sure anymore was the simple fact that working knowledge was no substitute for experience.

And Caleb's friends had plenty of experience, of that he was sure. Lothar's age was difficult to determine thanks to his wolfish features and penchant for remaining in his emerald green cosmo-armor at all times, but thanks to hints dropped by the others, Caleb guessed Lothar to be a few centuries old at least. Doctor Abbot was even more of an enigma. A humanoid composed entirely of shadows, his only distinguishing features were his orange eyes, and his affectation for the wardrobe of a nineteenth century British detective. Nothing hinted at age, but Abbot's tendency to lecture on diverse and arcane topics led Caleb to believe he was almost as old as Lothar.

That left Kassy. She didn't appear to be much older than Caleb's own eighteen years, but she was Atlantean. She was human in all the ways that mattered, but the magicks used by the Atlanteans eons ago, the very ones that destroyed their homeland and sent them on an interdimensional diaspora, had altered the Atlantean physiology enough to give them extended life spans and enhanced physical abilities. Further, Kassy was herself an Undead Slayer, a tattooed vampire hunter who had adventured from one end of the Three Galaxies to the other in the company of Lothar or Abbot.

Even though Caleb had almost single handedly defeated the Zodoran energy leech, an artificial construct that had decimated a dozen Consortium ships, he still felt wet behind the ears around his more experienced colleagues. He was further handicapped by his Earthly birth; sights and situations they took for granted surprised, delighted, or horrified him. At first his own cluelessness had not seemed like much of a problem, but when Kassy joined their small band, Caleb began to feel embarrassed about his lack of knowledge. He didn't want to look like a bumpkin in front of her.

So he took Lothar's warning to heart. Not that he would admit that to Lothar; he might respect the Wolfen a great deal, and even view him as a substitute for the father he had left behind on Earth, but his relationship with Lothar was at least as abrasive as the one he had at home. The last thing Caleb wanted Lothar to think was that he listened to him.

Lothar nodded perfunctorily at Abbot, but looked at Caleb to make sure his words at sunk in. "Got it," Caleb said at last, trying not to sound too petulant.

"Good," Lothar growled. "You'll be with me, but the Mother knows we could get separated and I want you to be aware of what we're heading into." He turned his attention to Doctor Abbot, leaning on his cane, and Kassy, who had her back to the airlock. "We're all aware of the stakes, aren't we? Elias Harkonnen has a two standard day lead on us. We need to find out why he came to Center, why he left, and most importantly, what Quajinn Huo's corpse has to do with his plans and whereabouts.

"Caleb and I will attempt to convince the Prometheans to help us. The two of you will check with your informants in the city. We meet back here in twenty-four standard hours."

"We've done this sort of thing before," Abbot said dryly, his orange eyes twinkling in his shadowy face. Lothar grunted.

Kassy took this as the order to disembark. She flicked the switch at her elbow and the airlock cycled open, letting in a blast of humid, sweet smelling air that tickled Caleb's nostrils. Kassy ran a hand through her dark hair and smiled at Caleb. "Have a good time," she said, and marched down the ramp. Abbot followed at a sedate pace.

Lothar nodded to Caleb. "This may be a good time to suit up," Lothar said. Caleb shook his head. Unlike Lothar, Caleb preferred to wear his cosmo-armor only in emergencies. He felt it erected a wall between himself and the outside world, and feared what he might become on other side of that wall. He was already more than human himself, fitting in quite nicely with this band of aliens. He could fly, shoot heat beams out of his eyes, shrug off attacks that could level cities, and survive in the vacuum of space without aid. He didn't need the armor reminding him that he wasn't a normal person anymore.

"After you," Caleb offered. "You know the way."

* * *

The Prometheans proved to be less than cooperative.

Lothar bullied his way through the Promethean command structure, using his legendary temper as a bargaining chip, and eventually earned them an escort to the station that allowed Elias Harkonnen to leave Center. The two Prometheans waiting for them there, Tor and Egis, had been on duty when Elias and his precious cargo went through.

Both Tor and Egis stood at least eight feet tall, with grayish-purple flesh that looked as hard as stone. Their round, hard, black eyes made them look more expressionless and unreadable, and Caleb wasn't sure if the Prometheans were trying to be as difficult as possible, or whether they were like that all the time. He had seen a few of their kind on Xerxes, but never had the chance to talk to one.

