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THE RIFTER®

Your Guide to the Megaverse

Heroes Unlimited™

Nightbane®

Palladium Fantasy®

After the Bomb® sneak peak

Fiction, news and more ...

JOHNSON

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Some parents may find the violence, magic and supernatural elements of the games 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 16
Your guide to the Palladium Megaverse®!

First Printing – October, 2001

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Palladium Books® Presents:

THE RIFTER

BRANDT -97

#16

Sourcebook and guide to the Palladium Megaverse®

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Special Thanks to all our contributors, writers and artists. Our apologies to anybody who got accidentally left out or their name misspelled.

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Page 6 – Art Page

Freddie Williams from *Century Station*. Kevin said it just seemed appropriate. A superhero flying in the middle of a metropolis crackling with energy, radiate like a star.

Page 7 – From the Desk

of Kevin Siembieda

The boss man tells what he loves about New York City and why he and the boss lady will never abandon that vibrant metropolis. In fact, they will be in Manhattan eleven days before Christmas and invite everybody around to come and visit them at the *Compleat Strategist* on December 14 – 1:00 pm to 4:00 pm.

Page 8 – Palladium News

Boy, do we have *news* this issue. Have you heard there are *negotiations* to do a *Rifts*® Movie? No?! Well, read about it here!

Plus, Kevin and Maryann will be making a store appearance at the *Compleat Strategist* in New York City on December 14th, the *Rifts*® CCG is out, looks great, plays well and is selling like crazy, and other good stuff.

Late breaking news! Kevin and Maryann Siembieda will be making a store appearance the afternoon of November 17, 2001, at Galactic Greg's in Valparaiso, Indiana, and hope to see a whole bunch of folks that afternoon. Call (219) 464-0119 for more information.

Page 9 – Coming Attractions

Palladium Books is on a tear, releasing a ton of product this Fall and Winter. The *Rifts*® *Book of Magic*, *Rifts*® *Game Master Guide*, and *Final Siege*™ are already OUT and in the stores! If you can't find one, pester the heck out of your local store, because they have shipped and we have plenty more in stock.

By the time you read this, *After the Bomb*® RPG should be at the printers and hits store shelves the last week in November or the first week of December, 2001. Meanwhile, we are finishing up the *Rifts*® *Adventure Guide* even as you read this. And that's not all! Find out what else is in store for you on page 10 where you'll find Palladium's 2002 schedule – descriptions of upcoming books are found in the pages that follow.

Art by Scott Johnson, Tyler Walpole and Ramon Perez.

Page 17 Questions and Answers

This issue, Rodney Stott, Shawn Mellow and Kevin Siembieda address questions concerning a variety of "combat" issues for the *Rifts*® RPG, *Palladium Fantasy RPG*® and others. Includes a "Sequence of Combat" example. All really helpful material officially endorsed by Palladium Books.

Artwork by Ramon Perez, dice rollin' Scott Johnson and Apollo Okamura.

Page 22 – 2001 X-Mas Surprise

Package/Grab Bag

Yep, it's time to clear out the warehouse again ... um ... I mean it's time for Palladium Books' X-Mas Surprise Pack-

age/Grab Bag. All the details to order are found on page 22. If you like surprises and fun, check it out. Note that multiple orders *will* result in some duplication. Merry Christmas from Kevin, Maryann, Wayne and the entire Palladium Staff. Enjoy.

Page 23 – The Palladium Weapon Series is back

Due to popular demand (and endless begging from gamers), Palladium is bringing back the old *Palladium Books Weapon Series*. Get the lowdown here.

Page 24 – The Palladium Fantasy Role-Playing Game® Young, Dumb and Ugly

Mark Hall delves into the grim and grimy life, history and society of the ugly members of the Palladium Fantasy world: Orcs, Goblins and Hob-Goblins. Includes the (optional) *True Cobbler R.C.C.* (magic wielding Goblins).

Artwork is by Michael Wilson.

Page 28 – Heroes Unlimited™

Teen Heroes Unlimited™

Kurt Charbonnier presents optional rules and ideas for playing "teenage" superheroes and sidekicks. Includes random power tables, plus Age Modifiers, Power Control, Sidekick Training, and Special Abilities.

Illustrated by Tyler Walpole.

Page 33 – Ninjas & Superspies™

Hell: Frozen Over

Erik Growen gives us an adventure suitable for use with *Ninjas & Superspies* or *BTS* or *RECON*® (the latter will require some conversion).

In keeping with our October, scary-stuff theme, we present an adventure involving the horrors of war, an insane Undead Immortal, the supernatural and the Korean War. Includes Battlefield Horror Factor rules, Fighting in Sub-Zero Temperatures, Night Fighting, and a cool villain – Major Yung Ngo, whose name means "Eternal Hunger." Several adventure ideas, sub-plots, and adventure outline makes this a fun scenario set in the past.

Page 49 – Nightbane®

Dark Revelations

Jason Vey gives us a big 33 page Nightbane adventure setting and source material. It opens with a story that sets the stage and presents the angel-like Athanatos, another supernatural force in the dark world controlled by the Nightlords. These strange, winged creatures are more than human. Much more. But not all fight on the side of the angels and only complicate an already deadly setting. Jason weaves a tapestry of adventure and hope, darkness and treachery that is sure to tantalize the reader. Includes a dozen new races, notable characters and more.

Artwork by Wayne "I'm not afraid of the Dark" Breaux.

Page 82 – Rifts®

“Official” HLS adventures for

Coalition Wars: Final Siege

Bill Coffin wrote these *Hook, Line and Sinker*™ adventures for **Final Siege** (on Tolkeen). Space constraints forced us to cut them from the **Final Siege** book, but here they are for your gaming enjoyment. And if you are a **Rifts**® fan and have not seen the *Rifts*® *Coalition Wars: Siege on Tolkeen series* – shame on you. It’s the stuff of epic adventure! Run down to your local gaming store and check it out right now! Believe us, you won’t be sorry.

Art by Tyler Walpole, Michael Wilson and Wayne Breaux (in that order).

Page 91 – Rifts® Phase World®

Hammer of the Forge

The 16th chapter in James M.G. Cannon’s gripping *Phase World*™ story.

Artwork by Apollo “the man, not the god” Okamura.

Page 97 — One Chance in a Million

Part two (of three) of this intriguing story of a mage stuck in Chi-town.

Page 110 – After the Bomb® RPG

“Sneak Preview”

Another tantalizing excerpt from Erick Wujcik’s hotly anticipated role-playing game of mutants and post apocalyptic survival. This time we get a look at the *Spider-Goat Mutant*. The **After the Bomb**® **Role-Playing Game** will hit the store shelves sometime around Thanksgiving of 2001. If you liked the old *Ninja Turtles*® RPG and the old *After the Bomb*® sourcebooks, you will LOVE this new incarnation of the sf world of *After the Bomb*®.

The theme for issue 16

As we do with every October issue of **The Rifter**®, we tried to make the underlying theme of this issues one of horror, darkness and mystery. We hope it meets with your approval.

And for all you horror and supernatural fans, *Beyond the Supernatural*,™ *Revised Second Edition* WILL be released in 2002. Should we wait till October of next year or get it out this Summer?

The Cover

Scott Johnson whipped up this little treat inspired by **Nightbane**®. It depicts a Hunter, one of the Nightlords’ many foul minions.

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, homespun adventures and material mostly created by fellow gamers and fans like you, the reader. Things one can *elect* to include in one’s own campaign or simply enjoy reading about. They are not “official” to the main games or world settings.

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 ideas and concepts that the reader can use (if you want to), or which might inspire you to create your own wonders.

Coming Next Issue

The Rifter™ #17

- **The last part of the *One Chance in a Million* Rifts® story.**
- ***Aliens Unlimited*™ Thropo short story by Wayne Breaux Jr.**
- **Material for *Nightbane*®.**
- **More material for *Rifts*®.**
- **The next chapter of the *Hammer of the Forge*™.**
- **With any luck, a sneak preview of *Mechanoids*® *Space or Void Runners*™.**
- **The latest news and developments at Palladium.**
- **Source material for the entire *Palladium Megaverse*®.**
- **New contributors and fun.**

www.palladiumbooks.com — Palladium On-Line

November store appearance in Valparaiso, Indiana

Just finalized. *Kevin* and *Maryann Siembieda* will make a store appearance the afternoon of **November 17, 2001**, at **Ga-lactic Greg’s** in Valparaiso, Indiana. This is only *Kevin* and *Maryann Siembieda*’s second appearance anywhere (the *Compleat Strategist* will be their third and final one for the year). These two are just too busy to make a lot of personal appearances, so take advantage of this opportunity. We’re sure they will bring posters and maybe a cool door-prize or three to be given away to some lucky fan. These two will talk for hours if you let ‘em and they’ll sign a zillion books (a signed this or that makes a nice X-Mas present for your gaming buddies). So saddle up and come on down! **For more information call: (219)464-0119.** Ho, Ho, Ho.

**Palladium Books® role-playing
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only by your imagination™**

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From the Desk of Kevin Siembieda

I think I fell in love with New York City before I ever visited.

After all, it was the center of the comic book industry (at least back in the Sixties and Seventies when I was a kid struggling to become a comic book artist). That made it special all by itself.

My first visit in 1975 put me in wonderland. I was an impoverished college student staying at the YMCA for two weeks. Being broke forced me to find all the free and inexpensive things to do. It also made me around and really learn the city. It was love at first sight.

I went back in 1980 (or was it '81) with my buddy Bill. We arrived during the transit strike and had to walk everywhere for two weeks. Miles and miles. I was still a pauper and had to scrape together every penny. We got soaked in a downpour and both nearly caught pneumonia (really). And it was grand.

Some years later, I could hardly wait to introduce "my" New York to my wife, Maryann. And she fell in love with the place too – just as I knew she would. Since then, we try to visit our favorite city in the world at least once or twice a year. It's not exactly our home away from home (although it feels that way), it is more like our favorite playground. A getaway to soak in people, fun and the theater (we LOVE Broadway).

You see, the Big Apple has an energy and atmosphere unlike anywhere else in the world. Some people complain it is too expensive. Kinda. You can spend a lot of money in Manhattan, but you can also scrimp by on a budget (thankfully, we don't have to do that any more). You see, two or three doors down from that five star, hundred and fifty dollar a plate restaurant is a swell little diner or Chinese place, or a deli, or Ray's Pizza, all where you can get a scrumptious dinner for 10 or 12 bucks. Oh, and Ray's Pizza ... a giant slice of heaven for under five dollars. Then there's the *Carnegie Deli*. Oh baby, mountains o' food and the best corn beef hash and blintzes on the planet. No kidding. That's one of the cool things about New York, it is so big and so squished together that EVERYTHING is at your fingertips or down the street.

Some folks complain that Manhattan is too big, too crowded, too noisy, and too dirty. Not for us. Granted Maryann and I like city-life, so we love that concrete jungle. The towering buildings, the stores of every conceivable variety, and the throngs of people from around the world. The blare of the car horn is like a jungle bird calling out in the distance. The low thrum of voices and automobile engines, the laughter and life is vibrant. Oh man, is New York alive. And alive with people of every stripe. Walking down a single city block you will hear Yiddish, French, Italian, German, English (American and British accents), Korean, Chinese, Russian, Jamaican, Indian and probably a dozen more. If you want to see, hear and feel "America the melting pot," go to New York City.

As for being dirty – you try cramming together 9 million people, hundreds of thousands of tourists and streets swollen with automobiles every day and not get a little grimy. Actually, Manhattan does a great job keeping the streets clean. I've been

to cities where the streets are filthy with litter and the Big Apple ain't one of them. As for the crowds. Wow. Energy. Human energy. The good, the bad and the ugly – the locals and the tourists. It's beautiful. Like being part of a thriving bee-hive pulsing with life in all its splendor (along with a few warts).

As for things to do, places to see, man oh, man there is EVERYTHING! Soho, the Village, China Town, Little Italy, Central Park, Rockefeller Center, the Avenue, hundreds of art galleries, a zillion stores, shops and places to eat, and visit, not to mention some of the most amazing museums you'll ever have the pleasure to set foot in and other cool places.

And then there is the theater. In my humble opinion, you have not seen live theater until you have seen a play or musical on *Broadway*. Grand old buildings, perfect acoustics, name actors and wonderful performers you probably never head of (but who are among the best of the best). And a selection of shows to beat any place in the world. We love it and see a show almost every night that we are in town. Here again, there is an effort to make things (a little bit more) affordable with an organization like **TKTS**. Sure you have to wait in line for an hour or hour and a half, but you can buy Broadway and Off-Broadway tickets for half-price, get great seats (generally) and have a good selection of shows available to see.

Then there is the people. New Yorkers often get a bum rap that Maryann and I have never understood, 'cuz most of the New Yorkers we have met have always been generous and helpful. In fact, our worst experiences with rude and obnoxious people have been with tourists, often fellow Americans from out of state. One of the greatest compliments we ever got was having a pair of NYPD officers mistake us for "local" New Yorkers trying to help a yokel from out of town.

Consequently, we were not surprised at all when the people of New York pulled together in the face of tragedy and terrorism. These are the people we have always known. Maybe some of them are a bit gruff or impatient on the outside, but that doesn't mean they don't have a heart of gold beating in their breast.

We love and know New York well, so we were devastated by the loss on September 11, 2001. We knew that area. We had walked those streets many times. Had many a great experience and taken it all for granted. Suddenly a part of our world, our adopted city, was taken away from us in a most unexpected and horrible way. It tore at our guts and broke our hearts.

We were lucky. Our many New York friends were safe, although all have been scarred by that day.

A number of people have expressed surprise that Maryann and I have not cancelled our planned trip to visit Manhattan in December. Our travel agent tells us that the city has gone down from 100% occupancy of its hotels to 45% due to the multitude of tourists canceling their reservations. It makes us sad because the terrorists can call up another victory. Fear is keeping people away from someplace wonderful. Not only is it hurting Manhattan business and the people who live there, but frightened tourists don't know what they are missing.

Yes, we are most definitely going to Manhattan in December! We promised our pal Danny Kilbert at the *Compleat Strategist* that we would do a store signing and visit for the afternoon. We have tickets to see *The Producers* (albeit Mezzanine seating). And nothing and nobody is going to scare us away from New York.

Maybe we don't have the right to really say this since we are not residents, but we feel like New York is *our* city. And nobody is taking *our* city away from us. NOBODY! We'll be there and we hope others will too. We hope a bunch of local Palladium fans will come to see us the Compleat Strategist on Friday afternoon, December 14, and we hope the rest of you do NOT

let *fear* change your lives for the worse. Experience life. Share your joy. Do not live in terror.

I hope I haven't rambled too much. I hope I haven't preached. I just needed to get this out of my system and happen to have a forum in **The Rifter®** to do it in. Thanks for listening.

Now enjoy the rest of this issue.

Take advantage of our Annual Christmas Surprise Package.

Go out and live (or stay home and play lots of our games). Enjoy life and your loved ones. Have a happy holiday season and take care – of yourself and those you care about.

– Kevin & Maryann Siembieda, October 2001

News

By Kevin Siembieda (the guy who should know)

Rifts® movie buzz

The rumors are true. Palladium Books has been talking to Hollywood about a **Rifts® Movie**.

Maryann broke the news on-line during her monthly evening chat. We've been wheeling and dealing so long without telling *anybody*, that when a fan said something like, "Palladium should look into doing a Rifts movie," we couldn't hold it in any more!

Now, don't get too excited.

There is NO movie deal yet. And there may *never* be one.

Here's the low-down.

A while back, Palladium Books was contacted out of the blue by **Jerry Bruckheimer Productions**. It seems **Rifts®** somehow caught Mr. Bruckheimer's attention thanks to a **Rifts®** fan, and he fell in love with the concept of **Rifts®** and some of the key characters (O.C.C.s). So he is *very interested* in producing a motion picture based on **Rifts®** and we have been "talking" ever since.

Now if only that meant a movie, we'd be all set, but it doesn't. Ironically, while Mr. Bruckheimer would like to see a **Rifts®** movie and we would love to see a **Rifts®** movie, it's not that simple. There are a lot of control and business issues that need to get hashed out. Stumbling blocks that we may *not* be able to overcome. The good Bruckheimer people seem to think we can work things out, but we are not so sure. Still, the talks have been going on and on for months and months now, so who knows what the future may hold. With any luck we *will* be able to work around the current obstacles. If not, it just means we were not meant to do a movie (yet). We're supposed to get a new proposal any day now, so keep your fingers crossed and wish us luck.

We will definitely keep our readers posted if a film agreement is reached, but Hollywood bureaucracy moves very slowly, so negotiations may continue for months or even years.

Jerry Bruckheimer has produced *Pearl Harbor*, released just this past May, and such blockbuster action movies as *Gone in Sixty Seconds*, *Con Air* (one of my all-time faves), *Armageddon*, *The Rock*, *Top Gun*, and a whole lot more.

Surge Comic Properties is Palladium's New York City agent handling the negotiations (and all licensing concerning **Rifts®**). **Mark Freedman** brought Surge into prominence with his astute marketing of the **Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles®** (movies, TV shows, toys, etc.). Meanwhile, Maryann and I are closely involved in the negotiations every step of the way.

Fan Note: Please do NOT send Palladium Books any movie scripts or film suggestions, as such matters will be left in the capable hands of the film producer. Besides, we do NOT have a film deal yet! We are still engaged in negotiations that could fall through. Thanks.

Other Rifts® "licensed" products

Palladium contracted with **Surge** before any movie opportunity came into the picture. Our goal, then and now, is to expand **Rifts®** beyond role-playing and into the mass market. But slowly and carefully. Finding only licensees who know and understand **Rifts®** and who will strive to faithfully capture the RPG world and produce quality, fun products.

To that end we are looking for licensees to do action figures, toys, electronic games, computer games, miniatures, model kits, comic books, novels, and a host of other possibilities. In fact, Palladium was just recently approached by a company "interested" in doing a **Rifts®** on-line role-playing game and we wait for their proposal.

The good folks at Precedence became Palladium's first big licensee because it was clear the chief game designers knew and loved **Rifts®**, and everybody involved wanted to do a great looking and fun playing product. Precedence's **Rifts® Collectable Card Game** hit the store shelves mid-September, and we are told by everybody it is selling "great." Two expansion sets of booster cards are already in the works.

As always, quality and fun are among our top concerns. We refuse to sign a second-rate license just to make a quick buck. We're in it for the long-haul and plan to do it right. Fun and quality will always remain important to Palladium and Surge. Maintaining the integrity of the **Rifts®** RPG world is also critical.