"You two were on duty two days ago when the Invincible Guardsman Elias Harkonnen left Center?" Lothar asked them.

Egis, at least the one Caleb thought was Egis, nodded. Tor stood passively at attention, a wicked looking halberd in his hand.

"Can you tell me anything about him?" Lothar pressed.

Egis rolled his shoulders in what Caleb took to be the Promethean equivalent of a shrug. "Harkonnen passed through this checkpoint on the way to his ship. His cargo was deemed unlikely to harm any of our satellites or space gates and he was allowed to leave unmolested."

"I see," Lothar rumbled. "What was his cargo?"

"I fail to see how that is any business of yours, Lothar of Motherhome," Egis said pointedly. "While Center is certainly not off limits to the Cosmic Forge, your jurisdiction here is tenuous at best. Elias Harkonnen committed no crimes during his stay here."

"Indeed," Lothar growled. His eyes flashed green within his wolf's head helm. Caleb could tell Lothar was losing his patience, a commodity the Wolfen never possessed in abundance.

"Be that as it may," Caleb interjected quickly, "Elias Harkonnen has performed criminal acts in several sectors of space and is wanted by the authorities. Any aid you give us that might lead to his apprehension could save lives."

Egis stared at him dispassionately.

Lothar put his hand on Caleb's shoulder by way of thanks; he looked less annoyed now, as if Caleb had given him a moment to master his emotions. "Gentlemen," Lothar said, "I realize that Center remains as profitable as it is due to Promethean neutrality. But please, be assured that Elias Harkonnen is a deserter and a criminal, not a political activist nor even an agent of the Transgalactic Empire. Helping us will not violate any oaths."

Egis still appeared unmoved, but Tor shifted uncomfortably from foot to foot, gripping his halberd so hard his knuckles paled. Lothar cocked his head at Tor. "Do you have something you'd like to say?"

Egis frowned at his companion, and Tor looked away from Lothar and Caleb, staring at some invisible point above them and to the side.

Lothar and Caleb exchanged looks. Caleb had seen enough episodes of Dragnet to see how this was going, and he guessed that Lothar knew what he was doing. "More than that," Lothar added, "he had in his possession the body of Quajinn Huo, a being who has been disavowed by every sentient in the Three Galaxies. You would betray no one by telling what you know of Harkonnen's plans."

Still nothing from Egis. Caleb wasn't sure, but it looked like Tor gave his companion, whom Caleb just realized was Tor's superior, a furtive look.

"Hey," Caleb jumped in, "you may not care if Elias takes out some humans or Wolfen, but I've seen Prometheans all over the galaxies. How would you feel if one of them dies at Harkonnen's hand, and you could have helped prevent it?"

Egis bristled, but before he could say anything, Tor slammed the butt of his halberd against the floor sharply. "By Zurvan, Egis, I can't stand still with my mouth closed any longer." Egis began to stand up, but Tor put a hand on his shoulder and pushed him down. Tor turned to Lothar and Caleb. "I've seen the accounts of Quajinn Huo's conquests, and heard from the mouths of men who had been there about his attack on Ogretopia. When I first realized Elias Harkonnen held the body of Quajinn Huo in his possession, I was afraid." Tor's features darkened at the memory.

"I was so afraid in fact that I made only a cursory examination of the body and the refrigeration unit in which it was stored. He appeared to be deceased, and indeed the computer told me so, but hours later I realized to my shame that it was entirely possible that Huo's death was a sham."

"What do you mean?" Lothar said, his eyes blazing again. Egis withdrew from Lothar's sudden anger, but Tor continued to speak, perhaps unaware of the Wolfen's ire.

"Huo's body was lifeless," Tor said. "But it could have been simply cryogenically frozen, his life signs terminated in order to bypass the strictures of the curse you and Koguk the shaman placed upon Huo, but in such a way that he could be revived."

"Which means," Lothar said darkly, "in all probability Harkonnen did just that once outside the borders of Center. And the two of you allowed one of the most dangerous beings in the Three Galaxies to go free."

"Now, see here," Egis began, but was cut off as Lothar slammed a fist against Egis' console, denting the steel frame.

"You will give me everything you have on their ship, their cargo, and probable destination," Lothar ordered, "or I will hold the two of you responsible for whatever evil Elias Harkonnen and Quajinn Huo unleash on the Three Galaxies." Egis and Tor both looked at him blankly for a moment as Lothar's words sank in, and then quickly bent to the task.

Caleb couldn't help but smile as the Prometheans scurried to do Lothar's bidding. It was nice to see someone else get the brunt of Lothar's temper. Lothar caught Caleb's expression and snorted.

* * *

"I'm really beginning to hate this place," Kassy told Abbot as they slogged through one of the worst neighborhoods of level five. "While the Knights are living it up with the masters of this city, we're dealing with all the lowlifes and scumbags." She stepped over an insectoid being twitching on the sidewalk, lying in a puddle of unidentifiable liquid.

Abbot went around the unconscious figure. "Now now, Kassy. You know Lothar isn't the most delicate negotiator to come out of Motherhome. You and I are best suited to this task. The minute someone like Squiddy sees a Cosmo-Knight coming, he'll be out the door and waddling away as fast as he can. You and I, however, are safely anonymous. We could be anyone."

Kassy snorted in amusement. "My tattoos announce to the world what I am, and you're the only Abbot in the Three Galaxies anyone has ever met. You're more recognizable than Lothar, in fact."

"Hmmm, perhaps," Abbot said. He was indeed unique in the Three Galaxies, a fact that had led to his profession as a fact finder and problem solver in an attempt to learn of his own shadowy origins. But in a place as vast as the Three Galaxies, one more mage of an unknown race was hardly worth knowing anything about. Abbot had his admirers and enemies, but he wasn't as well known as Kassy made him out to be. Not by far.

Especially here on Phase World, where anyone and anything could happen. Still, the "Squiddy" in question, a Monro information broker, might recognize Abbot, especially if Squiddy

had been dealing with Elias Harkonnen, as the last informant claimed under Kassy's insistent questioning. There were rumors that Anshurr himself, Splugorth High Lord, sometimes used Squiddy. If that were the case, the Monro might indeed be able to place Abbot's face. Or even Kassy's for that matter.

The Splugorth had no love for either of them, that was certain.

Abbot flirted with the idea of concealing their identities with a simple spell, but ultimately discarded it. Neither his nor Kassy's physiologies were conducive to transformative magic, and an illusion would take too much concentration to maintain. Abbot would keep it simple, and if that meant Squiddy recognizing them and making a run for it, he would deal with the situation.

"This is it," Kassy said abruptly, jolting Abbot out of his reverie. They stood outside a squat, four story structure, with dim windows and grime caked all over its surface. A dingy sign over the door proclaimed it to be "Squiddy's Curios" in Trade Four. But a sign on the door declared the building closed.

Kassy frowned. "He must have company in there, if he's closed this early in the morning."

"Out to lunch perhaps," Abbot suggested. He tried the door, and found the latch unlocked. "Or maybe not," he said. He pushed the door open and stepped into the dim interior, Kassy a step behind. As they passed the threshold, a chime rang overhead.

The inside of the curio shop was a maze of junk heaped haphazardly together, forming piles and piles of trash mixed together with items of actual value. Most of it appeared to be tech of one kind or another; trideo players, breathing masks, hydro-spanners, gravplates, translator pods, bionic limbs and organs, musical instruments. Clothing from a dozen worlds and twice as many species was jammed into the spaces, almost accidentally cushioning various items and just keeping them from scraping together and damaging them further. Little keepsakes and mementoes, small statues, keychains, medals, plaques, and the like were piled on top of everything else, some spilling onto the floor. Balls and other sports equipment, shattered bits of armor, and less identifiable scraps littered the floor. A mostly intact hyperdrive motivator loomed off in the distance, almost scraping against the ceiling.

"Go away," a voice boomed from the back. "We're closed."

Kassy and Abbot shared a glance. Kassy licked her lips.

They both knew the voice had not come from the Monro owner of the store. It was too deep, too dry, and too commanding. Monros simply didn't possess that kind of range.