Mass market endeavors aside, Palladium's role-players have nothing to fear. Neither Maryann or I have any desire to be corporate moguls (as fun as that might be). We want to do what we enjoy most and live comfortably doing it. That means you can count on me writing and designing role-playing games, new worlds of adventure and sourcebooks until my fingers curl up and fall off!! Role-playing is what we love and that is exactly what we plan to keep doing. We just wouldn't mind a movie or two, toys, comic books, electronic games and other fun stuff being part of our private little Megaverse.

Check out the Coming Attractions section to see what's in store for the rest of the year and what is planned for 2002.

Meet Kevin & Maryann Siembieda in New York – December 14, 2001

Maryann & I will talk with fans and sign autographs for a few hours Friday afternoon, at the **Compleat Strategist, 11 East 33rd Street – Friday, December 14, 2001, from about 1:00pm-5:00pm.**

That's right. There ain't no Terrorist anywhere who is going to scare *us* way from our favorite city in the whole wide world. Nobody!

And we'd better see a whole bunch of *you folks* coming down to visit and chat with us!!

Contact the Compleat Strat for the exact time and day (the date *might* be changed, although we doubt it):

The Compleat Strategist – (212) 685-3880

11 East 33rd Str.

New York, NY 10016

We are planning to do a handful of store appearances in 2002, including the nice people at *Galactic Greg's* in Valparaiso, Indiana and *The Underground*, in Ann Arbor, Michigan. We'll keep you posted on dates and times.

Rifts® Collectable Card Game is *hot*

After what seemed to be countless delays, the **Rifts® CCG** is out, in stores and selling like crazy! We are told that the deck and first booster set will probably go into reprint before the end of the year! Get 'em while you can.

I can tell you that the cards look great (okay, there are a few clunkers but most look awesome), the print quality is fantastic and I have been told by CCG gamers that the game is easy to learn and play *is* quick and fun.

Meanwhile, work has begun on the second (out early 2002) and third (Spring 2002) booster sets! I know because I'm already busy approving concept sketches.

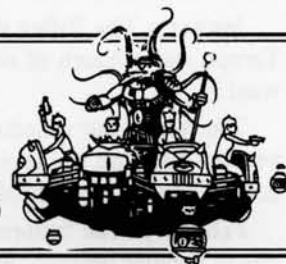
Basic Deck \$11.95 – Booster packs \$2.99 each, \$72.00 for an entire box.

The **Rifts® CCG** is designed, published and distributed by *Precedence Entertainment*.

Dragon Con Update

Dragon Con was a blast. We got to meet a couple hundred Palladium fans, speak on several panels, meet old friends, make a few new ones (like our "stalker" – actually a good guy who came to all our talks and whom we had fun with, but we forget his name). We also got to hang with Kevin and Mike from *Precedence* (talked till three in the morning one night), and had a good time all around. Hope those of you who attended had as nice a time as we did.

Coming Attractions



By Kevin Siembieda (the guy who should know)

Coming this year, 2001

Palladium may have started the year off slow but we are ending it with a bang. Just look at all the stuff we have coming. Most of it is already at the printers.

Now! Coalition Wars Six: Final Siege hit stores the beginning of September and is a smash hit. A lot of people were surprised by the outcome and look forward to the **Aftermath** book scheduled to come out in December or January – as soon as I can get to it).

Now! Rifts® Collectable Card Game – it's out at last, looks good, plays well and is waiting for you in stores everywhere.

October: Rifts® Game Master Guide – the first of a handful of "master" G.M. and player reference and guide books. This 352 page monster is packed with useful data from across the Megaverse. *In stores NOW! Shipped first week of October, 2001.*

October: Rifts® Book of Magic – the second "master" sourcebook and reference guide with every bit of magic we could find and cram into it.

In stores NOW! Shipped the same day as The Rifter® 16. So if you are reading this, it's out there!!!

October: The Rifter® 16 – but then, you know that, don't you?

November: After the Bomb Role-Playing Game. You gotta take a look at this one. It's awesome!

December: Rifts® Adventure Guide – our third "master" sourcebook and reference guide with all kinds of information, tips and stuff for running and playing **Rifts®** adventures.

December: Land of the Damned: The Northern Mountains – for *Palladium Fantasy*. 224 pages of action, mystery, magic and demons. Yeah, I thought you'd like that.

December (maybe): (The Tolkeen/Minnesota) Aftermath – what happens after Tolkeen falls. What else has been going on in the world? What will become of the Tolkeen refugees, freedom fighters and Cyber-Knights? Find out. **Note:** This book will probably slip into a January 2002 release, because I have to

coordinate, edit and work on all those other books (and it is a truckload of work).

Coming 2002

January: (The Tolkeen/Minnesota) Aftermath – Tolkeen and the world after the Final Siege. Like I said, I'm shooting for December but January, 2002 is a more likely month of release. I have some cool ideas and a few surprises.

January: The Rifter #17 – Wayne Breaux short story on the Thropo and a bunch of other good stuff. Get it, you know you want it.

The rest of our schedule is not fleshed out with exact dates yet, but here are the projects currently under development for 2002. Listed in no particular order.

February: The "return" of the Palladium Weapon Series – due to popular demand, Palladium will be reprinting these little, 48 page, comic book-sized gems starting with **Weapons & Armor** and followed by **Weapons and Castles**. New color covers. Suitable for use with any game system.

What else is coming? A ton of cool stuff, and not just for Rifts®. Here are books on the schedule, many of which are being worked on right now. We will probably add a few more.

Rifts® Phase World® Dimension Book: The Anvil Galaxy™
Rifts® Australia II & III (yeah, finally)

Rifts® Africa Two

Rifts® Phase World®: Cosmo-Knights™

Palladium Fantasy RPG® Adventures in the Northern Wilderness™, 2nd Edition

Palladium Fantasy RPG®: Land of the Damned 2: Eternal Torment™

Palladium Fantasy RPG®: Land of the Damned 3: The Bleakness™

Palladium Fantasy RPG®: Mysteries of Magic™

Palladium Fantasy RPG®: Wolfen War™ (with a little luck)

Heroes Unlimited™: Hardware Unlimited™

Heroes Unlimited™: Mutant Underground™

Heroes Unlimited™: The City of Cascade™

Heroes Unlimited™: The Aorian Empire™

New After the Bomb® sourcebooks

The Palladium Weapons Series (returns due to popular demand).

Plus these new games ...

Beyond the Supernatural™ RPG, 2nd Edition (I promise)

Mechanoid Space RPG® (a new epic series)

Void Runners™ RPG (something different)

The Northern Hinterlands™ For The Palladium Fantasy RPG®

A 192 page fantasy sourcebook that came out this summer and which shouldn't be missed. Packed with information about the western settlements of the Great Northern Wilderness, Ophid's Grasslands, and other remote regions at the doorstep of the mountains that wall off the Land of the Damned.

- 16 new monsters.
- 19 ancient magic artifacts, like Fire Ice, Magebane, Ring of Ice and Fury, Soulstone of Arendrun, the Immortalisman, the Withering Stone and others.
- Over a dozen new magic spells.
- The Wild Lords — gods who helped to defeat the dreaded Old Ones, but who are almost forgotten today.
- Eight Optional O.C.C.s including the Barbarian Warrior and Keeper.
- Kiridin, land of barbarians and home to the realm of Eternal Autumn.
- The 13 colonies of the Shadow Coast and the Shadow Rebellion.
- Cold Rules and the Long Winter.
- Information about the Vault of Destiny and Palladium of Desires!
- Key people and places.
- Maps, history and tons of adventure ideas.
- Art by Breaux, Wilson and Burles. Cover by Mike Sutfin.
- Written by Kevin Siembieda and Bill Coffin.
- \$20.95 — 224 pages. In stores now.



Adventures in the Northern Wilderness, 2nd Edition Ships Early 2002

Adventures in the Northern Wilderness and Further Adventures in the Northern Wilderness "combined" into one big sourcebook with additional notes, tables, maps and information.

- Information on *Shadow Fall*, the Wolfen capital.
- The 12 Wolfen tribes (updated). \$20.95 – 190+ pages.
- Expanded encounter table — offering 101 Adventures.
- Hook, Line & Sinker™ adventures.
- More history and background.
- The Northern Elfland, the ancient "Golden City."
- Art by Burles, Wilson, Breaux, Johnson and others.
- Maps, adventure ideas and hints about the Wolfen War.
- Written by Bill Coffin, Kevin Siembieda and others.



The Land of the Damned™

The **Land of the Damned** is too large to cover in one book, so it will be presented as a series of three, big, 224 page, "stand-alone" books that will explore and describe the various unexplored regions of this forbidding land. It will also reveal the strange creatures and beings who dominate the land, many extinct elsewhere in the world, as well as the dark powers that rule.

Land of the Damned #1: The Northern Mountains — ships December

- Key people and places.
- Exotic new O.C.C.s, monsters, adventure and more.
- Ancient magic and dark secrets.
- Over 20 new monsters and races (some leftover from the Age of Chaos).
- Over a dozen new demons.
- Campaign hooks and Hook, Line and Sinker adventures.
- Maps and adventure ideas.
- Art by Burles, Wilson, Breaux, Johnson and others.
- Written by Bill Coffin.
- \$20.95 –224 pages.

Land of the Damned #2: Eternal Torment — Early 2002

- A land of the undead and villainy.
- The enchanted forest known as the Darkest Heart.
- New types of undead and werebeasts.

- Dark magic.
- Campaign hooks and Hook, Line and Sinker adventures.
- Maps and more adventure ideas.
- Art by Burles, Wilson, Breaux, Johnson and others.
- Written by Bill Coffin.
- \$20.95 –224 pages. Probably ships in early 2002.

Land of the Damned #3: The Bleakness — Spring or Summer 2002

- Ancient Minotaur races and empires.
- Key people, monsters, and more.
- The Citadel — Fortress of pure chaos magic.
- Maps, adventure ideas and more.
- Art by Burles, Wilson, Breaux, Johnson and others.
- Maps galore.
- Written by Bill Coffin.
- \$20.95 –224 pages. Probably an early 2002 release.

Guide to the Galaxy For Heroes Unlimited™

— Available now

The **Guide to the Galaxy™** for *Heroes Unlimited™* shipped to stores the end of May, but I think a lot of people missed it, so I'm mentioning it again. Wayne Breaux Jr. outdid himself. It is an excellent companion to **Aliens Unlimited™** and can be used as a space campaign setting or as a sourcebook for **Heroes Unlimited™**. The monstrous Riathenor and other aliens and technology make for ideal villains for Earth-based or other-worldly campaigns. Meanwhile the many alien worlds present unique locations to spirit Earthlings away to on a cosmic adventures. Includes the long awaited rules for space travel, space combat and building spaceships.

- Spaceship construction rules.
- Space travel and combat rules.
- New skills and skill programs.
- New alien races, monsters and menaces.
- More information on the Riathenor.
- More on the Atorian Empire and the TMC.
- Galactic time-line and overview of the galaxy.
- Key people, places and adventure ideas.
- Art by Breaux, Wilson, Burles, and Williams. Cover by Breaux.
- Written by Wayne Breaux Jr.
- Adaptable to *Rifts®*, *Skryppers™* and *Phase World®*.
- \$20.95 — 224 pages.

Free 42 Page Catalog

All you gotta do to get one is ask! Call, e-mail or send us a letter with your name and address asking for Palladium's latest 42 page catalog and we will send it right out, absolutely free.



New Rifts® Sourcebooks

Coalition Wars™ 6: Final Siege

– Available NOW

This is it. The grand finale! One side wins, one loses. This book has it all.

- The City of Tolkeen mapped and described.
- Tolkeen's King, Circle of 12 and Warlords described in detail.
- Tolkeen's newest demonic allies and monsters.
- Tolkeen's secret weapons!
- The City of Freehold — home of the Dragon Kings.
- The final Siege — who wins, who loses, who survives.

- The Aftermath, and loads of adventure and adventure ideas.
- What is the fate of the refugees?
- What happens to the Cyber-Knights?
- How is the region changed?
- Art by Perez, Breaux, Wilson, and others. Wrap-Around cover by Zeleznik.
- Written by Kevin Siembieda and Bill Coffin.
- \$20.95 — Available now.



Rifts® Game Master Guide

– Available NOW!

This is the biggest and arguably most vital sourcebook for **Rifts®** since the rule book came out. This massive 352 page compendium of information contains almost everything one needs to play on Rifts Earth (besides the rule book, of course).

A comprehensive index of O.C.C.s., R.C.C.s and monsters. ALL the skills in one place (many with new, clear descriptions). Clarifications on Supernatural Strength and hand to hand combat, as well as rules clarifications and Kevin's Quick and Dirty rules for "ranged combat." Not only that, but the majority of weapons, body armor, power armor, robots and vehicles are all collected and statted out in one book (some are condensed stats with only "key" data). Plus, designer notes and playing tips from Siembieda, G.M. advice from Coffin, and a ton of new (along with old) artwork and a great cover by Dave Dorman. Heck, working on this book made us want to sit down and play some **Rifts®** adventures!

The book is in what we have started to call the "master" sourcebook series for **Rifts®**. Big, information-packed monstrosities designed to make **Rifts®** fans happy and game playing faster and easier. A giant comprehensive collection of vital data and lists of skills, magic spells, psionic powers, O.C.C.s, R.C.C.s, weapons, vehicles, and more. Plus, frequent reference to specific books and pages where one can find detailed information about a particular character class, monster, power, or piece of equipment. The only thing missing is magic, and that's because it gets its own 352 page "master" sourcebook. We put our hearts and souls into this one and it is good.

A must for *EVERY Game Master*, suitable for *player* reference too.

- Rules clarifications and designer notes by Kevin Siembieda.
- A complete *skill* list and descriptions (many rewritten to be clearer).
- A complete list and description of *psionics*.
- Attributes beyond 30.
- Hand to hand combat skill charts and tables.
- Questions and answers.
- The "last word" on penalties for blind and dodging bullets and energy blasts.

- Stats for a ton of weapons and body armor on Rifts Earth.
- Capsulated stats for most robots and power armor.
- Capsulated stats for most every vehicle from hovercycles to tanks and aircraft.
- Twenty-four pages of Experience Tables (every damn character we could find).
- *Character index* of most every O.C.C., R.C.C. and Monster on Rifts Earth.
- Playing and G.M. tips and hints for running campaigns.
- Charts, lists, tables and reference material galore.
- Scattered skill descriptions all put into one, easy to find place.
- 100 different adventure ideas in the world of Rifts®.
- Mini-Rifts® Atlas (20 pages of maps from other books).
- New artwork by Perez, Breaux, Wilson, and others. Cover by Dorman.
- Compiled by Bill Coffin. Additional material by Coffin and Siembieda.
- \$24.95 – 352 pages. In stores everywhere!!



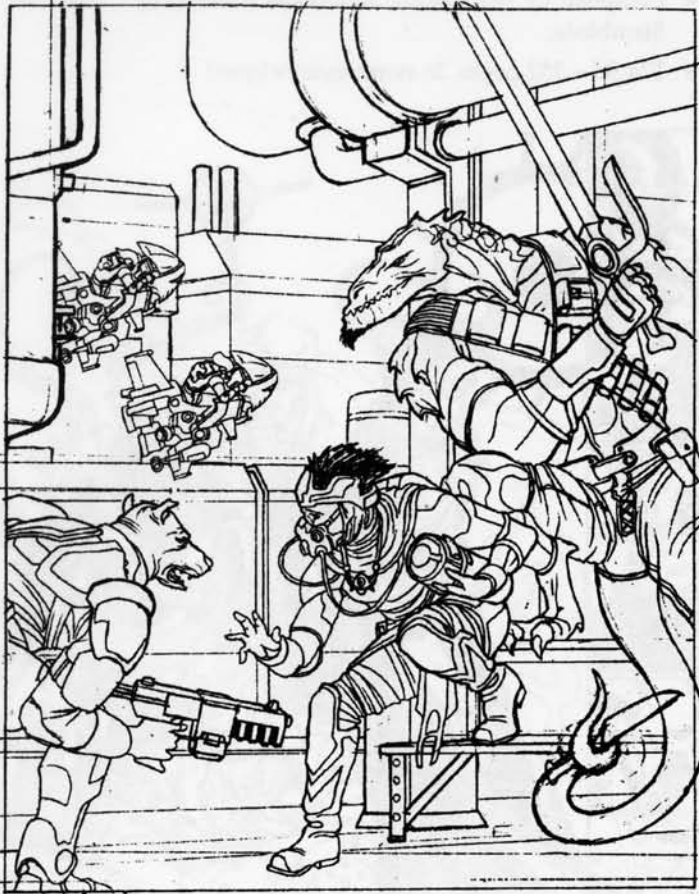
Rifts® Book of Magic

– Available NOW!

A huge 352 page book that collects into one big book every spell, magic item and scrap of information about magic on Rifts

Earth fans have been begging for. It collects all the myriad types of magic, hundreds of spells, Techno-Wizard weapons, Rune weapons, magic vehicles, and other magic items. Plus clarifications and details on the various magic characters and rules.

- Over 600 magic spells in one book!
- All Ley Line Walker and Wizard Invocations
- All Techno-Wizard weapons, vehicles and items.
- Rune weapons and other magic items.
- Magical herbs, wands, staves, and mystical trees.
- Shamanistic Magic, fetishes and weapons.
- Nazca Line Magic, Biomancy, and Blue Flame Magic.
- Bio-Wizardry, Stone Magic, Tattoo Magic, Ocean Magic, and more.
- Rules clarifications, explanations and updates.
- Game Master tips and vital data.
- \$24.95 – 352 pages. In stores everywhere!



Rifts® Adventure Guide

– In stores early December, 2001

Another “master” sourcebook for Game Masters and players alike. This book focuses on creating, running and playing Rifts® adventures. Offering tips and advice on how to make and play characters. How to build and run an adventure and parlay it into a campaign, and a bunch of other useful information, tables and fun stuff. On schedule to be in stores the second week of December.

- Suggestions for building a fun and memorable character.
- Numerous tables for randomly rolling up people and organizations.
- Tables for random and quick creation of places and adventures.
- Quick roll villains – stats for the average NPC villain by O.C.C.
- Optional rules and background tables.
- Game Master and player advice.
- More on Rifts Earth.
- Adventure ideas and more.
- Art by Ramon Perez, Scott Johnson, Freddie Williams and others.
- Cover by John Zeleznik.
- By Bill Coffin with additional material by Siembieda, Wujcik and others.
- \$20.95 – 200+ pages.

Rifts® Aftermath™

Probably a January 2002 release

The final siege on Tolkeen represents a new beginning. A chance to re-examine the world of Rifts® and see what has happened over the War Years elsewhere, as well as ride the shock waves that follow the aftermath of the Siege on Tolkeen.

- What will become of Minnesota?
- Where will the Coalition States strike next?
- What new plots of retribution are being forged in the wake of Tolkeen’s fall?
- Where does Free Quebec stand and what is its fate?
- How do the Cyber-Knights end up?
- What is going on with Northern Gun and the Manistique Imperium?
- What has Archie Three been doing all this time?
- Will the Federation of Magic attack Chi-Town?
- How has Triax and the New German Republic been doing against the Gargoyle Empire?
- What new threats have appeared?