Kassy touched an arcane blue-white symbol on her shoulder, and a glowing blue longbow coalesced in her hands, creating a cool glow around them. Abbot searched the recesses of his mind and selected a half-dozen spells that could be useful in the next few moments. Abbot gestured to the left with his cane, and then angled himself around the pile on the right as Kassy went left.

There was a moment of silence, and then a tremendous crash as something large and heavy smashed into one of the piles of garbage, creating an avalanche of curios, broken tech, and old clothes. Abbot angled himself so he could see the rear of the store, and made out a biped silhouetted against the light. He caught a glimpse of red and black armor and metal skin.

The figure took a step towards the front door, and Abbot could suddenly see him very clearly. The figure was large and broad shouldered, clad in the distinctive armor of an Invincible Guardsman. He had a neatly trimmed beard on his chin and a gold hoop through his lip. His exposed flesh, face and hands only, had the burnished look of freshly polished steel.

Twin arrows of blue fire flashed from the darkness and slammed into the Guardsman. He hardly seemed fazed, but turned towards his unseen attacker with a growl. Not for the first time Abbot appreciated his natural ability to blend in with darkness; while Kassy distracted the Guardsman, Abbot could summon a spell that would knock him flat.

Abbot's orange eyes flashed as he gestured with his cane, and the Guardsman was suddenly rooted to the spot, unable to move. No matter how hard he tugged, he could not lift a single foot free of the floor. While he twisted and cursed, two more fiery arrows slammed into him, and Abbot summoned up a special trick that would place the Guardsman in a state of suspended animation for a short while; the man tried to fight it as he felt the spell take hold, but Abbot channeled his will into the binding, and a moment later the man collapsed, crashing to the floor, his arms crossed against his chest, his eyes open and unseeing.

Kassy stepped around a mound, the bow in her hand and one fiery arrow knocked. "What did you do to him?"

"Nothing too drastic," Abbot said, joining her at the side of the Guardsman. "He'll regain consciousness in two weeks, feeling refreshed and relaxed. By then, of course, he'll be safely locked up where he can no longer harm anyone."

Something within the collapsed mound of garbage groaned wetly.

Kassy dispelled the bow and began to shift some of the detritus out of the way. Abbot knelt down beside her to help, and before long they uncovered the squat, barrel chested form of Squamato Kekkil Damathui, better known to the world at large as Squiddy. The Monro was in bad shape; two of his legs were bent at odd angles, his fleshy tentacles were flapping feebly, and blood stained his massive, toothy mouth. Squiddy blinked his single large red eye rapidly, trying to focus on his rescuers. "Get me a medcab," he wheezed.

"In a bit," Kassy said, folding her hands behind her back.

"Indeed," Abbot agreed. "It just seems too outrageous a coincidence that we have come here to discuss Elias Harkonnen, only to find an Invincible Guardsman treating you like a punching bag. Shall you enlighten us?"

The red eye swivelled back and forth from Kassy to Abbot. Squiddy coughed weakly.

"My guess is the Guardsman broke some ribs, maybe punctured some vital organs. Drowning in your own blood isn't a pretty way to go, Squiddy," Kassy said. Abbot eyed her speculatively; she wasn't usually this cruel.

"Fine," Squiddy wheezed. "Harkonnen hired Quajinn Huo to do a job for Thraxus. Something about a riot," he managed to get out between burbling coughs. "That's all I know, I swear."

Kassy couldn't hide her surprise at hearing the name of Thraxus. Nor could Abbot, but his shadowy features hid it better. Thraxus, one of the richest sentients in the Three Galaxies, made his home on Center but kept his fingers dipped in

many different pots throughout the Megaverse. He was rumored to be behind a dozen major wars, to have dealings with the Splugorth and the Transgalactic Empire, and to be a personal friend of Inglix the Mad. *As if Harkonnen and Huo aren't trouble enough*, Abbot thought.

"Riot? What riot? Where and when?" Kassy pressed.

Abbot heard sirens in the distance, growing louder with each second. Kassy cursed softly under her breath. Squiddy perked up; he could hear the sirens as well, and he knew what it meant. He would tell them no more.

Abbot pressed a hand against Squiddy's broad forehead and muttered a single syllable. Squiddy closed his huge eye, sent off to dreamland by Abbot's magic touch.