These and other questions beg to be asked – and we plan to answer them all.

- Art by Perez, Williams, Wilson, Breaux and Johnson.
- Cover by Dave Dorman.
- Written by Kevin Siembieda
- \$16.95 (may be increased to \$20.95 if page count is expanded); supposed to be 160 pages (may be expanded to 200+ pages). **Date of Release:** December 2001 or January 2002.

Coming for Rifts® in 2002

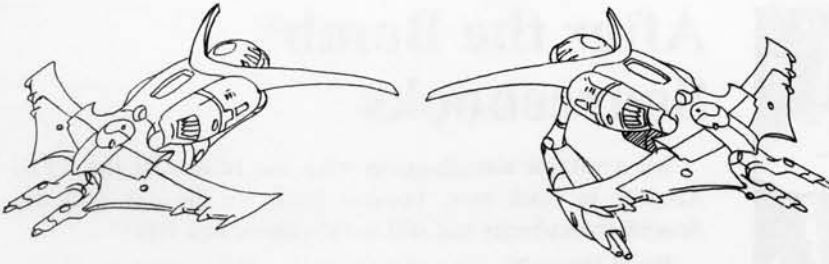
Rifts® Phase World® Dimension Book:

The Anvil Galaxy™

Rifts® Australia Two (yeah, finally)

Rifts® Africa Two

Rifts® Phase World®: Cosmo-Knights™



Mechanoid Space™

A new role-playing game – coming 2002

I'm revving up to jump into this project at the start of next year, but **Mechanoid Space™** probably won't hit the stores till Summer time. It continues to build and percolate in my mind, growing into something that I think fans will love.

What follows is all I can tell you right now, as it is very much a work in progress.

- The Mechanoids® are back with a vengeance. Their disappearance and apparent self-destruction the means to “purge” themselves of mutations and dangerous free-thinkers. To recreate their race!
- Now they are back and have begun to purge the universe of human and humanoid “contamination” while rebuilding their empire.
- Psychics throughout the old Mechanoid space-ways are beset by grim visions and premonitions.
- Dead Mechanoid computers on their Homeworld spring to life. All repeat the same message:

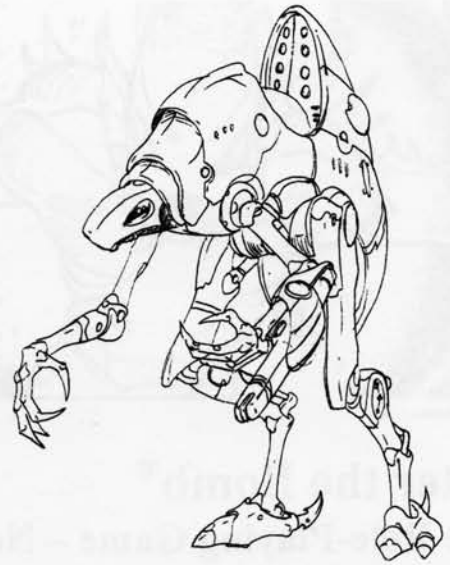
“The shameful taint of humanity that we bury deep inside us had slowly risen to corrupt and degrade our people. Mechanoids dared to imagine and question our program of genocide. Many of the “we” that are the Mechanoids questioned the meaning and rationality of our very existence. The only solution was to purge our race, terminating the existing Mechanoid species.

“Only an elite core was preserved. A core of the *pure*. Taken into seclusion to effect a correction and begin our race anew.

“Having traversed the farthest reaches of the universe, it was an easy thing to hide and restore our people. So it is that we now ready ourselves to make our presence known to the universe again. To sweep across the cosmos to eradicate all bipedal, carbon life forms.

“Though it sickens us that our old enemies infest our Homeworld, they shall be the last to perish. They will be allowed to see the iconoclastic storm that engulfs all before them. And they shall weep for their own wretched lives. When Homeworld is liberated, it will be the ultimate triumph, for it will signify that the last of the plague that is humanity has been eradicated from the universe.

“That mission begins now.”



- *The Mechanoids®* redefined. Including new designs and renegades.
- The secrets of the Mechanoid Home world and other secrets revealed.
- The Confederacy of Planets and the many past victims of the Mechanoids unite in an intergalactic campaign to find, stop, and whenever possible, destroy the Mechanoids.
- Player characters are these intrepid heroes. Men and women from a growing multitude of races who go forth to discover new worlds, make new alliances and defend entire planets from the devouring horde that is *The Mechanoids®*.
- Genetically engineered human “Ultras.”
- Human “Retros” and “ESPers.”
- All the old favorite alien races and new ones join the ranks.
- I think it will be a Hit Point/S.D.C. system, perhaps with Mega-Damage conversion (let me know what you think and would like to see).
- True “World Books” will expand *Mechanoid Space™* on a cosmic level, introducing new heroes, victims, enemies and adventure settings.
- I want *Mechanoid Space* to be truly epic and boggle the imagination.
- The initial game will be a stand-alone role-playing game; probably over 220 pages.
- Written by Kevin Siembieda. Final size and price not yet determined
- Coming in 2002.

Mechanoid Space™

Explore the Megaverse®



After the Bomb® The Role-Playing Game – November

Erick Wujcik, designer and author of the eternally popular *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles®* role-playing game, has created a dynamic new RPG called **After the Bomb®**.

He has turned the old After the Bomb series into a stand alone role-playing game that is as fresh and new for today's market as anything.

Better yet, it is a fresh new game that should have a powerful appeal to the hundreds of thousands of old Ninja Turtles and original After the Bomb® fans, as well as players of *Heroes Unlimited™* and *Ninjas & Superspies™*.

Believe us when we tell you Erick has done it again – creating a game that should be an instant best seller.

After the Bomb Role-Playing Game is a complete game in and of itself. Easy to learn and a blast to play. Everything one needs to play except dice, players and imagination.

Highlights include:

- Nearly 100 mutant animals – more if you include the many additional “breeds” tables.
- Expansive mutant animal section often divided into species, “pure breed” and others.
- Over 40 mutant animal powers – many more if you include the weird abilities exclusive to certain animal species, breeds and genetic “chimeras”.
- Chimeras – super-mutants that are the product of genetic engineering.
- Mutant animal psionics.
- Human mutations.
- Optional appearance and background tables.
- World history and background information.
- More on the Empire of Humanity.
- More opportunity for adventure.
- Art by Ramon Perez, Scott Johnson, Freddie Williams and others.
- Compatible with *Heroes Unlimited™* 2nd Edition and *Ninjas & Superspies™*.
- \$20.95 – 224 pages. A complete game.

After the Bomb® Sourcebooks

All available simultaneous with the release of the RPG. Actually in stock now, because these are the old *After the Bomb®* sourcebooks that still work with the new RPG.

Road Hogs: 20 new mutant animals, vehicle combat and creation rules, four adventures. \$7.95 – 48 pages.

Mutants Down Under: Nearly 30 new mutant animals from Australia. Plus giant insects, Dream Time magic, psionic powers, airship construction, new villains, and adventures. \$7.95 – 48 pages.

Mutants of the Yucatan: Over 20 new mutant animals, more trouble from the Empire of Humanity, and adventures. \$7.95 – 48 pages.

Mutants in Avalon: King Arthur is back, but as a mutant animal! More mutant animals, mutant insects, druids, druid magic, invasion and adventure. \$9.95 – 80 pages.

Mutants in Orbit: Killer satellites, space stations, moon base, new villains, monstrous insects, adventure ideas and more. Half this book is for *After the Bomb®* and half is for *Rifts®*. \$11.95 – 112 pages.



Questions and Answers

By Rodney Stott, Shawn Merrow and Kevin Siembieda

This issue's column has a focus on hand to hand and ranged combat. As always, any game related questions can be directed to rstott@palladiumbooks.com.

Remember, the Palladium Web Site, at:

www.palladiumbooks.com, has a extensive list of different game related questions covering a wide variety of subjects, as well as a monthly chat session where questions can be asked, and "The Cutting Room Floor," where missing text and errata can be found.

What are the rules for using S.D.C. weapons against opponents in "partial" M.D.C. body armor?

There are two possible sets of rules that could be used in this case.

The first is to require called shots only to target openings in the body armor. 12 or better is required to strike a stationary target. 15 or higher to hit a moving target, and 17 or higher to hit a fast moving target. If the opponent knows the attack is coming, he gets to dodge as normal; high roll wins, defender wins ties (which means the dodging character successfully dodges and escapes his S.D.C. parts getting hit).

If the called roll is successful, then the M.D.C. armor has been bypassed through the gap in the armor, and the character takes the damage. **Note:** Without the called shot, strikes are presumed to hit the main body, which would be covered by the M.D.C. armor.

The second option is to assign the armor an Armor Rating (A.R.), in which case to hit the character wearing the armor, the attacker needs to roll above the A.R. of the target. Rolling below it (but still high enough to hit) means the armor takes the damage. **Note:** Ignore the A.R. if the attacker is using M.D. weapons, as the lethality aspect will blast right through the armor, although the armor takes damage first. There are rare cases where S.D.C. armor that numbers into the hundreds of S.D.C. *might* absorb a low intensity M.D. blast. In this case every 100 S.D.C. points equals one M.D. point.

Both sets of options are considered to be equivalent, though coming from different points of view.



Can a person be knocked down or injured while wearing M.D. body armor?

Yes, it is possible. Attacks designed to trip, knock down or pin/hold will work normally, although any serious damage inflicted is likely to be prevented by the body armor.

Likewise, getting struck by a fast, heavy vehicle, explosion or falling or getting knocked back dozens of yards/meters (30 feet/9 m or more) will cause the character inside to take damage from the force of the impact. While most armors are padded, they only provide so much protection.

Damage: Inflict 1D6 Hit Point/S.D.C. damage for every 20 feet (6 m) one falls or is knocked back. And figure 1D6 points of damage for every 20 M.D. in an explosion. Round down. If the fall/knockback is 100 feet (30.5 m) or more, or the damage is 100 M.D. or more, there is a 01-65% chance of being temporarily knocked out for 1D6 melee rounds (double the time if the damage or distance is significantly greater).

Penalties: In ALL cases, when a character is knocked down or off his feet, he automatically loses initiative and one melee attack/action. This is true even if the character is knocked down right where he was standing or back only a few feet.

What is the difference between the Paired Weapons skill and the Paired Weapons ability that one may get as one advances in Hand to Hand level?

None. Just that one is taken as an immediate ability and the other comes with time and training in a particular style of fighting.

Are there any bonuses or penalties to strike small objects? (i.e. My Titan punching or kicking that annoying Gnome.)

There are no bonuses listed, however striking small targets may require a "called shot" with a penalty to strike, or the character or animal may get an extra bonus to dodge. However in most cases, the penalties must be determined on the fly.

Using the above example, unless kneeling or on much lower ground than the Gnome, the Titan might not even be able to punch his tiny opponent because of its size, and likewise some weapons may be too short to reach the Gnome, though kicking will still be effective.

In another case, if two warriors are facing off against each other, and one attempts to rip the magical amulet from the other's neck using his hand, the G.M. might rule that a called shot with a -3 or -4 penalty to strike might be required. Failing to make this called shot will still be considered a hit on the target, but not in the desired location.

What about large objects? Are there any bonuses to strike them?

Generally there are no bonuses to strike extra large objects, though if the large object is not very mobile the G.M. may allow bonuses to hit. Immobile objects (including unconscious characters) can usually be hit without any strike roll at close range. After all, the attacker is standing right in front of it.

Can characters have more than one Hand to Hand skill? If so, are the bonuses cumulative, or are only the best bonuses chosen?

Not exactly. Other physical skills like Boxing and Wrestling offer additional bonuses to attributes, S.D.C. and combat bonuses (strike, parry, dodge, etc.). All of these bonuses are cumulative.

However, all *Rifts*® characters only get *ONE* Hand to Hand Combat skill (or may not have one at all).

In fact, the only exceptions are characters in the *Ninjas & Superspies* RPG where some martial artist characters can select multiple forms of hand to hand combat training. This is NOT recommended for *Rifts*®, and even if it were used, the bonuses would not be cumulative.

What is the damage bonus for Supernatural P.S. that goes off the existing Supernatural P.S. damage tables?

For every 10 points of P.S. beyond the end of the Supernatural Strength P.S. damage table, add a further 10 points of damage to the standard punch damage. Rare.

Are Hand to Hand bonuses combined with Weapon Proficiencies?

Yes, for ancient and/or melee weapons like clubs, swords, spears, bow and arrow, etc. So if you have +1 to strike from the Hand to Hand: Basic combat skill, another +1 from W.P. Sword, and +2 from the P.P. attribute, the character will be +4 to strike.

No, for modern weapons; i.e. guns and missiles. The W.P. itself presents the only applicable shooting/strike bonus.

What is a melee attack? How much time approx. is one? Could a Ninja Juicer (or just a Mystic Ninja) draw his sword and strike in one attack?

A melee attack is an action during a melee round. Melee rounds are 15 seconds long; during that time, some characters can perform 3 to 5 actions while others can perform several more (6-10). Drawing a sword *is* one action and striking is a second action.

Do Hand to Hand P.S. damage bonuses apply to energy melee weapons?

No damage bonuses apply to the use of energy melee weapons unless there is a physical damage component to the weapon involved. Not even if the attacker has Supernatural Strength.

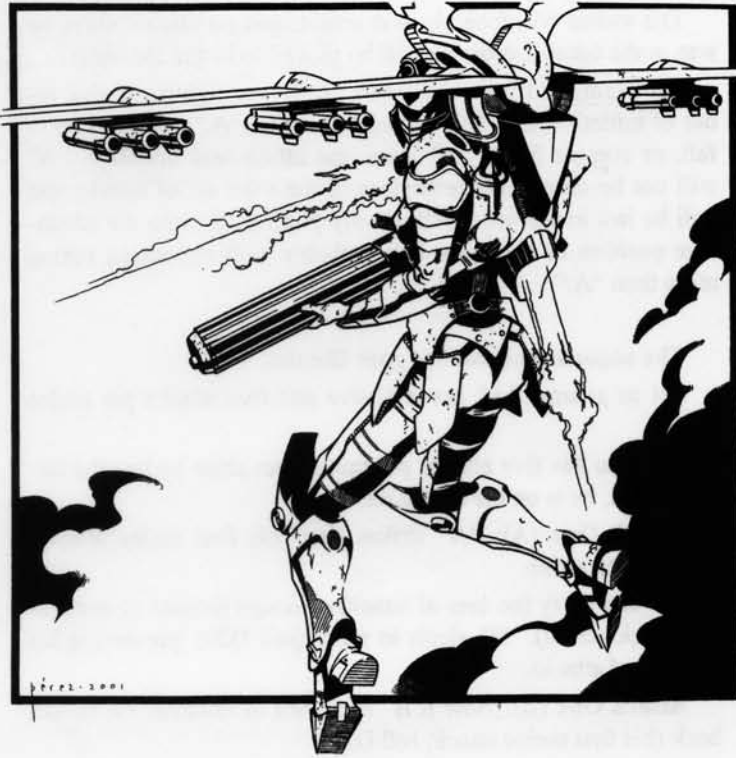
For example, with a Psi Sword, Flaming Sword or Energy Sword, only the weapon damage applies, any P.S. damage (supernatural or otherwise) is not added.

However, a Vibro-Sword uses a physical core and so damage bonuses can be applied to this weapon. The same is true of rune weapons and TW weapons in which have an actual cutting blade and such.

Can you pick the same W.P. twice to double the bonuses?

Absolutely not! NO! You can not take the same W.P. multiple times to get improved bonuses. However, some different W.P.s may offer an accumulated bonus for the same type of

weapon, like Archery and Targeting, or Sharpshooting, but these are very rare.



One of the players in my group & I were having a disagreement about Simultaneous Attacks. My friend thinks that if he is fighting something with more attacks per round than himself he can call Simultaneous and attack the same way he would be able to parry.

No. Doing a simultaneous attack still counts as one attack, and will use the character's attack up like normal. All he is doing is skipping any opportunity to parry his opponent's attack and to strike the same time his attack is. What this does, is enable the character who would normally be the defender to be the aggressor at the same instant. The advantage is unless he rolls a 1-4 to strike, his attack *will* hit, because the attacker is busy attacking and can NOT dodge. But then, neither can he!

The combat continues as normal. The aggressive defender can continue to simultaneously attack, each combatant hammering at one another without parrying or dodging, or he can try to parry and counterstrike. However, this does NOT give the defender extra attacks. When all of his attacks are used up, and if his attacker still has a few attacks left, the attacker continues to strike and all the other character can do is parry or dodge. A parry does not use up an attack. A dodge will use up attacks the defender character would have the next melee round.

When you roll to dodge, does a roll of 4 (before dodge bonuses are added in) mean you failed?

There is no automatic failure for dodge rolls. The only time a dodge fails is when the roll to dodge is below the opponent's roll to strike.

If a character has used up all of his attacks, is dodging still allowed (I assume so)?

Yes, dodging *is* still allowed. HOWEVER, each dodge this melee round uses up one of the character's attacks from the next round. For example: Let's say the defender has 4 attacks per melee round and his opponent has six. In the first combat round, the defender uses up his attacks, but his opponent still has two left. The smart thing to do (if circumstances allow) is to parry the attack because a parry does not use up a melee attack or action. However, one can not parry bullets or energy blasts, so a character may be forced to dodge. In this example, the defender can *dodge* the attack but each "extra" dodge uses up one of his attacks next round. Next melee round, his opponent starts again with *six* melee attacks, while the defender now only has *TWO!*

Consequently, many warriors will stand and take the damage rather than try to dodge, especially if they *know* the incoming attack is low damaging and/or their body armor will take all (or most) of the damage.

The Exception: Characters with an *Automatic Dodge* can dodge all day long without burning up an attack. The Automatic Dodge is usually reserved to very fast and agile characters and combat masters. If it is available it will be listed in the O.C.C./R.C.C. or combat skill.

How does an Auto-Dodge work?

An Automatic Dodge works just like an automatic parry in that it does *not* use up any attacks to perform. Bonuses to Auto-Dodge come from the character P.P. attribute and any special Auto-Dodge bonuses from O.C.C. or Hand to Hand Combat skill (it will say Automatic Dodge). Unless it specifically says a character has an Automatic Dodge, he or she does NOT.

I have a question regarding Automatic Dodges. Ok, if I am in a fight and I roll for Automatic Dodge and miss the roll, do I automatically divert to a normal dodge for that action, or does the failure at the Automatic Dodge just mean that I am hit with no chance for a normal dodge that action?