"Drat," Kassy said, standing. "We're not much better off than we were before."

"Let's hope Lothar and Caleb had more luck, then," Abbot said. "Kassy, what do you have behind your back?"

"This?" she said with a blush. She brought her hands out from behind her back and tossed Abbot her comm-unit; the volume was off, but the distress signal was beeping a healthy rhythm. "I didn't see any reason to let Squiddy know I was calling the meds. Nor could I just let him lie there bleeding to death."

"Of course not," Abbot agreed.

* * *

Aboard the S'hree Vek scout ship *Vigilance*, the mood was grim. The huge, crab-shaped craft, which looked like it was grown rather than built, was hiding within the rings of the gas giant Garouk-9. Blaster burns marred the red striped hull, badges of honor from a battle against a Consortium Warshield cruiser that had nearly crippled the *Vigilance* before it was able to escape. Now it hid among the asteroids and icesteroids that orbited Garouk-9, its crew trying to repair battle damage and hoping the radiation and debris from the planet's rings would shield them from their enemy's scans.

Celestine Joriel stood on the bridge, his crimson wings folded against his back, muscled arms crossed across his chest, eyeing the activity of his lessers with some disdain. The blocky, blue-skinned Haakon engineers were hard at work putting the ship back together while the thin-boned Tooranimoor ran diagnostic checks on all the ship's systems, running through scenarios in case the Warshield cruiser arrived for a second round.

Everyone on board could feel the agitation of the Commissar, Lor Koushak Dail, as she floated in her tank of virium in the center of the bridge. Her tail lashed back and forth, sending ripples through the fluid, and her lip tentacles quivered. All six of her eyes tracked the movements of her lessers on the bridge and those on the rest of the ship, visible on the dozen screens that floated around her tank. She should have swam back to her quarters through the ceiling duct, where she could meditate and regain her strength so they could psi-jump back to friendly space, but Commissar Koushak couldn't bring herself to leave her bridge while the ship was in such terrible shape.

Joriel suppressed a sneer. Commissar Koushak was a spoiled royal child given command too early, and her rashness would doom them all. It was too bad that there were only five

Celestines aboard besides Joriel himself; another wing could have turned the tide against the Consortium ship. Or at least towed the *Vigilance* to a better hiding place.

A Tooranimoor took a step towards the Commissar's tank, and Joriel sensed the telepathic connection between the two as the technician reported to his superior. Joriel's hawk-like vision could see the Tooranimoor's station, lit up like a fireworks display. The ship's sensors had detected something interesting out there in the field of tumbling ice and rock.

<Joriel> the Commissar's bass voice echoed in Joriel's mind. <Tech Jemmani has detected something strange just outside our doors. Take two of your people and investigate. It may be of some use to us.>

Joriel clicked his boots and bowed at the waist to his Adinum superior. He maintained a tight reign on his thoughts until he felt her withdraw from his mind, and then turned to go, his bright feathers flashing in the reflected light of the bridge's computers. He keyed his internal comm-unit and ordered Kael and Kariel to meet him at the hanger bay.

He found them waiting when he arrived, their blue-black armor gleaming, shoulder length maroon hair tied into warrior's braids. Kael was slightly taller than his sister, his feathers a darker red than hers, while she was both smarter and faster than her brother. Joriel had flown with them for most of their lives, and knew them to be smart, capable officers. Just the people he needed at his back while exploring some strange radiation out in the void.

"Three to exit," he told the ship's computer, and was rewarded with the grinding sound of the hanger bay doors opening. In a moment the force field would drop and the three Celestines would be sucked out into space, their natural element.

"Standard see-n-snatch," Joriel told Kael and Kariel. "We do a visual on this oddity, and drag it back if it looks useful. Keep your eyes open and your blazers hot." As soon as he was finished, the force field shut down, and the three of them automatically spread their wings and took flight, out of the ship and into the planet's rings. Their wings were actually useless in space, but they were linked to the Celestines' internal grav systems. *All part of the image*, Joriel thought with more than a little bitterness.

With another thought, his blazer sprang to life in his hand, a three foot long filament of blue-white fire that could carve through a ship's hull in seconds. Joriel doubted he would need it, but regulations were regulations. As his wingmates fell into formation around him, their own blazers sprang to life. Joriel unclipped his hand-held computer from his belt with his free hand, and keyed it to the ship's bridge sensors with his thumb. Using the link, he tracked the strange emanations to their source, ducking and weaving his way around and through the floating chunks of ice and rock that hovered around him.

The sensors brought him to a small asteroid, barely larger than a human, floating alone in the void. At first he couldn't see anything remarkable about it, but as he drew closer the illumination from his blazer cast a shadow on the rock. It looked roughly human shaped, but indistinct and difficult to discern details. He glanced back at his wingmates, and then gestured for them to take up flanking positions near the rock. The shadow's shape did not alter at all, despite the shift in light source.

Joriel drew up alongside the asteroid and reached out with his free hand to touch the shadow. He expected his hand to pass right through it, or brush up against cold rock, but instead he met the solid, warm resistance of a living body. Joriel grabbed the body and levered it to one side, flattening it against the surface of the asteroid. Sprawled on top of the asteroid, the figure took on entirely human dimensions, save for the fact that it remained shadowy and indistinct.

"Vigilance," Joriel said into his internal comm-unit, "your anomaly appears to be a humanoid, unlike any I've ever seen before. The body appears to be made of shadow, but it's solid enough to the touch. And it's alive. Unconscious and not respiring, but it's warmer than it should be floating out here."

There was silence from the ship for a moment, as the Commissar weighed Joriel's words.

<Bring it on board, Joriel,> the Commissar ordered. <We may be able to turn a profit on this venture yet.>

It was impossible to sigh in the vacuum of space, but Joriel did his best.

* * *

While they waited for Abbot and Kassy to return, Lothar pored over the datadisks Egis had reluctantly given them, while Caleb lounged in the co-pilot's chair and tried to think of some way to turn the Prometheans' meager knowledge to some advantage.

They had Harkonnen's ship's profile, manifest, crew information, and trajectory as it left Phase World. But Harkonnen's ultimate destination was still one giant question mark that even Lothar, with his centuries of experience, couldn't answer. Caleb doubted that his limited knowledge of the Three Galaxies would be of any use.

"Huo could be anywhere by now," Lothar growled for the seventh time. "Even considering for a moment that Harkonnen continued in a straight line after leaving Phase World, there are literally thousands of habitable worlds they could have reached." Lothar clenched his fists tightly, and he looked for a moment as if he might pound his console into dust, but instead sat back in his chair with a dejected look. "I hope Abbot had better luck."

"We'll know shortly," Caleb said, as his own console notified him that the airlock had cycled open. Lothar grunted an acknowledgment and the two Cosmo-Knights waited in silence for Kassy and Doctor Abbot to reach the bridge.

"The two of you don't look very enthusiastic," Abbot said, taking a seat behind Lothar. "Do I surmise a similar lack of success?"

"You didn't find anything?" Caleb groaned.

"Not much," Kassy told them. "Harkonnen is working for Thraxus, and his job has something to do with a riot. Sadly, that's all our contact could tell us because another Invincible Guardsman had already worked him over."

"Romulus' beard!" Lothar swore. "Thraxus? Are you certain?"

"I hate having to be redundant," Caleb interjected, "but who is Thraxus?"

"Some say he's the richest being in the Three Galaxies," Abbot supplied. "He's as old as Center, immortal and easily bored. He keeps himself amused by dabbling in galactic politics. What he's up to now is anyone's guess."

"Well, if we know he's involved, why don't we stroll over to his place and ask him some questions?" Caleb asked. Kassy paled, looking stricken, while Abbot sat back in his chair as if the wind had gone out of him.

Lothar gave Caleb a calculating look. "Out of the mouths of pups," he muttered.

"What?" Caleb asked. "What did I say?"

"Unfortunately, getting to Thraxus isn't as easy as it may sound, even for us," Lothar explained. "He maintains a heavily guarded sanctum on Center's highest level, and has his own private army. He has tangled with Cosmo-Knights in the past as well, and always escaped unscathed. If we turned our attentions to Thraxus, we would have to abandon our hunt for Harkonnen and Huo. The enormity of the task would demand it."