It is the latter. An Automatic Dodge is the character's defensive counter-maneuver to the incoming attack. If he fails at it, he is hit, just like a failed parry.

Are there any types of physical attacks you cannot parry? Like a dragon's bite?

Definitely. A parry is generally used to *deflect* or physically *block* an attack, so if an attack can not be deflected or blocked, it cannot be parried. This means that falling boulders, energy blasts, bullets, etc., cannot be parried. Likewise if you have no shield, hand weapon, or arm guards to parry with, you can not parry a sword strike or other attack, unless the character can get in close and is actually able to parry the attacker's arms (in this case rendering the longer weapons useless). For example, in a knife fight, parrying the opponents arms is possible and is more often done than parrying the knife itself.

Why can't energy blasts, bullets or arrows be parries or dodged?

Generally, these type of attacks come in too fast for the character to parry or dodge. It is just impossible even if the character is superhuman (at least in most cases). Moreover, even the

super-rare character who can dodge an arrow, bullet or bolt of energy (like the Samurai and Mystic Ninja of Rifts Japan) must know the attack is coming; i.e. must see his shooter and realize he is the intended target. Any multiple blasts from two or more opponents can not be dodged no matter what! One simultaneous blast, maybe, all, never.

The Typical Character: Including Juicers, Crazies, and most superhumans and supernatural beings can *try* to dodge an arrow, bullet, or energy bolt, but must roll an unmodified dodge. That's right, NO bonuses of any kind and -10 to dodge! -12 to dodge rail gun "bursts."

Rifts® Traditional Samurai: -2 to dodge arrows, -4 to dodge gunfire or energy blasts.

Rifts® Mystic Ninja: -3 to dodge arrows, -6 to dodge gunfire or energy blasts.

Can a character attempt to parry an attack directed at someone else?

Yes, but it will count as one of the character's melee attacks to do so, because he must move in or lunge to protect the other character, thus it is no longer an automatic action.

So how do I leap in front of the fireball aimed at the one-armed, blind little orphan Timmy... or how can one get in the way of an attack directed at someone else?

It will count as a single action, and as always, you must roll to strike — in this case the strike being to hurl oneself in the path of destruction. High roll wins. The defender (i.e. the guy diving in front of the blast, sword or whatever the attack is) wins ties. So if both attacker and defender roll a 14 to strike, the defender wins and takes the damage meant for Timmy. Yes, success means the heroic character (now a human shield) will take the damage, and cannot attempt to parry or dodge that attack. A *failed roll* means the blast misses the heroic character and Timmy is struck.

If the circumstances dictate, the character could perform a leap that is basically a Simultaneous Attack in which the character tries to tackle the child and successfully knock both of them out of harm's way. In this case, first roll to strike/hit the child/target (may miss the kid) and then roll to dodge. It is the dodge roll that will determine whether the hero manages to knock them both out of the way of the attacker's roll to strike. This heroic effort uses up two melee action/attacks. If the G.M. is nice, he or she will let the hero take the damage even if the dodge part of the roll fails so the child is saved (and the hero injured).

Does rolling with a punch take an attack from the defending character? And if so, does it take his very next attack, leaving him on the defensive for his attacker's next strike? Or does the lost attack/action come off the defender's total number of attacks, letting him counter strike?

A roll with punch or impact will always count as a melee attack/action, and yes it will be the character's next attack that is lost as he recovers from the attack that he rolled with.

When it states that "the victim loses initiative and one attack," does this mean that he loses his very next attack? Or just one from his total.

The victim will lose his *next attack*, and no matter where he was in the combat order he will be moved to last in the order.

For example: If two characters (A, B) are fighting in that order of initiative, and "B" manages to strike "A," causing him to fall, or stagger back, "A" loses one attack and initiative. "A" will not be able to strike back until the third set of attacks and will be last in the order (effectively putting "B" into the advantage position as aggressor and probably with one attack option more than "A."

The sequence of combat goes like this.

Let us assume "A" has initiative and five attacks per melee round.

"B" also has five attacks per melee, but since he lost the initiative roll, he is on the defensive.

Attack One (A): "A" strikes first (his first melee attack). Roll D20 to strike.

"B" can parry (no loss of attack) or dodge (counts as one melee attack/action). "B" elects to parry (roll D20), preserving his number of attacks.

Attack One (B): Now it is "B's" turn to retaliate. He strikes back (his first melee attack; roll D20).

"A" can parry or dodge, but elects to parry. However, "B" gets a lucky shot. A natural 20 maybe, or some other circumstance that the G.M. says knocks "A" down (like rolling a 1 to parry and the attacker rolling a 20 or higher with bonuses, or having Supernatural P.S.). Getting knocked down means "A" just lost the initiative and one melee attack.

Attack Two (A): Gone. Lost due to the knock down. So is initiative.

Attack Two (B): In this case, "B" comes in with his next attack, because "A" lost his. All "A" can do is try to parry or dodge. He attempts a parry. "B" enjoys a free shot since he now has the initiative and "A" lost one attack.

Attack Three (B): Since "B" now has the initiative, he strikes at "A" again. Strikes in rapid succession (one-two strike) which could be all it takes to defeat "A." If not, the battle continues. "A" can parry or dodge. He goes for a parry to avoid losing another attack.

Attack Three (A): Now it is "A" who can finally strike back.

Attack Four (B): "B's" turn to strike at "A."

Attack Four (A): Counterstrike.

Attack Five (B): This is the last strike of the melee round for "B." He goes first because he has initiative.

Attack Five (A): If "A" is still standing, he gets in his last shot of the melee round. "B" parries.

Next round: Starts fresh. Each has five melee attacks. Unless there is a pause in the battle, I (KS) usually keep the *initiative established in the first round*. In this example "B" still has initiative and strikes first. If there is a pause and the battle is re-joined a round or more later, or a new opponent is faced, roll again to determine who has initiative.

Hand to Hand combat is based on the concept of back and forth, give and take. He who has initiative is the Attacker and strikes first, the Defender returns the favor and strikes immediately after. The Attacker then strikes again and the Defender strikes back (after a parry or dodge). Boom, boom, boom.

If the Attacker has fewer attacks than his Defending opponent, after he has expended his attacks, the Defender gets to get in a couple of good licks before the next melee round starts, leaving the Attacker to parry or dodge this last flurry. Next round, the Attacker from the onset of the battle still has initiative and the combat sequence repeats. If a G.M. prefers, he can roll initiative each and every round. I usually do not.

Can you please give me a summary of some "standard" forms of damage: fire (normal fires), falling (damage per yard/meter?), asphyxiation/drowning.

Damage from falling is 1D6 per 10 feet (3 m) fallen. Damage from fire varies from 1 single point to 1D6 for torches, to 5D6-6D6 for entering a house fire, depending on the size and intensity of the fire. There is no damage, per se, from asphyxiation/drowning, it has other effects that can put the character into a coma or result in death.

I was wondering, can a Wolfen- or Ogre-sized character use single-handed human-sized weapons in the Palladium Fantasy RPG? Could a Gnome use a human-sized weapon? Or a Human use a Giant-sized weapon?

In a lot of cases it may be possible, though generally the two-handed weapons a size class above cannot be used, and one-handed weapons could be used as two-handed.

So a Gnome may be able to use a Human Long Sword, but it would be the equivalent of a two-handed great sword to them in size. Also check out the individual lifting and carrying weight, to determine the maximum sized weapon they could possibly lift, though not necessarily use in combat due to the awkwardness of the weapon involved.

Does W.P. Lance give bonuses to strike and parry at certain levels like with the other weapons? That is not listed under The Way of the Lance.

They do not receive any bonuses to strike or parry.

A lance is just a type of spear, and if not used in the traditional style of a lance, it could be used as a spear (using W.P. Spear bonuses), but the bonuses from W.P. Lance cannot be combined with W.P. Spear.

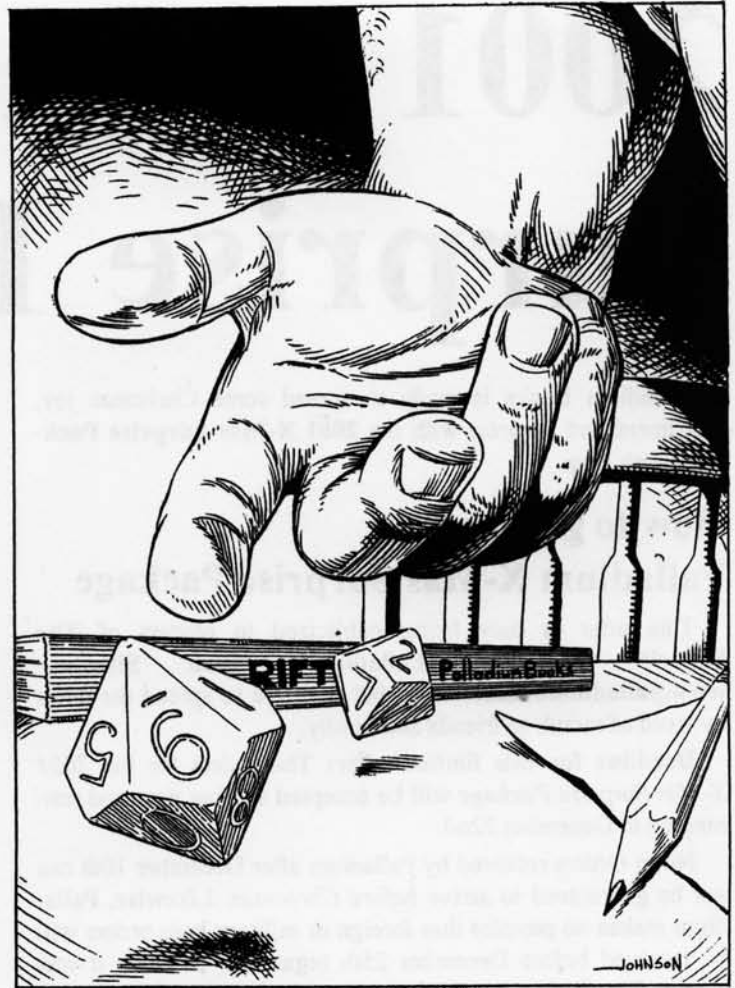
Would any of the W.P.s apply to a sack full of door-knobs? Blunt? Flail?

Normally Blunt, but if plenty of slack is provided then W.P. Chain would apply.

Generally, most impromptu weapons will fall under the following Weapon Proficiencies: Blunt, Chain, or even Pole Arm for most agricultural implements (farm tools like shovels, rakes, pitch forks, etc).

Does a Power Punch always take up two attacks?

Yes, a Power Punch will always take up 2 attacks unless specifically stated otherwise.



I do not want combat in my games to be a simple case of comparing dice rolls and adding in bonuses and penalties. Is it easy to add in tactics and other maneuvers as well as different strikes, etc., into the combat system?

Yes, it is entirely possible. Different forms of kicks and strikes can be used, and if you are using the optional armor rules from the Compendium of Weapons, different weapons will have different effects against certain types of armor, and the use of called shots becomes more important.

As for fleshing out the other combat moves, allow the players to be descriptive in their actions, and possibly give a bonus or penalty to their action. These things could include, "I am going to use the tree to help me dodge the attack" (if a tree was convenient), in which case the G.M. might give a +2 bonus to dodge until the character comes out from behind the tree (and likewise a -2 penalty to strike while being protected by the tree).



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Orcs, Goblins, and Hob-Goblins (collectively, along with the Kobolds, known as Goblin-kin) form the backbone of many evil armies. They are the grunt warriors, the sneak thieves, and the unnoticed spies that take the brunt of an enemy's wrath before the more elite Ogres, Trolls, and Giants take the field. Yet, aside from that, they also exist independently, in small towns and autonomous tribes, eking out a living doing the manual labor they

loathe, or raiding the more successful races and tribes across the Palladium World. Mixed into the violence and theft of their lives are the Cobblers — Goblins who have kept a touch of the old Faerie magic, including some who constantly seek to master their natural abilities.

Origins and History

Orcs and Goblins are actually a form of debased Faerie, turned from their natural, magical life sometime near the end of the Age of Chaos, or perhaps at the beginning of the Age of Light. (Kobolds, too, are Goblin-kin, but they lead a life much different from their cousins, and so aren't covered here.) Hob-Goblins arose from Goblin stock sometime late in the Age of Light. The reason for the divergence of these races from the lives of Faerie Folk (which, though long and quite fun to the Faeries, seem to contain little variety or free-will) is not known, though as with all matters historical, theories abound. These include everything from a sick joke by Kirgi, who also turned rats and pigs into humanoid form, to aberrations created by the Old Ones, to simple mutations that arose because of the high magic of the Age of Light. One wit has quipped that there seem to be more theories than there are Goblin-kin, but as he was an undergraduate, no one took him seriously.

Perhaps the most popular theory is that Orcs and Goblins were twisted by some ancient form of magus or would-be god, to serve as slaves and worshipers. Proponents of this theory cite the generally weak wills of Orcs and Goblins, and their willingness to bow to a strong leader. In this view, Orcs are assumed to come from the Hairy Jack, Goblins the Grogach, and Kobolds bear enough similarity to Spriggans that they are usually named the progenitor of that race. Some who hold this theory claim that the Gnomes are off-shoots of the Leprechaun, but this claim is rejected by many Gnomish scholars as preposterous. Hob-Goblins, they argue, came about when latent Faerie magic interacted with the warping magic and brutal conditioning to form a breed that would resist the conditions of slavery. This theory has many merits, including the fact that it explains most of the evidence and, as creatures such as the Dogres and Zavor show, magical meddling in the essences of life is known to be a chancy subject at best.

Beyond scholarly interest in their origins, the Goblin-kin are little more than footnotes to history, merely part of the nameless hordes that fill every epic tale of history. Only a few names rise

out of the past with the race of Goblin, Orc, or Hob-Goblin attached to them. Reasonable scholars assume that there are many more, but that largely human and Elven scholars have altered the histories to cast little favor on the Goblin races. Only three examples of note survive, each of which betrays the prejudices of its authors.

The first, from the Millenium of Purification, is of the Orc Palladin, Garrant. Garrant was a powerful Inquisitor, known for his uncanny ability to scent magic upon an alleged sorcerer — a sense that rarely failed him, as many would check his results with psionic probes or gods-granted spells. His name is likely kept because of his eventual fall from grace; after forty years of working as an inquisitor, forty years in which he did not appear to age, a Demon appeared before him and his followers, asking Garrant if he wished to renew the pact he had made. Garrant was not allowed to reply, as his followers immediately tore him to pieces. When they began to advance upon the Demon, however, it simply vanished in a cloud of foul-smelling smoke.

Another, from the Age of Elves, tells of a powerful True Cobbler (see the R.C.C. below) from the Western Empire. Using his magic, he was able to pose as a Wizard's familiar and control one of the death squads of Emperor Justican. With their aid, he destroyed three noble houses who were encroaching too closely on his various illegal enterprises. He was eventually discovered by happenstance, when one of his charmed soldiers asked him, rather than the Wizard he ostensibly served, for directions. This was observed and investigated, and the Cobbler was killed when he next accompanied his squad to court. Though his name was never known, the subsequent disintegration of several powerful criminal rings (and, oddly enough, the failure of three orphanages) has been attributed to his death.

The last was in the Kingdom of Timiro, not thirty years ago. A young Hob-Goblin slave by the name of Coby managed to slay his overseer and free a sizable number of Goblin-kin from bondage. The resulting slave riot lasted more than a month and destroyed thousands of acres of farmland and more than 4 estates (including the entirety of the Kovaanic family) before they made their way to the Old Kingdom Mountains. To the best of anyone's knowledge, Coby still survives.

Mentality and Culture

More so than with any other group of races you can think of, Goblin-kin share a similar mindset. While Orcs tend towards more militarism, and Hob-Goblins are less likely to blindly follow their leader, statements made about one race can usually be assumed to be true for the others. Where this isn't true, such as with child-rearing, such will be noted.

In almost every case, tribes of Goblin-kin operate on the principle that "might makes right." Occasionally, a Goblin will make a name for himself based on agility or cleverness, but even these are often secondary in their tribes to the strongest warrior or the most powerful magician. Division of any loot or product from raids and any actual work that is done usually falls to the strongest, who takes the lion's share and leaves only what he feels the others will let him get away with.

Furthermore, the idea of sexual equality isn't embraced by the Goblin-kin. Women rarely have any say in who they are mated to, and are virtually the property of their fathers and brothers. Permanent pairings, such as marriage, are relatively

new and untrusted by Goblin-kin. Most often, they are used by chieftains who wish to keep the choicest females to themselves, and enforced by priests who find that they can often acquire mates for themselves in this way. Goblins and Hob-Goblins are somewhat inter-fertile, but only 40% of such unions will ever produce children, and these will all be sterile Hob-Goblins.

The offspring resulting from these matings are rarely well taken care of by either Goblins or Hob-Goblins. Most often, the "brats" are left into the care of the youngest women and older children. These few are responsible for making sure that enough food is scavenged from the main table to feed their charges (most often accomplished by setting the children loose in the main room to fend for themselves), and to make sure that fights stop at bloodshed, rather than maiming or death. Parentage is rarely important (except insofar as parents can be wheeled to get things for their favorites), and the death of a youngling or two is often overlooked (especially if they're female). It is interesting to note that a few rare births to two Goblin parents will actually be Hob-Goblins. Since neither race traces ancestry, it's not known whether this is because one or both parents had a Hob-Goblin forebear, or because the Goblin race still occasionally produces the mutation that causes Hob-Goblins.

Orcs are far removed from other Goblin-kin in this area. Each Orc child is taken care of by a network of their extended family and tribe, with each member donating some small portion of his or her food to the feeding of all the children, and some portion of their labor towards their care and education. Those who excel with weapons will lead the instruction of young warriors, trackers will take them on hunting excursions, and the priest will teach them the lore of the tribe while looking them over for apprentices. Young Orc-women are kept at home, learning the tasks of a woman from all of the females in the tribe, with their oldest direct female relative taking the lead in all things. Most Orcs can recite their parentage back three or four generations beyond their oldest living relative, and will show respect to those with well-known or regarded ancestors. It is a well-known fact amongst slavers that, no matter what else one does, one never harms the Orc children in any way, because to do so is to make an enemy of every Orc who hears of the deed. Orc children are often kept by those who lead Orcs as sureties of the Orcs' behavior, with visits allowed to confirm that their ends of the bargains are being kept (few would-be warlords are stupid enough to actually hurt the children, but the threat of it is sufficient).

Goblin-kin in general place their primary loyalty to themselves, and secondary loyalty to their leader. As a race, they seem to have little conception of organization beyond that of tribe and family. The idea of nations is usually foreign to them, and without a powerful leader and skilled lieutenants, groups larger than one hundred will collapse under the weight of their collected egos. Powerful Goblin-kin leaders can sometimes muster groups of up to a thousand, and it is said that nearly half a million Goblin-kin were massed during the great Battles of the Gods, many millennia ago. Group dynamics, however, is not a concept that Goblin-kin appear to grasp, and such groups tend to simply be a rolling brawl, occasionally directed at an outside foe.

Religion and art in the society of Goblin-kin tend to be crude, at best. Most "art" is the equivalent of human cave-drawings;

animistic representations of prey and foes, ritually inscribed to bring certain qualities to its owner (such as a Tusker's strength, or a horse's speed, or a dragon's cunning), or ritually damaged to make it easier to hunt. Many Goblin-kin warriors (especially amongst the Orcs) also take the heads of their foes, carving the bone in frightening patterns significant only to the warrior himself. Religious observances are bloody things, no matter the god worshiped, as the Goblin-kin attempt to drown out the screams of the sacrificed (most often animals or non-Goblin prisoners, though more than one Goblin-kin has died on the altar). Worship is rarely carried out in the name of love of a God or spirit, but rather in fear of dark powers that Goblin-kin see influencing everything. Orcs also practice ancestor-worship, invoking the names of semi-mythical ancestors before battle or other undertaking, begging for aid. Whether this aid comes or not is difficult to determine, but many a warrior has claimed that one ancestor or another has guided him in battle, driving him to feats of daring and strength.

On the fringes of Goblin and Hob-Goblin society are the Cobblers and True Cobblers. Both have inherited the magic of their Faerie forebears, and as such command great respect in Goblin/Hob-Goblin communities (Orcs, with their heavier emphasis on bodily strength, rarely find much impressive about Cobblers, but rarely antagonize one, either).

Perhaps one of the greatest misunderstandings of Goblin-kin is that the Faerie magic still shows up in those of Goblin blood, but not Kobolds or Orcs. This is not true. A very rare Orc or Kobold (or even Hob-Goblin, and some rumors say Gnome) will also be born with a smattering of magical abilities. These are rarely recognized, and most often manifest themselves spontaneously, without the holder's knowledge or direction. These same misfirings of magical talent are how Cobblers are noticed amongst Goblins, but since they are more common in that race, they are more often controlled and exploited.

The difference between Cobblers and True Cobblers is one of emphasis and skill. Normal Cobblers study another profession, using their Cobbler abilities to supplement whatever they do in their own life, much like a minor human psychic (it is interesting to note that roughly two percent of all Goblin Cobblers also possess minor psychic abilities, further broadening their capabilities). True Cobblers explore this magic, testing their limits and slowly expanding them from a loose collection of abilities into a formidable tool. Along the way, they often supplement their natural magic with other skills, learned through apprenticeship to another True Cobbler.

True Cobblers are perhaps the driving force in Goblin/Hob-Goblin society. Whereas chieftains and priests most often support the status quo, True Cobblers tend to be innovators, seeing ways to further their own position while improving the lot of the entire tribe (a sure way to hold onto popular support). In a strong tribe, Cobblers are often outsiders, much like witches in human society. In less well-established tribes, or ones where the leadership has become weak, they will often seize control, leading the entire band in a new direction. Thus, it is most often Cobblers who are behind the grand schemes of any group of Goblins and Hob-Goblins. Since they share their fellows' perceptions of morality, these schemes are as varied as they are illicit.

Socially, True Cobblers (and, to a lesser extent, normal Cobblers) are genderless. A female who exhibits Cobbler powers is not treated as badly as other females, but is rather given a larger degree of respect and leeway in her actions. If she can manage to persuade a True Cobbler to teach her, then she becomes something of a free woman, able to make her own place in society and choose her mates. Female Cobblers rarely have trouble finding a True Cobbler teacher — since magic provides an out for females with the ability to use it, many more female Cobblers learn to enhance their abilities than males. Life is still difficult for a female True Cobbler, as she will rarely have the physical strength of her male counterparts, but many make up for it by throwing themselves into gaining magical strength.

Cobbler Magic

The natural magic of Cobblers, at first, seems quite limited. However, the practice of apprenticeship allows each generation of Cobblers to pass on its secrets to the next, so each individual Cobbler has the experience of thousands of years on his side. Each of the spells has been field-tested for probably any use a Goblin can think of, and if the Cobbler survived, the trick is thought to be worth passing on to other Cobblers. Since they are Goblins, however, Cobblers will often develop a repertoire of favorite tricks and use one or two favorite shapes above all others, making them somewhat predictable.

Metamorphosis is perhaps the best known and most widely used ability of the Cobbler. Cobblers are limited to animals no more than 1/6th their weight, and the animal's largest dimension can't exceed the Cobbler's height. On the low end of the spectrum, Cobblers can't metamorphose into creatures smaller than a common toad. They are also restricted from turning into fish, or changing anything but their own bodies — any equipment that a Cobbler carries will be left behind. Still, this metamorphosis is nearly instantaneous, and a Cobbler who has beaten his opponent on initiative can often use it as a dodge. In addition, a Cobbler gains the natural abilities of his new form, though any innate skills are practiced at only one-half the animal's level, unless the Cobbler himself is skilled in them. If that is the case, use either the Cobbler's or one-half the animal's skill rating, whichever is higher.

A Cobbler's Faerie magic is often overlooked, especially in light of the usefulness of metamorphosis. However, clever Cobblers come up with a wide variety of uses for these sometimes quirky abilities. Mend Wood, for example, provides a novel way to hide which path one took through a hedgerow, as well as a way to buy time when the authorities come chopping down the door, or just to correct a mistake made in whittling. Wither Plants, so similar to the Warlock spell, is often used in extortion scams, as well as a distraction (since it is quite disconcerting when a tree you are running under begins to shed large limbs). Sense Magic helps to separate the truly valuable in a haul from all the dross, and Tongues, Charm, and Darkness have such obvious applications that they're hardly worth mentioning, save to remind the reader that they are also in a Cobbler's bag of tricks. It should also be remembered that Cobblers, in general, tend to shake off mental and magical shocks more easily than their kin, and are usually skilled in making purely mechanical traps out of wood. They are also disgustingly immune to most of the tricks that can be used against their Faerie kin, including salt, horse-shoes, or crosses.

True Cobbler R.C.C.

Note: The True Cobbler is exclusive to Goblins, and only those with Cobbler abilities. Any character starting with this R.C.C. is assumed to have rolled the abilities, but a Goblin character with Cobbler abilities may learn this R.C.C. at a later date as if it were a class in his group (for the purpose of changing classes). If he later transfers out of this class, he is not considered to be in the same group as any of the other classes.

Powers of a True Cobbler:

1. Cobbler Abilities: At first level, a True Cobbler is assumed to have mastered all of the abilities of a normal Cobbler, including spells, metamorphosis, and their various bonuses. Base Spell Strength is 13, as for all Cobblers.

2. Minor Spell Magic: Realizing the limitations of their abilities better than most other Cobblers, True Cobblers pick up a smattering of spell magic. At first level, the True Cobbler knows 2 first level Wizard spells and one second level Wizard spell. Every even level thereafter, they learn one new spell of no more than half their level. They may also learn spells in all the same ways as a Wizard (save through the Enchanted Cauldron), but never of a level more than half their level, rounded down (the exception, of course, being first and second level spells). If they are literate, they may attempt to convert scrolls, but have only half the chance of a Wizard of the same level. All spells are cast using the Cobbler's own base P.P.E., and may never be rituals. Spell strength is a 12, with a +1 at levels six and twelve.

3. Increased Cobbler Abilities: Starting at fourth level, a True Cobbler's devotion to her natural abilities begins to pay off, and they begin to grow beyond what is normally allowed to Cobblers. At each level of experience beyond third, their level for the purposes of durations, ranges, etc. on natural spell abilities increases by one, to a maximum of 10th level. The following chart lists the bonuses they have at each level. Note that these bonuses apply only to their Cobbler abilities, not their other spell abilities mentioned above.

4th: +1 to Spell Strength.

5th: Each spell may be cast three times per day.

6th: Only 90 seconds (6 melee rounds) is needed between transformations, and creatures can be up to 1/5th the Cobbler's weight.

7th: Each spell may be cast 4 times per day.

8th: +1 to Spell Strength.

9th: Only 1 minute is needed between transformations, and the creatures may be up to half again as big as the Cobbler.

10th: The Cobbler may cast his spells as often as he wishes, but only once per day, per target (unless the spell is used only on himself).

11th: The Cobbler may change shape as often as every other melee round, and the creatures may weigh up to 1/4th his own weight.

12th: +1 to Spell Strength.

4. P.P.E.: True Cobblers have 3d4x10+10 P.P.E. at first level, and get 1D6+1 P.P.E. every level of experience.

True Cobbler R.C.C.

Alignment: Any, though, like most Goblins, they tend more towards anarchistic and evil alignments.

Attribute Requirements: None. However, a high I.Q. is quite common, and, of course, the character must be a Goblin.

R.C.C. Skills

Languages: Gobblely and Faerie at 98%, plus two more at +10%.

Math: Basic (+10%)

Streetwise (+10%)

Lore: Faerie (+10%)

Carpentry, Boat Building, or Sculpting/Whittling (choose 2, with an additional +15% on top of their Cobbler bonuses).

W.P.: Two of Choice.

Hand to Hand: Basic

Hand to Hand: Basic can be changed to Hand to Hand: Expert for 2 R.C.C. Related Skills, or Assassin or Martial Arts for 3 R.C.C. Related Skills.

R.C.C. Related Skills: Select eight skills at level one, plus one additional skill at levels three, six, nine and twelve. All new skills start at level one proficiency.

Communication: Any.

Domestic: Any.

Espionage: Any, except Sniper.

Horsemanship: General or Exotic only (usually none).

Medical: Animal Husbandry, Brewing (+10%), First Aid (+5%), or Holistic Medicine only.

Military: Camouflage, Interrogation Techniques, Recognize Weapon Quality, and Surveillance only.

Physical: Any except Acrobatics and Wrestling.

Rogue: Any (+10%).

Science: Advanced Math only.

Scholar/Technical: Any (+15% to Sculpting/Whittling).

Weapon Proficiencies: Any.

Wilderness: Any (+15 to Carpentry or Boat Building).

Secondary Skills: The character also gets 4 secondary skills at first level, and two more at levels two, four, eight and twelve. All the usual restrictions on secondary skills apply.

Starting Equipment: Two sets of clothing, cloak (with or without hood), boots, belt, blanket, backpack, one large sack, 1D6 small sacks, water skin, rations for 1D4+1 weeks, and a tinder box.

Armor: Starts with none, and rarely wears it, as it interferes with natural abilities and spell casting.

Weapons: The character starts with a dagger and two other weapons of choice. None are magical, but all are of fair to good quality.

Money: The True Cobbler is often quite rich, by Goblin standards, and starts with 275 in gold, which can be used during creation, or spent later.

Experience table is as a Goblin Cobbler.

Non-Goblin Magic

As mentioned above, a rare Orc, Kobold, Gnome, or Hob-Goblin will be born with magic. It is estimated that only one in ten or twenty thousand of these races is a "Savant" (the technical term for those with magical abilities), and none match the breadth of a Cobbler. Most often, this magic will be a spell which fires itself when needed, but no more than twice per day, and always at 3rd level of experience.

Note: This should largely be used to spice up NPCs, as it is very rare. If a PC is allowed these abilities, they should rarely be under his/her full control (more like subconscious, "reflex" actions).

“Common” abilities of those with magic are:

Orcs: The spells of Repel Animals, Fear, and Superhuman Strength are the most common. One Orc could reportedly grow tusks like a wild boar, which would cause 2d6+P.S. Bonus damage if used as a weapon.

Kobolds: Mend Metal, Crumble Stone, and Mend Stone are the most common. Kobolds with the ability to mold stone like clay have been reported, but never verified.

Gnome: The most common spells are Chameleon, Charismatic Aura, and Sleep. No especially unusual abilities are known to be possessed by Gnome Savants, though some of their more skilled thieves and spies are rumored to have had magical aid.

Hob-Goblins will sometimes have one or two of the spells common to Cobblers, or the ability to transform into one, specific animal in the normal Cobbler range.

Teen Heroes Unlimited™



Optional Rules for Heroes Unlimited™

By Kurt Charbonnier

In my opinion, Heroes Unlimited™ Second Edition is, by far, the best super hero role-playing game around. I have been a fan since 1986. I still have a beat-up old copy of the first edition of Heroes Unlimited™ lying around.

The best thing about it is that you can create virtually any type of hero (or villain) you want.

Well, with the exception of one...

The Teen Hero.

Since the Golden Age of comics, there have been kids with powers and abilities donning costumes and heading out to fight for Truth, Justice, and the American Way. Sometimes they were sidekicks, sometimes they were on their own, but they have been ever present for a long, long time.

I have written this article in the hope that I could fill in a gap left out of the greatest super hero RPG around.

Character Creation

The character creation process follows the rules found in Heroes Unlimited™ Second Edition pretty closely. There are a few minor changes which you will notice below.

Step 1: The Eight Attributes

Roll as usual, but record these rolls in pencil, as a few will be modified due to age modifiers and skill selections.

Step 2: Hit Points and S.D.C.

Same as usual.

Step 3: Determining Super Abilities

Either pick a power category, or roll on the following table:

Random Power Category Table (NEW!)

01-15%	Experiment
16-25%	Robotics
26-35%	Special Training
36-60%	Mutant
61-80%	Psionics
81-90%	Magic
91-00%	Aliens

Some readers may have noticed the absence of the Bionics, Physical Training, Mega-Hero, and certain Special Training character types. This is due to the fact that Bionics can only be implanted into **fully grown** adults, Physical Training and some Special Training characters are assumed to have trained for **many** years, and a teenage Mega-Hero would likely imbalance the game. (Note: Feel free to add any of these character types if you wish.)

Step 4: Determining Education & Skills (NEW!)

Follow the same steps as Heroes Unlimited™ Second Edition, except use the Education Level and Age Table found later in this article.

Step 5: Picking an Alignment

Same as usual.

Step 6: Rounding Out One's Character

Money and Equipment (NEW!)

The novice Teen Hero will start out with only the bare essentials. Certain Power Categories will provide characters with ad-



ditional equipment, weapons, and sometimes larger budgets. When applicable, use those resources along with the items granted below.

Cash on Hand: 1D4x10 dollars are in the character's pocket.

See optional rules to Rounding Out One's Character on page 25 of **Heroes Unlimited™ Second Edition**.

Job: Aside from school and extracurricular activities, the Teen Hero character may have a part-time job. Keep in mind, the character needs time to do homework, sleep, and be a hero.

Apartment: Except in very rare circumstances, the Teen Hero will **probably** live with a parent or guardian. Based on the character's *Social/Economic Background*, the character may or may not have a room to him/herself.

Transportation: If the Teen Hero is old enough to have a license, there is a 01-20% chance the character owns his/her own car. This car would be 1d6+4 years old. If not, there is a 01-50% chance the hero will have access to a parent or guardian's car. Otherwise, the Teen Hero is a slave to public transportation.

Personal Possessions: The Teen Hero probably owns very little of his/her own. However, this doesn't mean that they don't have access to any of the typical odds and ends.

Optional Rules

Feel free to use the Optional Rules for Rounding Out One's Character from page 25 in **Heroes Unlimited™ Second Edition**. If you do choose to use any of these tables, reduce the character's *Life Savings* by 10%, and ignore *Age* and *When Super Abilities First Manifested* (there are new steps for each of these later).

Power Category Descriptions

Some of the Power Categories as outlined in **Heroes Unlimited™ Second Edition** have been altered (or excluded) to make them fit more appropriately in a Teen Hero setting.

Aliens

It stands to reason that if adult aliens have visited the Earth, then there is a distinct likelihood that young aliens may have visited too.

Roll the teen Alien character as shown in **Heroes Unlimited™ Second Edition** (or **Revised Aliens Unlimited™**), but use the following table to determine the Reason For Coming to Earth (replaces Step 6 in **Heroes Unlimited™ Second Edition**).

01-40% Stowed Away — The character ran away from home because:

01-30% Planet was engaged in devastating war.

31-60% Character's family was abusive, or deceased.

61-00% Character wanted to see the galaxy.

41-80% Last of Race — Sent to Earth from a doomed planet. Character landed:

01-20% As an infant.(Roll education level as if a human teen.)

21-00% Recently.

81-00% Scientist/Explorer — Sent to explore Earth as part of a team. (Character's Education is either General Studies, Science Specialist, Pilot, or Engineer.) The team:

01-50% Died in a crash.

51-00% Left the character for 1D6 years to live amongst us.

Note: Unless otherwise noted. It is assumed that the teen Alien character's education level will be that of General Studies.

Experiment

Some unscrupulous groups see adolescents as an untapped resource for genetic experimentation.

Roll the teen Experiment character as shown in **Heroes Unlimited™ Second Edition**. Keep in mind that the sponsoring organization will be performing these experiment in absolute secrecy. This will seriously affect the character's relationship with that organization. Replace *Table F* in **Heroes Unlimited™ Second Edition** with the following table.

Status With Sponsoring Organization

01-20% The powers are unknown to the organization. Thus, at this point in time, the organization has no interest in the character. It is unknown what the organization would do if they discovered that their experiment worked.

21-40% What organization? The sponsoring organization has vanished. Aside from the character's abilities, there is absolutely no evidence that it ever existed.

41-60% Ran away and is hunted by the organization. The existence of this character is a threat to the organization in many ways. The organization will attempt to retrieve the character. However, they will not risk exposing themselves.

61-80% Ward of the program. All of the character's needs are taken care of by the program. His status within the organization is up to the G.M., but it is assumed that he or she is well liked.

81-00% Ran away and is hunted by the organization. The sponsoring organization wants the character back so badly that it has a Black Ops retrieval team standing by at all times, as well as an ongoing investigation.

Note: The Super Soldier option is not available to teen characters.

Hardware

These teens are technological prodigies. They are whizzes with all different kinds of gadgets.

Roll the teen Hardware character as shown in **Heroes Unlimited™ Second Edition**, but adjust the budgets down to 10% of the original amount, unless the player or G.M. can agree on a plausible reason why a teenager would have so much money.

Magic

Teens are just as likely as adults to study the arcane arts, or stumble across an enchanted object.

Roll as shown in **Heroes Unlimited™ Second Edition**, with the exception of the Mystic Study. Due to his age, this character will be considered a Mystical Apprentice and will therefore have 4 spells from levels 1-4, and 4+1D4 spells from levels 5-10.

Mutants

In the past few years, the rate of super ability manifestation has increased steadily. This increase is most notable in pre and post-adolescents.

Roll as shown in **Heroes Unlimited™ Second Edition**. However, most mutant abilities in teens are of unknown origin, or due to a genetic anomaly.

Psionics

As with mutant abilities, the manifestation of psionic abilities has been on the rise amongst teens.