Caleb frowned. He had already had a taste of what passed for law and order in Center, and he was hardly surprised that known criminals could operate here with the blessings of the Prometheans. It still made him very angry, though, and not simply because it meant another dead end.

"Did you say 'Huo'?" Kassy asked.

"Indeed," Lothar growled. "We believe Harkonnen found a way around the curse Koguk and I placed on Huo, and was able to safely escort him off Phase World." Lothar jabbed a thumb at the datadisks he and Caleb had taken from Egis. "Harkonnen is flying a refitted Scimitar class patrol cruiser, and he's loaded it full of enough explosives to spark a minor war. His crew includes an Oni, a Relogian, a Kisent, and a Klikita. All armed to the teeth, and all presumably augmented with additional abilities. My guess is that the Klikita's cold manipulation abilities were the key to Huo's escape."

"This is very bad," Kassy said quietly. Lothar nodded emphatically.

"May I see those?" Abbot asked, gesturing towards the disks.

"Be my guest," Lothar answered, standing up to give the shadowy mage a chance to peruse the information on his own.

"We're still at square one," Caleb grumbled. "In fact, we're actually worse off than we were before. We know just enough to get us really worried, but not enough to do anything about it."

"Hold on," Kassy admonished. "Abbot is getting an idea."

The doctor looked up at the mention of his name, his orange eyes blinking. "I'm not certain that I am," he explained, "but I doubted a look at the information on my own would hurt." Abbot focused his attention on Lothar, adding, "You didn't mention this had Harkonnen's trajectory mapped out."

"It doesn't help," Lothar pointed out. "The Three Galaxies are simply too large."

"I wouldn't say that," Abbot disagreed. "Look, what do we know about Harkonnen?"

"He's smart and tough and ruthless," Caleb suggested helpfully. "And he's quit the only job in the universe he was cut out for."

"Yes," Abbot agreed. "He's also about as subtle as a supernova. He blew up his own secret base to get Lothar off his back, and used an entire century of Invincible Guards to decimate a small convoy of blockade runners."

"You're saying that his destination is on that straight line the datadisks predicted," Lothar said slowly, as if he didn't quite believe Abbot.

"Well, it's worth a shot," Abbot said. He hit a button on the console, and a list of system names scrolled past the screen, reflecting blue light up into Abbot's face and making him look more transparent than usual. "Here," he said, jabbing another button. Abbot's orange eyes flickered. "this one looks promising."

Lothar leaned over Abbot's shoulder. "The Dellian System." Lothar growled deep in his throat, a rumbling sound that made the hairs on the back of Caleb's neck stand up.

"Why do I have a bad feeling about this?" Caleb asked.

"The only inhabited planet in the Dellian System is the fourth from the sun," Kassy explained, "a world known simply as Dellian-4. But the humans of the CCW have another name for it: Malthus' World. It's the most overly populated planet in the Three Galaxies, overrun by the native sentients, a species who call themselves the T'Zee. It's a dirty, polluted, messy world, and the only place in the CCW where people can still starve to death. The Consortium has tried to fix things there for years, but the T'Zee like how their world is, and the CCW needs their nanotech too badly to press the issue."

"A few explosives in the right places," Lothar said in a dangerous voice, "could indeed start a riot. A riot that could escalate into a full scale war, pull CCW ships back from the Neutral Zone. It could give the TGE some breathing room, a chance to squash the rebellion or mount a serious offensive against the CCW. Maybe give the S'hree Vek Confederacy or the Splugorth a chance to get some punches in as well."

"Worst case scenarios, certainly," Abbot told Caleb. "And we've no way to be certain Dellian-4 is Harkonnen's target save for visiting the planet ourselves."

"Then why are we all suddenly so nervous?" Caleb asked.

The four adventurers stared at one another for a long moment. "I'll get the ship prepped for takeoff," Lothar told Abbot. "You call the Prometheans and let them know we'll be out of their hair as soon as possible. Kassy, you and Caleb get to work on a subspace communication to the Consortium; maybe we can alert Dellian-4 before Harkonnen lands."

Doctor Abbot, Kassiopaea Acherean and Caleb Vulcan stared at Lothar of Motherhome for a heartbeat, and then began to carry out their orders.

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