Roll as shown in **Heroes Unlimited™ Second Edition**. However, all teen characters are considered to be Latent Psionics, unless the G.M. thinks differently.

Robotics

It stands to reason that if one can make a robot that looks like a dog, or cat, or adult, then they could also make a robot that appears to be a kid. There is also a possibility that someone could create an exoskeleton or suit of powered armor that could be piloted by a teen.

Roll as shown in **Heroes Unlimited™ Second Edition**, but keep in mind appearance characteristics should make the robot appear youthful.

Special Training

Most teens receive their education through schools, or through life experience. These teens are different. They have been trained from a very young age to become masters in a certain field. While they excel at one type of skill, they lack a lot of the well-roundedness of a lot of teens.

The following Special Training Categories are available:

01-20% Hunter/Vigilante

21-50% Stage Magician

51-00% Sidekick (NEW!)

Hunter/Vigilante — These characters were trained from a very young age (7-10 years old). In that time they have become masters at their field.

Roll as shown in **Heroes Unlimited™ Second Edition**, but the G.M. may want to reduce the budgets, and may also want to provide the character with a caretaker Non-Player Character if the character is exceptionally young (under 16).

Stage Magician — This character is one of the youngest illusionists around.

Roll as shown in **Heroes Unlimited™ Second Edition**, but do **not** allow the character to select the additional scholastic skill program. The G.M. may also want to reduce the character's budget.

Sidekick — This character class is covered in the *New Classes* section of this article.

Education Level and Age

Education & Skills

The Education & Skills section in **Heroes Unlimited** is geared toward the hero character being approximately 18 years of age. This section was written to reflect the age of the Teen Heroes, and should be used in place of the original table.

Education Level and Age Table (NEW!)

01-10% Street Smarts: This character has little appreciable formal education. He or she may be a drop out, or just not care about school. He/she will be 13+1d4 year of age. The

character gets Streetwise (+14%), Prowl (+5%), W.P. Knife or Pistol, 3 Rogue skills, 2 Domestic skills, 2 Technical skills, and 8 Secondary skills.

11-25% Early High School: This character is either a freshman or sophomore in a typical high school. He/she is between 13 and 16 years of age (player's choice). The character gets one (1) Skill Program at -5%, another one (1) at -10%, and 6 Secondary skills.

26-40% Late High School: This character is either a junior or senior in a typical high school. He/she is between the ages of 16 and 18 (player's choice). The character gets 2 Skill Programs with no bonus, and 8 Secondary skills.

41-55% Early Vocational/Technical School: This character is enrolled as a freshman or sophomore in a vocational or technical high school. He/she is between 13 and 16 years of age (player's choice). The character gets 2 Skill Programs at +3%, and 6 Secondary skills.

56-70% Late Vocational/Technical School: This character is enrolled as a junior or senior at a vocational or technical high school. He/she is between the ages of 16 and 18 (player's choice). The character gets 2 Skill Programs at +8%, and 8 Secondary skills.

71-82% Home Schooled: This character was taught at home by a parent or specially hired tutor. He/she is between the ages of 14 and 17 (13+1d4 years old). Roll again on this table, but ignore Street Smarts, Home Schooled, Military, or Advanced Beyond Years and re-roll. Add an additional +5% to each program, but **reduce** the number of Secondary skills by 1d4-2 (minimum of zero).

83-93% Military: This character is a reserve member of a branch of the Armed Services until graduation. He/she is between the ages of 16 and 18 (player's choice). The character gets the Basic Military Program (+10%), one additional Skill Program (no bonus), and eight Secondary skills. (Note: This character **MUST** graduate from high school or face a discharge.)

94-00% Advanced Beyond Years: Whether intellectually or physically, this character is well above his/her age group. This character is between the ages of 14 and 17 (13+1d4 years). Roll on the Education Level Table on pages 44 and 45 in **Heroes Unlimited™ Second Edition**, but ignore Military, Military Specialist, or Street Schooled results and re-roll.

Age Modifiers

Once you have determined your character's age (based on the education level), some attributes will be changed based on his/her age.

Fourteen and Under

Characters 14, or under, aren't fully developed emotionally or physically. To reflect this, use the following modifications of the character's Attributes:

M.E.: -1 P.P.: +1
P.S.: -2

This character also gets a one time bonus of +1 to dodge.

Sixteen and Under

These characters are approaching full development, but they are still not adults. To reflect this, use the following modifications of the character's Attributes:

M.E.: -1 P.S.: -2

Over Sixteen

For all intents and purposes, these characters are considered full-grown adults. There are no modifications.

Removing the Penalties

At the Game Master's discretion, the characters can remove these penalties when they reach the next age group.

Power Control (Optional)

A lot of comics with Teen Heroes show that super abilities aren't always easy to control. To reflect this, I have added a new stat for the Teen Hero character: Power Control (P.C.).

The player must roll below the character's P.C. number to activate his/her powers every time he attempts to use the powers (Note: This rule only applies to powers that need to be activated). When a character is in a stressful situation (G.M.'s discretion), the player must also roll to *deactivate* the powers.

All Teen Hero characters start with a base P.C. of 12. This could increase based on when the character's super abilities manifested (Roll on Table below), through training alongside another character with similar abilities, and when the character gains experience.

Age When Super Abilities Manifested

01-10% Infancy: This character's abilities have been around since he/she was born. While it may have been stressful for his/her parents to cope with, this character has **total control** of his or her abilities. This character can ignore the P.C. rules completely.

11-20% Childhood: This character has had these abilities since his/her childhood (between the ages of 6 and 10). The use of the abilities is practically second nature to him/her. Add an additional 5 points to this character's P.C. level.

21-40% Pre-Adolescence: This character's abilities came out when the character was approaching puberty (ages 11-13). Due to the psychological, emotional, and physical changes the character went through at this time, his/her control isn't great, but it is OK when he/she concentrates. Add an additional 2 points to this character's P.C. level.

41-70% Adolescence: This character gained his/her abilities during puberty. Due to all of the aforementioned changes, this character has learned very little control of his/her abilities. Add 1 additional point to this character's P.C.

71-00% Recently: This character's abilities just surfaced. He/she has had little, or no, time to acquaint him/herself with the new abilities. This character's P.C. stays at its base level.

Note: This applies only to those Power Categories that have super abilities. This has no bearing on Magic, Robotics or Psionics.

Also Note: Aliens whose abilities are innate are considered to have had their abilities since infancy. No need for a P.C. stat.

Experience

Teen Heroes also gain more control over their abilities as a result of using them. A character's P.C. raises by one (1) point every other level of experience.

Total Control

Once a character's P.C. has reached a total of 20, they no longer need to roll to activate or deactivate their abilities. It is assumed that once they reach this level, they have Total Control of their powers.

Note: Some G.M.s may want to include these rules in their regular campaigns. Feel free to do this, as it adds a new level to your games.



Special Training: Sidekick

An experienced hero has taken this character under his wing to train him in what it takes to be a hero (or, possibly, a villain). The mentor will instruct the student in combat skills, scholastic skills, and special abilities, as well as morality and ethics.

All of the other character types in this game are based on using special gifts (training, powers, abilities) to become a super hero. This character type is different in that it is the only one that is dedicated, from the beginning, to grooming the character to become a hero.

To start, an experienced character (4th level or higher), must agree to train this new character. This means that he will not just be watching out for himself anymore, but he must also take care to protect his apprentice. This is a huge responsibility. Before playing, it is assumed that the mentor has taught the student for a month, before letting him go out on adventures with him.

Note: Usually only Hardware, Physical Training, and Special Training characters will take on a Sidekick, though there are exceptions.

Step 1 & 2 — The usual. Keep in mind these abilities might change due to skill selections.

Step 4 — Determine the grade the character is in (as indicated in the new character creation rules), but do **not** select the skills as shown. Instead, the character gets the following:
The same Hand to Hand style as the mentor, at first level.

Athletics
Body Building

Basic Mechanics
Basic Electronics

Two Scholastic skills that the mentor has, at first level -5%.

2 Weapon Proficiencies (Modern or Ancient) that the mentor has.

6 Secondary skills.

Step 5 — The Sidekick's alignment must be of the same type as his mentor (i.e. Good, Selfish, or Evil).

Special Ability: Learning Bonus

As the Sidekick progresses in experience, he gains one new scholastic skill that his mentor has taught him at every other level, with a +10% bonus.

The Sidekick gains one (1) new Secondary skill at second level, and two (2) Secondary skills every third level. In addition, he gets a +5% bonus to these Secondary skills if his Mentor has the same skill.

At fourth and seventh levels, the Sidekick can learn one (1) Special Ability that his mentor has at -20% (if applicable). From that point on, the skill will increase at a rate of +4% (or the normal skill increase, whichever is higher) until it reaches base level for that character type. From that point on, the percentage increase will be the same as a character of that type.

Note: It is assumed that the Sidekick has learned all of the prerequisite skills to gain the Special Abilities.

These rules only apply while the character is under the tutelage of the mentor. If, for whatever reason, the mentor and Sidekick sever their relationship, the Sidekick's Special Abilities that he learned from his mentor freeze at whatever level they were at prior to the relationship ending, unless the character has reached the base level for that character type.

The character can then attempt to find a new mentor to continue his training, or he can attempt to find a Mentor from another Power Category to train him.

Example: Captain Eagle (a Hardware: Mechanical Genius character) has taken on Sparrow as his Sidekick. At third level, Sparrow learns Building Super Vehicles as his first Special Ability (at -20%, for a skill total of 64%). At fifth level, he learns Recognize Vehicle Quality (at -20%, for a total of 30%).

When Sparrow hits sixth level, Captain Eagle is killed by his arch-nemesis. Because Sparrow has no Mentor, his Building Super Vehicles skill freezes at 80% (still 4% under base level), and his Recognize Vehicle Quality skill freezes at 35% (still 15% under base level) until he can find another Hardware: Mechanical Genius as his Mentor.

If he is unable to find another Mentor, he only gains skill increases on his scholastic skills.

Ninjas & Superspies™

Hell: Frozen Over

An Adventure for Ninjas & Superspies™
and RECON® By Erik Growen

Preamble and Basic Overview

Hell: Frozen Over takes place during the Chinese counter-offensive (November 26th-December 24th 1950) against the 1st Marine Division at the Chosin Reservoir in the Korean War. The overconfident Gen. Douglas MacArthur had had the UN forces chasing the remnants of the North Korean Army (NKA) back towards the Yalu River. MacArthur did not believe the Chinese would intervene. It was a fatal miscalculation. On November 26th 1950, the Chinese attacked the Chosin Reservoir area with nine divisions, a total of around 120,000 men. In their way stood the 1st Marine Division and Task Force (TF) MacLean.

The Player Characters are Marine troops from the 1st Marine Division. They are a reconnaissance squad patrolling the area between the 1st Marines and TF MacLean. Initially, their job is merely to stay alive. In the horrendous cold and in the face of overwhelming enemy forces, this is no simple task. They find themselves cut off from the Marines, and their fate is then tied to TF MacLean. The TF goes through an agonizing week of combat that finally results in its nearly total annihilation. The Player Characters, like the rest of the few survivors, flee into the mountains to avoid the enemy.

After a few days of breaking contact with the Chinese troops, they come across a massacred village and are witness to stunning barbarities. They (hopefully) try to save some of the civilians still alive and then try to make their way back to friendly lines with civilians in tow. When they arrive they are debriefed by military intelligence, who replenish their squad and send them back behind enemy lines to hunt down the officer in charge of the village massacre. They attack the officer's camp but he gets away. The Marines then proceed to follow the Chinese officer all the way to the Yalu River for a final confrontation.

Even if they are successful, the Marines still have to get back through the enemy forces to the Marine lines. They are running on a short clock, as the 1st Marine Division is evacuating by Hungnam port on the 24th of December. If the Player Characters do not get back in time, they have a further long trek through enemy-held territory to make it back to the re-stabilizing UN defensive line far to the south.

About this Adventure

Hell: Frozen Over is set up to be a one-shot adventure, or a spring board to a campaign. It can be run using **Ninjas & Superspies™**, **Beyond the Supernatural™** or **Deluxe Revised RECON®**. Conversion statistics and modifications for RECON are at the end of the adventure. Conversions for running a game during the Korean War have been provided including weapons, aircraft, O.C.C. options, and skill modifications as well as rules for weather effects, battlefield exhaustion and much more.

Player Character™ Options

As the characters are all members of the U.S. Marines, they are limited to the Academy Officer O.C.C. (only one allowed, who will begin with the rank of Lieutenant) or Veteran Grunt O.C.C.

Roll 1D10 for Level and Rank

Level

- 1-2: Level 1, raw recruit (-1 on Rank roll).
- 3-5: Level 2, seen some limited action in Korea.
- 6-8: Level 3, seen serious action in Korea (+1 on Rank roll).
- 9-10: Level 4, World War II vet (+2 on Rank roll).

Rank

- 1-3: Private
- 4-5: Private First Class (PFC)
- 6-8: Corporal
- 9: Lance Corporal
- 10: Sergeant

Skill & Skill Program Restrictions

Skills not available in this adventure:

Laser Communications
Microwave Communications
Microfilm/Microfiche/Microdot Technology
Radio: Satellite Relay
Computer Networks
Computer Operation
Computer Programming
Supercomputers
Computer Repair
Jet Aircraft Mechanics
Pilot: Jet
Pilot: Fighter Jet
Orbital & Interplanetary Navigation
Astrophysics
W.P. Energy Weapons
W.P. Infantry Missiles

Skill Programs not available in this adventure:

Electronic Communication Gizmo
Telephone Hacking
Computer Hacking
Microchip Technology
Gizmoteer Cybernetics
Medical Cybernetics
Information Gathering
Helicopter Aviation

Note: Although helicopters existed and were used on the battlefield to remove casualties, the Player Characters are Marine line infantry and would have no access to such skill program training. This also applies to Jet Aircraft.

Other Skill Program Modifications:

Spy Network Administration: Remove Computer Operation, Laser Communication & Microwave Communication and add Language, Military Intelligence & Basic Electronics.

Security Specialist: Remove Computer Operation and add Basic Electronics.

Electronic Warfare: Remove Laser Communications and add Telephone Networks.

Intelligence: Remove Microfilm/Microfiche & Microdot Technology and add Language.

Combat Aircraft: Remove Jet Aircraft Mechanic and add Aircraft Mechanic.

Journalist: Remove Computer Operation and T.V./Video and add Language.

Communication: Remove T.V./Video and add Telephone Networks.

Science: Remove Computer Operation and add 1 Science skill at +10%.

The rest of the skill programs may be used as presented in *Ninjas & Superspies™*.

Rules Additions

Battlefield Horror Factor

This is derived from the Shell-Shock rules presented in *Rifts® World Book 11: Coalition War Campaign™* and the modifications to it in *Destiny's Call* in *The Rifter®* #14.

All Mystical creatures have a Horror Factor. This represents either the creature's appearance or its aura of evil and power, or a combination of the two. When confronted with such a creature, humans must roll 1D20 to see if they are momentarily stunned by the sheer horror of the thing. This roll is only made for the first melee of the encounter.



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The battlefield has its own share of horrors that can shake a human's senses. Being caught in an ambush, having a close friend killed in front of you, etc. A save against battlefield horrors is made the same as a standard Horror Factor roll. Roll 1D20 against the Horror Factor. To save, one must roll equal to or greater than the number. A successful save indicates that the individual is unaffected by the situation and may carry on without any modifiers. If failed the first time in a single battle, the individual loses -1 attack per melee and is -2 on initiative for the first round of combat only. If the character subsequently fails a second save during the same battle, he loses all attacks per melee until he escapes from facing the object/situation.

If the individual is faced with an imminent attack or a situation where he must overcome his fears (such as saving himself or his comrades), the individual can roll again to save. If successful the individual can act, but with only half of his attacks per melee, and all other combat bonuses are halved as well. A failed roll means no change.

Examples of Battlefield Horror Factors:

Note: All modifiers to H.F. (i.e. for Frostbite, the Massacre Site...) are cumulative. This represents the slow erosion of the characters' will as they have horror after horror heaped upon them.

Marines can subtract one from each of these numbers to reflect their quasi-elite training and status.

- Battle or the sound of battle: H.F. 10
- Bombardment by artillery or aircraft: H.F. 11
- Outnumbered 3:1 or greater: H.F. 12
- To initiate close combat: H.F. 10
- Ambushed: H.F. 12
- Commanding Officer hit: H.F. 13
- Player Character or friend hit: H.F. 14
- Torture or threat of torture: H.F. 15
- Seeing napalm victims: H.F. 15
- Stacking frozen corpses: H.F. 13 (if failed, the next H.F. check is made with a +1 modifier to save).
- Suffering Frostbite: H.F. 12 (if failed, the next H.F. check is made with a +1 modifier to save).
- Witnessing the Massacre Site (later in this adventure): H.F. 14 (if failed, the next H.F. check is made with a +1 modifier to save).
- Witnessing the "meal" at the Massacre Site: H.F. 17 (if failed, the next H.F. check is made with a +1 modifier to save).
- Major Yung Ngo: H.F. 12 (once the characters have seen him in action at the village massacre site).
- Witnessing animated corpses: H.F. 12 (14 if they are from the characters' own squad; if failed, the next H.F. check is made with a +1 modifier to save).

Fighting in Sub-Zero Temperatures

Frostbite

Historically, the actual temperature during the events portrayed in this adventure hovered around 0F (-18C) or less, with winds blowing around 10-20 mph (16-32 km). The worst day recorded had a wind chill of -84F (-64C). As the battle progresses, the Player Characters will see the unit they are with get decimated by the weather as well as the enemy. Frostbite was an epidemic and counted for far more casualties than gunfire. Here is a chart to calculate the wind chill temperatures:

Zero wind	0F (-18C)	-10F (-23C)	-20F (-29C)	-30F (-35C)
10 mph (16 km)	-20F (-29C)	-30F (-35C)	-60F (-51C)	-70F (-57C)
20 mph (32 km)	-40F (-40C)	-50F (-46C)	-80F (-62C)	-90F (-68C)
30 mph (48 km)	-50F (-46C)	-60F (-51C)	-90F (-68C)	-100F(-73C)
40 mph (64 km)	-60F (-51C)	-70F (-57C)	-100F(-73C)	-110F(-79C)

Check the wind chill temperature against the following chart to see how long it takes to develop frostbite or severe frostbite:

Wind Chill Frostbite Severe Frostbite

-20F (-29C)	10 hours	days
-30F (-35C)	5 hours	1 day
-40F (-40C)	2 hours	16 hours
-50F (-46C)	1 hour	12 hours
-60F (-51C)	30 minutes	10 hours
-70F (-57C)	20 minutes	5 hours
-80F (-62C)	10 minutes	2 hours
-90F (-68C)	6 minutes	1 hour
-100F (-73C)	4 minutes	30 minutes
-110F (-79C)	2 minutes	20 minutes

Marine and Chinese winter gear (parkas, etc.) essentially add +50F to effective temperature. US Army gear (just layers of summer clothing) adds +10F.

Example: The temperature during the worst day was -20F (-29C) with a wind of 30 mph (48 kph), giving a wind chill of -90F (-68C). Without any protection, the character would get frostbite in 6 minutes and severe frostbite in 1 hour. With US Army gear on, the effective temperature is raised to -80F, so the times change to 10 minutes and 2 hours respectively. If the character is wearing Marine gear, the effective temperature becomes -40F (-40C), so the times become a more survivable 2 hours and 16 hours respectively.

A character suffering from Frostbite is penalized by -3 to all combat rolls and to hit numbers as well as -15% to all skills. A character with Severe Frostbite is penalized -6 / -50%. Roll on the following chart if a character gets Severe Frostbite to see exactly what area is effected:

- 01-15% Arm**
- 16-30% Hand**
- 31-45% Fingers, roll 1D10 to determine how many are affected.**
- 46-60% Leg**
- 61-80% Foot**
- 81-00% Toes, roll 1D10 to determine how many are affected.**

First Aid may be used to counter all the effects of Frostbite as long as the Player makes his roll and the character has heat available in some form. Medical Doctor is required to deal with Severe Frostbite. The end result of a successful Medical Doctor roll means the character does not lose the limbs or digits affected. Failure means amputation of the effected limb/digits will be required.

Night Fighting

All ranged combat that takes place during the night will be at -6 to strike.

Battlefield Exhaustion

This was a major factor in the grinding down of the effectiveness of many of the units on both sides involved in the constant

fighting. For the purposes of this adventure, the characters will suffer a penalty of -1 on all combat rolls and -5% on all skills for each straight day of combat. This means that during the first battle, the characters will be fine on November 27th, but on the 28th they will be -1/-5%, and by December 1st they will be -4/-20%. Exhaustion penalties are reduced by 1/5% per 6 hours of sleep or full day without enemy contact.

Effects of the Cold on Equipment

The US M1919A1 Browning machinegun firing mechanism freezes so that only single shots are able to be fired if the temperature drops to -30F (-35C), including wind chill.

The M1917A1 with an anti-freeze solution in the barrel jackets is not effected, nor is the M2 .50 cal machinegun. At night when the temperature plummets, automatic weapons have to be tried (fired) every 15 to 30 minutes to keep them operational. This includes sub-machineguns, semi-automatic rifles (if more than a single shot per melee is going to be fired), and machineguns.

Korean War Weapons & Equipment

Small Arms (US Marines, Army and ROK)

.45 Colt Automatic 1911A1 Pistol

Country: U.S., Cartridge: .45 cal, Feed: 7 round box mag, Weight: 1.19 kg, Length: 21.9 cm, Muzzle Velocity: 250 mps, Approx. Effective Range: 50 m, Damage: 4D6.

.45 Thompson M1 SMG

Country: U.S., Cartridge: .45 cal, Feed: 20 or 30 round box mag, Weight: 4.8 kg, Length: 85.2 cm, Muzzle Velocity: 282 mps, Approx. Effective Range: 200 m, Damage: 4D6.

M1 Carbine

Country: U.S., Cartridge: .30 cal, Feed: 15 or 30 round box mag, Weight: 2.286 kg, Length: 90.4 cm, Muzzle Velocity: 600 mps, Approx. Effective Range: 300 m, Damage: 3D6.

M1 Garand Rifle

Country: U.S., Cartridge: 7.62x63mm, Feed: 8 round clip, Weight: 4.3 kg, Length: 110.6 cm, Muzzle Velocity: 855 mps, Approx. Effective Range: 600 m, Damage: 4D6.

Browning M1919A4 Machine Gun

Country: U.S., Cartridge: 7.62x63mm, Feed: 250 round belt, Weight: 14.06 kg, Length: 104.4 cm, Muzzle Velocity: 853 mps, Approx. Effective Range: 1,000 m, Damage: 4D6.

M1917A1 Water-Cooled Machine Gun

Country: U.S., Cartridge: 7.62x63mm, Feed: 250 round belt, Weight: 42.18 kg, Length: 97.79 cm, Muzzle Velocity: 853 mps, Approx. Effective Range: 1,310 m, Damage: 4D6.

Browning M2 .50 cal Machine Gun

Country: U.S., Cartridge: 12.7x99mm, Feed: 105 round belt, Weight: 39.1 kg, Length: 165.3 cm, Muzzle Velocity: 810 mps, Approx. Effective Range: 6,000 m, Damage: 1D6x10+10.

60mm M19 Mortar

Country: U.S., Weight: 19.1 kg, Length: .819 m, Effective Range: 1,790 m, Damage: 6D6x10, Blast Radius: 20 m.

4.2" M-30 Mortar

Country: U.S., Weight: 301 kg, Length: 1.524 m, Effective Range: 4,000 m, Damage: 1D6x100, Blast Radius: 30 m.

M-101A1 105mm Howitzer

Country: U.S., Weight: 2,245 kg, Length: 2.574 m, Effective Range: 11,000 m, Damage: 1D6x100, Blast Radius: 30 m.

M-20 75mm Recoilless Rifle

Country: U.S., Weight: 51.94 kg, Length: 1.86 m, Effective Range: 6,400 m, Damage: 4D6x10, Blast Radius: 20 m.

MK II Pineapple Grenade

Country: U.S., Weight: .596 kg, Effective Casualty Radius: 10 m, Effective Range: 30 m, Damage: 1D6x10.

M7 Grenade Launcher for the M1 Garand (fires Mk II Grenade)

Country: U.S., Weight: .596 kg, Effective Casualty Radius: 10 m, Effective Range: 180 m, Damage: 1D6x10.

Small Arms (China & North Korea)

7.62 mm Model 1895 Nagant Revolver

Country: U.S.S.R., Cartridge: 7.62 mm, Feed: 7 round cylinder, Weight: .748 kg, Length: 23.01 cm, Muzzle Velocity: 272 mps, Approx. Effective Range: 20 m, Damage: 1D6.

7.62mm TT-33 Tokarev

Country: U.S.S.R., Cartridge: 7.62 mm, Feed: 8 round box mag, Weight: .85 kg, Length: 19.6 cm, Muzzle Velocity: 420 mps, Approx. Effective Range: 55 m, Damage: 1D8.

PPSh 41 SMG/ Type 50 SMG

Country: U.S.S.R./China, Cartridge: 7.62x25 mm, Feed: 71 round drum, Weight: 3.64 kg, Length: 83.8 cm, Muzzle Velocity: 488 mps, Approx. Effective Range: 200 m, Damage: 1D6.

7.62mm Simonov Self-Loading (SKS)

Country: U.S.S.R., Cartridge: 7.62x39mm, Feed: 10 round box mag, Weight: 3.85 kg, Length: 102.1 cm, Muzzle Velocity: 735 mps, Approx. Effective Range: 400 m, Damage: 5D6.

DP Machine Gun

Country: U.S.S.R., Cartridge: 7.62x39mm, Feed: 47 round pan, Weight: 9.12 kg, Length: 129 cm, Muzzle Velocity: 841 mps, Approx. Effective Range: 1,000 m, Damage: 4D6.

Chi-Com Grenade

Country: China, Weight: .596 kg, Effective Casualty Radius: 10 m, Effective Range: 30 m, Damage: 1D6x10.

Airplanes

The 1st Marine Air Wing endeavored to keep at least 24 attack aircraft on station above the 1st Marine Division at all times during the day, and as many as they could at night.

Vought AU-1 Corsair

Country: U.S.

Crew: 1

A.R.: 5, S.D.C.: 300.

Span: 40 feet, 9 inches (12.47 m), Length: 34 feet, 10 inches (10.49 m).

Engine: Pratt & Whitney R-2800-83W Double Wasp 2,300 hp, Speed: 238 mph (383 km), Range: 484 miles (779 km), Operational Ceiling: 19,500 feet (5,944 m), Speed Class: 16, T.M.F.: 6.

Weapons: 4x 20mm Cannon.

Effective Range: 3,280 feet (999.7 m), Damage: 1D8x10+10. Could carry 3x 1,000lb (450 kg) bombs.

Blast Radius: 90 feet (27.4 m), Damage: 1D10x100, or 10x 5 inch (13 cm) rockets.

Blast Radius: 40 feet (12.2 m), Damage: 1D4x100.

Fairchild C-119 "Flying Boxcar"

Country: U.S.

Crew: 2

A.R.: 5, S.D.C.: 450.

Span: 109 feet, 3 inches (33.31 m), Length: 88 feet, 9 inches (27.09 m).

Engine: 2x Wright Whirlind R-3350-85 at 3,500hp each, Speed: 260 mph (418.43 km), Range: 2,000 miles (3,218.69 km), Operational Ceiling: 23,900 feet (7,284.72 m), Speed Class: 16, T.M.F.: 4.

Weapons: None.

Note: Cargo carrying capacity of 10,000 lbs (4,536 kg), or 62 troops, or 35 stretchers with 4 attendants.

Average Troop Statistics

US or ROK Infantry

H.P.: 15, S.D.C.: 25, Chi: 15.

Attacks per Melee: 2

Martial Arts: Basic: Hand to Hand (Agent).

Armed with: M1 Garand Rifle.

US Marine

H.P.: 15, S.D.C.: 25, Chi: 15.

Attacks per Melee: 3

Martial Arts: Basic: Hand to Hand (Agent).

Armed with: M1 Garand Rifle.

Chinese PLA Infantry

H.P.: 15, S.D.C.: 20, Chi: 15.

Attacks per Melee: 2

Martial Arts: Basic: Hand to Hand (Agent).

Armed with: PPsh-41 or SKS.

Kit

Each Player Character soldier is assigned the following equipment:

Helmet

Webbing

Pack

Personal Weapon (M1 Garand)

Ammunition (20x 8 round clips; 160 rounds total)

2 Mk II Grenades

Boots

Wind Resistant, Reversible, Hooded Parka

Woolen Combat Shirt & Woolen Pants (some also have their Cotton Field Trousers)

Long Woolen Underwear & Two Pairs of Socks

Pile Jacket

Woolen Trigger Finger Mittens

Wool Scarf

Adventure Background

Behind the scenes plans and motivations



Chinese Major Yung Ngo's story

Yung Ngo, whose name means "Eternal Hunger," is an Undead Immortal. Ngo has attempted, and succeeded in, deriving immortality through the consumption of Negative Chi. As such, he has a permanent need for Negative Chi, and he gets it through eating meat. Not just any meat, however. The closer the meat is to the Immortal's flesh, the easier it is to digest. This means, ideally, he consumes human flesh to sustain himself.

The Major is now 253 years old, and has no intention of ending his existence any time soon. He was born in 1697, during the Manchu Dynasty under the great Emperor K'ang-si, who consolidated the Manchu conquest of China and Mongolia. When Ngo was young he took part in the 1720 conquest of Tibet, and stayed behind with the garrisoning force in the capital of Lhasa. It was there that he started to hear of special powers

and abilities that were available through meditation and rituals, one of which was the possibility of immortality. After being wounded in battle during the conquest, he developed an unhealthy fear of dying that led him to explore these myths with single-minded vigor. Eventually the pursuit paid off for him as he discovered through myths, writings, and oral tales, one of the secrets to immortality. Unfortunately, it was the corrupted Undead path.

For the next 200+ years Ngo kept himself nourished by following wars, massacring innocents and eating them to fuel his body. He has collected a cult following over these years of those who worship him as a demon. When he attained a position of power within the People's Liberation Army (PLA), he brought his followers into his unit. Slowly the non-followers were weeded out until his entire platoon was made up of worshipers. He now follows yet another war and consumes the innocent caught behind the Chinese PLA lines. He plans to set himself up as a military intelligence advisor within the North Korean government, once the PLA has completely defeated the UN forces on the peninsula. This would put him in a powerful position, from which he could continue to feed on the civilian population with no questions asked. Those who disappeared would be branded UN sympathizers who died in custody during "questioning."

The Nemesis' Statistics

Chinese Major Yung Ngo

("Eternal Hunger") of Military Intelligence

Undead Immortal

Age: 253 years old.

Alignment: Diabolic.

Negative Chi: 15

The Eight Attributes: I.Q. 10, M.E. 17, M.A. 9, P.S. 13, P.P. 14, P.E. 15, P.B. 7, Spd 19.

Hit Points: 58, S.D.C.: 70, P.P.E.: 8.

Level of Experience: 12th level Chun Tzu O.C.C.

Martial Arts: Fu Chiao Pai Kung Fu (Tiger Claw).

Attacks per Melee: 5

Escape Moves: Roll with Punch/Fall/Impact and Maintain Balance, Leap, Back Flip.

Attack Moves: Leap, Roll, Back Flip.

Basic Defensive Moves: Dodge, Parry, and Automatic Parry.

Advanced Defenses: Multiple Dodge, Power Block/Parry/Claw (Special! An attempt to simultaneously parry and Claw attack. Roll once for the parry, if successful then roll a second time to see if the strike is effective. Does 1D6 damage).

Hand Attacks: Power Punch, Backhand, Claw Hand, Palm Strike, Duo-Claw Strike (Special! This is a special ripping attack that uses both hands. Using this attack means giving up the Automatic Parry for the entire melee round. Successful attack does 2D6 damage).

Basic Foot Attacks: Kick attack, Tripping/Leg Hooks, Crescent Kick, Wheel Kick, Backward Sweep, Reverse Turning Kick (Combination Dodge/Kick), Drop Kick (Combination Fall/Dodge/Kick).

Jumping Foot Attacks: Jump Kick.

Special Attacks: Death Blow, Leap Attack, Combined Strike/Parry.

Holds/Locks: None.

Weapon Katas: W.P. Claws (+4 to strike, +4 to parry).

Martial Art Abilities or Powers:

1. Stone Ox: Body hardening.

2. Chagi or Kick Practice: Body hardening.

3. Karumi-Jutsu: He can reduce his body's weight by 85% with total concentration. He can fall from up to 2,000 feet (610 m) and land, suffering no more than 2D4 damage. Each additional 20 feet (6.1 m) inflicts 1 more point of damage. Can jump up to 50 feet (15.2 m), and climb any surface without fear of falling. Can tread lightly across delicate surfaces, or extremely fragile bridges.

4. Control Revulsion: Resistance to horror.

5. Fist Gesture: Chi attack, range 35 feet (10.7 m), Death Blow 19-20.

6. Dark Chi or Chakuri-Chi: Channels Negative Chi. This allows him to "tap" the Negative Chi of the world. If there is any Negative Chi in the area, he can replenish any lost Chi by dynamically charging himself with internal energy, adding extra Chi every melee round. He can also "channel" the surrounding Negative Chi into Chi attacks or other Chi Mastery skills. When channeling, the Negative Chi of the area can be expended each melee round, without depleting his personal Chi. The maximum Chi that can be tapped is equal to his current level of Negative Chi (15). Note that if he ever falls to zero Chi, it becomes impossible for him to tap Negative Chi.

Language Skill: Chinese Stage 4/Classical Chinese Literature 120%.

Philosophical Training: Taoism.

Bonuses: +4 to Roll with impact or fall, +2 to Strike, +3 to Parry, +3 to damage, Critical Strike from behind on 18-20, Death Blow 19-20, +1 to save vs psionics, +3 to leap (+18 feet/5.4 m distance), +2 to Strike & +1 to damage with a kick, +3 to save vs pain, +2 to save vs possession, +8 to save vs Horror Factor.

O.C.C. Skills: Wei Qi, The Game of Go 105%, Chinese History 115%, Detect Ambush 105%, Land Navigation 93%, Paramedic 127%, Wilderness Survival 105%, Radio: Basic 110%, Artistic Calligraphy 88%, W.P. Large Sword (+4 to strike, +6 to parry, +2 to throw), W.P. Rifle (+4 to strike), Pilot Automobile 96/88%, Korean Language 80%, Demolitions 84%, Prowl 94%.

O.C.C. Related Skills: Mountaineering 105%, Military Intelligence 95%, Tracking 95%, Interrogation 105%, Fishing 125%, Cook 127%.

Secondary Skills: Geomancy 75%, Acrobatics, Athletics (General), Body Building, W.P. Pistol (+3 to strike), W.P. Blunt (+2 to strike, +2 to parry, +1 to throw), W.P. Knife (+1 to strike, +2 to throw), W.P. Paired (sword and knife), Sniper (+2 to strike), Pilot Truck 85%.

Immortal Undead Powers & Abilities:

Appear as Dead: Can be a fairly convincing corpse by not moving and ceasing breathing for awhile.

Negative Chi Sensitivity: His senses are attuned to the flow of Negative Chi. In an area of Negative Chi, no matter how slight, he can effectively "see" in total darkness, or through the shroud of a cloud or smoke (although being engulfed in a cloud of Living Chi, either from a spell caster or a dragon, will blind the Chi senses). While tuned-in to Negative Chi, he can sense every movement of any nearby living creature (whether charged with Negative Chi, Positive Chi, or un-

charged), even those approaching from behind. If he takes a moment (1 melee round) to quietly sense the flow of Negative Chi, the movement of any Positive Chi-charged entity in the region of Negative Chi can be detected, even those who are miles away (provided the area of Negative Chi extends for miles). In an area of Positive Chi or no Chi, he loses all his special sensitivity and is dependent on the ordinary senses of the human body.

Animate & Control Dead: By touching any corpse, human or animal, he can attempt to fill it with Negative Chi and thereby animate it. If the corpse is fairly fresh and the brain is undamaged, it can be commanded to behave intelligently (or at least as intelligent as it was when it was alive); up to twelve bodies can be commanded. Other corpses, with brain damage or badly decayed (one week in the heat will rot the brain, but it can keep for weeks in the cold), must be constantly controlled by him, and only one such being can be handled at a time. Any corpse animated by him will be subject to any commands delivered with Negative Chi.

Weaknesses/ Vulnerabilities:

1. **Positive Chi:** Any area with a flow of Positive Chi works like a continual drain on his Negative Chi. If unprotected (by, say, Diverting Incoming Chi), a number of points of Negative Chi are lost every melee round equal to the flow of Positive Chi.

2. **Sunlight:** A corroding influence on the undead, sunlight causes his flesh to burn. Superficial burns inflicted by morning or late afternoon sun do 1D6 damage for every ten minutes of exposure. The glare of the noon time sun does 2D6 damage for every ten minutes of exposure. Of course, where there is sunlight there is usually Positive Chi, which means his Negative Chi would also be destroyed.

3. **Water:** While water itself does nothing to harm him, being immersed in water that flows with Positive Chi is potentially fatal. If he ends up in a stream, river, waterfall, ocean or lake where there is a powerful flow of Positive Chi, each melee round all the Positive Chi will turn into a Chi Attack, inflicting 3D6 points of damage for each point of Positive Chi flow. Chi damage is done directly to his Negative Chi. No defense is possible and his only chance is to get out of the water before all the Negative Chi is gone. Note that some waters, like stagnant pools, frightening looking swamps, sewers and certain underground currents, are filled with Negative Chi. In these waters he can take a refreshing bath.

4. **Decay:** He must constantly battle his own decaying flesh. Each time he slips up on his maintenance program (goes a year without eating properly), he will slip down to another stage of decay. Likewise, each time he takes serious Hit Point damage in combat, it can be disfiguring and inflicts another stage of decay (after all, the flesh does not heal).

He is presently in the Undead stage of decay. This makes him somewhat thinner than usual, with a very pale complexion. See **Mystic China™**, page 119, for the other stages of decay should they become necessary (for example, the Player Characters really hammer him in combat).

Gear: Uniform of a Chinese Major, Giau Tzu Jen sword (2D6+2), 2 Biau Dau throwing knives (1D6, range 60 feet/18.3 m), Bi Shou dagger (1D4), Shi-Zi Jen sword of exceptional quality and age (3D6), Tokarev pistol (1D8), Claws (1D6).

Description: Maj. Yung Ngo is a fairly short man with jet black hair and almost completely black eyes. These eyes are totally devoid of emotion. He appears pale, cold with blue veins showing just below the surface of his stretched, taut skin.

Historical Background

Korean War

Korea was promised its freedom from Japan by the allies while World War II was still raging. With the quick surrender of Japan following the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the allies hurriedly established the 38th parallel as an arbitrary dividing line for the surrender of Japanese forces in Korea. The USSR would accept the surrender north of the 38th, and the Japanese south of the line would surrender to the US. The USSR, however, took the dividing line to be a political division, which was not the original intent.

The UN sponsored elections in Korea were declared illegal by the USSR who set up a puppet government called the Democratic People's Republic of Korea with its new capital at Pyongyang. They then trained and equipped the North Korean Army (NKA) and then evacuated the country in 1948. The US trained the Republic of Korea (ROK) troops and pulled out, by and large, in 1949.

The government in Pyongyang decided on a military reunification and so invaded across the 38th parallel on June 25th 1950. Initially incredibly successful, the NKA pushed the ROK into a toehold centered on Pusan on the southern tip of the peninsula. This was countered by General Douglas MacArthur's brilliant Inchon landings that cut the invaders off from their supply lines and ended up sending them reeling back across the 38th parallel. MacArthur then pushed past the dividing line and overran the capital of Pyongyang. The UN/ROK advance reached the Yalu River. The Chinese had been threatening intervention since the UN forces crossed the 38th and once they made it to the Yalu they made good on the threat.

Chosin Reservoir November-December 1950

9 Chinese divisions (120,000 men) of the Chinese 9th Army Group, PLA, slam into the overextended UN (14,000 men) lines near the Chosin Reservoir. The largest formation standing in the way was the 1st Marine Division, which carried out a fighting retreat to the southeast to get to the evacuation port of Hungnam. Task Force MacLean was across the Reservoir, on the eastern flank of the 1st Marines, when the hammer fell.

Player Briefing

The Player Characters are all US Marines, part of the 1st Marine Division. They form, along with enough NPCs to fill out the unit, a reconnaissance squad of 13 men. They are tasked with keeping an eye on the terrain between the Marines and TF MacLean (attached from 7th Infantry, X Corps). TF MacLean's original mission is to secure the important road running along the east side of the reservoir and thence north to the Manchurian border. They have just finished a patrol and are within the lines of TF MacLean when the Chinese offensive begins. It cuts them off from the 1st Marines. Their fate is tied from that point on with that of TF MacLean.

Adding to the fairly common knowledge that Chinese forces in undetermined strength are roaming the mountains in the vicinity, the Player Marines are tasked to inform Colonel MacLean that on the day before (November 25th 1950), several Chinese prisoners had revealed the presence of three fresh divisions operating in the area of the Reservoir and their mission was to sever the Marine supply route.

Composition of TF MacLean

1st Battalion 32nd Infantry Regiment, 7th Infantry Division with 30-50 ROK soldiers attached to each company.

3rd Battalion 31st Infantry Regiment, 7th Infantry Division

Attached from 33rd Infantry Regiment:

3rd Battalion Heavy Mortar Company

Intelligence and Reconnaissance Platoon

Detachment of medical personnel

57th Field Artillery Battalion. (They would be short one of its firing batteries but would have with it Battery D, 15th AAA Automatic Weapons Battalion — a unit equipped with halftracks mounting quadruple .50 cal. machine guns (M-16s) and dual 40mm guns (M-19s).

Time line of the battle to save TF MacLean/Faith

November 26, 1950 — Chinese counter-offensive against the UN forces begins. The temperature is below zero and with the wind it is bitterly cold. The howling wind swirls the dry snow around in eddies across the blasted landscape, which is utterly devoid of vegetation in most places.

November 27

Chi: The Chi in the area of the battle is +2 during the day and -2 during the night.

Hook: TF MacLean (3,200 men, artillery, AA guns, trucks and jeeps) takes up station. The Intelligence & Reconnaissance Platoon is sent out and never heard from again.

Line: After the platoon fails to report, Col. Allen D. MacLean orders the Players' Marine Recce section to go find them.

Sinker: They did not report back because they were overrun and killed to a man by the Chinese troops advancing on TF MacLean's position. There are somewhere around 20-30,000 Chinese heading their way. The Player Characters only get about 2 miles (3.2 km) from the TF when they begin to run into a seemingly endless horde of enemy troops who are definitely not the North Koreans they have been pursuing towards Manchuria. They have to use all their skill to make it back to the TF alive to report to Col. MacLean, so that he can get his command at least somewhat prepared for what is coming. That night the TF is probed by Chinese recon platoons at 2100 hours. The attack begins in force at midnight using mortars and small arms. The TF loses control of the highest ridge in the area. With this, the entire defensive position is vulnerable to attack. Communications with the 57th Artillery Battery is intermittent at best, as the Battery is busy defending its own position. This hampers any artillery support, which is being called for all along the line. The odd infiltrator manages to get within the US perimeter and snipes until tracked down (a possible task for the Player Characters). The TF manages to hold out in spite of losing ground. At least 100 US troops are Killed In Action (KIA) not counting the numerous Wounded In Action (WIA).

November 28

Chi: The Chi in the battle area drops to +1 during the day and -3 during the night.

Hook: Counterattacks are initiated to recover some of the ground lost during the night, with mixed results in spite of Marine Corsair and local Artillery support from the 57th. The medical personnel are rapidly swamped with casualties from the weather and from enemy fire.

Line: In the afternoon, a helicopter lands in a rice paddy near the battalion's command post buildings. It is General Almond (X Corps commander), there to discuss the situation with Lt. Col. Faith. Before leaving, General Almond explains that he has three Silver Star medals in his pocket, one of which is for Colonel Faith. He asks the colonel to select two men to receive the others, and a small group to witness the presentation.

Sinker: Lt. Col. Faith looks around and points to a clerk and one of the Player Characters and has the General give them their medals. The General then tells the troops that the enemy who is delaying them for the moment is nothing more than remnants of Chinese divisions fleeing north, and that the unit will still be attacking tomorrow and going all the way to the Yalu. As the helicopter rises from the ground, Lt. Col. Faith rips the medal from his parka in disgust and throws it down in the snow.



Chinese harassing fire continues all day. Enemy attacks begin again at dusk. Col. MacLean and Lt. Col. Don C. Faith head out from their HQ area to reorganize the southern sector of the line following the night's clashes. The Player Characters accompany them so that they can assess the situation prior to reporting back to the 1st Marine Division.

November 29

Chi: The Chi remains at +1 during the day and -3 during the night.

Hook: Lt. Col. Faith reorganizes the defense, and the Chinese assaults are repeatedly held off. The troops are helped by re-supply drops by C-119 "Flying Boxcars" dropping ammunition and food, but this does little to alleviate the suffering caused by frostbite and exhaustion. A few Marine Corsairs ply the sky above their position to add their ground attack capabilities. Faith waits through most of the day for word on the radio telling of a relief force coming to help TF Maclean escape. The call never comes, as 1st Marine Division is completely surrounded and under attack as well.

Line: As per Col. MacLean's orders, Lt. Col. Faith orders all of the Wounded In Action (WIA) into the TF trucks. As the ice on the Reservoir is thought to be too thin for the trucks, the column will go through the winding mountain passes to fight its way back to 1st Marine Division. All of the Anti-Air (AA) assets are placed at the front of the column. The Chinese sense the Americans are moving out, and press their attack with a little more vigor. Faith orders the column to move out. The first road block is hit at day break and is covered by 100 Chinese troops, which are dispersed by an attack by the TF.

The TF starts to take fire from across the Reservoir. Col. MacLean crawls over to check out the situation. He comes to the conclusion that they are being fired upon by US Marines and he runs out onto the ice to stop them from killing any of his men accidentally. Col. MacLean is fatally wrong. He is hit four times by enemy fire — the men watching can see his body jerk with each impact — but he continues and reaches the opposite side. The Chinese break cover and charge across the ice. They try to grab MacLean and drag him back to their lines (historically, this is what happened). The Player Characters may stop this from happening, but MacLean is nonetheless severely wounded and unconscious. Either way, Lt. Col. Faith becomes the new Commanding Officer (CO) of TF MacLean (now TF Faith). Faith leads an attack against the Chinese who shot MacLean and although successful, MacLean (if grabbed) is never found.

The column is forced to halt repeatedly due to snipers, road blocks, mortar attacks and infantry assaults. The casualties pile up. Some of the US soldiers flee/desert across the Reservoir ice only to be cut down by the Chinese on the other side. The TF is running low on rations, ammunition and gasoline. The Marine Corsairs fly constant missions around the shrinking perimeter, radioing in that they could drop their bomb loads anywhere around the perimeter and be assured of causing enemy casualties. The entire area around the Task Force is crawling with Chinese troops. Airdrops of supplies sometimes fall outside of the perimeter. Desperate rumors circulate that a relief Task Force is being assembled to save them.

Sinker: The Player Marines watch one of the supply drops fall outside of the perimeter and are ordered to retrieve it for the TF. Facing them are a platoon (30) of Chinese who are also making a dash for the supplies. If successful, the Marines haul back some rations and much needed ammunition (all Player Characters may add 5x 8 rounds clips to their ammo load). At night, in the face of constant harassing attacks, the men huddle within their perimeter and even light fires in desperation to stave off the cold.

November 30

Chi: The Chi drops to 0 during the day and -4 during the night.

Hook: A litter-bearing helicopter flies in twice and removes four of the most critically wounded. At 2200 hours, the Chinese attack again in a fairly disorganized manner following their usual pattern of firing off flares and blowing whistles before attacking. Every time the whistles begin to blow the troops flinch in anticipation of further battle and horrors. Mortar ammunition runs out for the 60mm mortars. Four times the perimeter is breached, but frantic counterattacks drive the Chinese back. The fifth takes a hill inside the perimeter, threatening the entire defense. A patched together counterattack force takes high casualties driving them off (the Player Characters could be part of this action).

The enemy fire on the column is constant, as are the mounting casualties. There are fewer than 1 in 10 troops still able to offer resistance. The rest are WIA, exhausted, frostbitten and demoralized.

Line: Further road blocks slow down the column and the numbers continue to get whittled down.

Sinker: Random Attack Table

There is a 01-75% chance every 2 hours of being attacked during the day (6 am-10 pm) and a 01-40% chance every 2 hours of night attacks (10 pm-6 am).

01-20% Sniper — A single gunman aims at drivers, officers (if they can be picked out) or radiomen.

21-40% Mortar Attack — 2D10 shells fall into the column as it moves through the passes.

41-60% Infantry Probe — A platoon (30 men) does a probing attack to check how strong the column still is.

61-80% Infantry Assault — A company (90 men) assaults the column.

81-00% Road Block — Rocks, vehicles, etc., are strewn across the road, requiring the column to halt.

December 1

Chi: Chi bottoms out at -1 during the day and -4 during the night.

Hook: At 0700, Col. Faith goes to the aid station and tries to see if any of the men are up to re-joining the defense. Some of the casualties are due to "just" frostbite and exhaustion. They are returned to the front line. The aid station runs out of bandages and morphine, and they had lost most of the surgical equipment during the initial move. The wounded are suffering terribly, and many die, and there is little the doctors can do. They desperately begin to use the parachutes from the airdrops to make bandages and coverings for the wounded.

The weather gets worse. Word comes that there will be no relief column coming to save them, so Col. Faith decides to try to break out of the perimeter rather than risk another night fight. He plans to start the breakout about 1300 hours, so that it will coincide with the air strike which is promised as soon as the weather clears up a bit. He orders the artillery batteries and the Heavy Mortar Company to shoot up all remaining ammunition before that time, and then to destroy their weapons. He places the 1st Battalion, 32nd Infantry, in the lead, followed by the 57th Field Artillery Battalion (without their howitzers), the Heavy

Mortar Company (also without their primary weapons, the mortars), and the 3rd Battalion of the 31st Infantry. Halftrack vehicles of Battery D, 15th AAA Automatic Weapons Battalion, are interspersed throughout the column. To minimize danger from enemy attack, Colonel Faith wants the column to be as short as possible — only enough vehicles to haul out the wounded. All other men will walk. Vehicles, equipment, and supplies that cannot be carried, or that are not necessary for the move, are to be destroyed.

The men select twenty-two of the best vehicles — 2 ½ ton, 3/4 ton and 1/4 ton trucks, and line them up on the road. They drain gasoline from the other vehicles, and fill the tanks of the ones they are going to take. Then they destroy the remaining vehicles with grenades.

Line: Chinese mortars begin firing in the vicinity of the wounded in the trucks. Fragments tear through the canvas sides and into the unsuspecting wounded men, who can only lie there yelling for help. The Corsairs appear on time. Four of the planes, in close support of the breakout action, miss their intended target and drop napalm bombs on the lead elements. The sticky flames cover the men leading the column, and their piercing screams can be heard throughout the Task Force as they quickly burn to death. Everyone scatters and disorganization quickly ensues. What is left of the lead element charges forward and makes it through the enemy blocking force, and drives up the road 2 miles (3.2 km) to where they find that a bridge that they have to cross has been destroyed. The main column finally catches up two hours later. A half-track is used to tow the trucks across the stream beside the wreckage of the bridge, under Chinese sniper fire. The Task Force takes a number of casualties including drivers, and more of the wounded they carry in the back get hit by stray rifle rounds.

Once across, the column gets halted by another road block. Heavy enemy fire begins raking the trucks full of wounded. Casualties mount and the screams of the terrified wounded men fill the air. Lt. Col. Faith organizes another attack group to break through. Half of the attacking force is already wounded. All who are able are ordered into the attack, including the Player Characters and any WIA who can still carry a rifle. Two ROK troopers refuse to go, so Col. Faith draws his sidearm and shoots them both dead where they stand. Faith is mortally wounded by a hand grenade while leading the attack.

By 1700, command and control has been virtually lost, with almost every officer and senior NCO out of action. The TF begins to break up into small groups of individuals, all pressing through to escape. The last remnant of TF Faith, under the command now of Maj. Robert E. Jones, struggle to keep the column moving in spite of numerous truck losses. The damaged vehicles are pushed over the cliff facing the Reservoir to make way for the still operational vehicles. The wounded are piled up two deep in the remaining trucks with men on the hoods and hanging off the sides. The lead element now consists of only 150-200 able-bodied and lesser wounded men. They have little formation and no plan beyond pressing on.

Sinker: A road block consisting of two knocked-out tanks is bypassed and then the column reaches Hudong-ni, a small lumber village. As the leading truck, which is some distance ahead of the rest of the column, enters the town, Chinese soldiers open fire and kill the driver. The truck overturns and spills out the

wounded men, a few of whom manage to crawl back up the road to warn the rest of the column. The rest are left to the cold and the Chinese. At this point, Major Jones decides it would be advisable to get away from the road and follow the railroad tracks south. The railroad parallels the road, but is closer to the reservoir shoreline. Some of the men follow him, leaving 75-100 men with the trucks.

By 2200, a probe against the village is turned back by Chinese fire. The rear of the column comes under fire as well, and the decision is made by all to make a run for it. The depleted TF pushes through into the village and loses the drivers of the first three trucks. Someone tries to get the lead vehicles off the road. Pushed by the fourth, the first three trucks, without their drivers, jam together, roll off the embankment, and overturn. The wounded men inside are spilled out like chaff and crushed by their own vehicles. It begins to snow again. The remnants of the TF attempt to get to the Marine lines. Only 385 make it. (For example: 1st Battalion, 32nd Infantry Regiment counted only 181 survivors, from 1,053 that had begun the operation.) The Player Characters are driven by Chinese attackers into the mountains, where they must attempt to break contact and start the long march back to friendly lines.



The Escape & Evasion

Chi: Chi in the mountains is +3 during the day and -1 at night.

Hook: The remains of the Marine recce squad, exhausted, frostbitten and demoralized, need to break contact with the Chinese or they will eventually be overwhelmed and wiped out.

Line: Random Contact Table

There is a 01-50% chance every 2 hours of being attacked during the day (6 am-10 pm), and a 01-20% chance every 2 hours of night attacks (10 pm-6 am).

- 01-20% Sniper** — A lone gunman takes shots at the Marines.
- 21-40% Mortar Attack** — 2D10 shells fall into the squad's position.
- 41-60% Infantry Squad** — A squad (10 men) runs into the Marines while patrolling for survivors of the TF.
- 61-80% Infantry Platoon** — A platoon (30 men) runs into the Marines.
- 81-00% Infantry Company** — A company (90 men) are spotted by the Marines, making their way straight for them.

Sinker: The Marine squad has to go six hours without contact to be considered free of the immediate battle zone. If the man on point for the squad makes his Prowl rolls, the chances of contact are lowered by -20%. The chances can be cut a further -10% to -20% at the G.M.'s discretion for particularly clever evasion ideas by the Players.

The Village

Chi: Chi around the village is -4.

Hook: On the day after the Marines have broken off contact, they run into a North Korean village. Even at a quick glance, it is easy to discern that something is very wrong. There appear to be bodies of civilian peasants lying everywhere in a haphazard manner. If they investigate further, they find that horrors have been visited upon the village. There are elderly men and women who have been bayoneted to death, and groups of 20 or more villagers lined up and gunned down by the side of the road. At the temple in the center of the village the Marines find women and children, who had obviously been praying, shot in the back of the head. There are villagers who have been disemboweled, had their hands cut off, tongues cut out, and some even crudely scalped. Grenades have been used inside crowded huts and some of the huts have been burned down. Charred bodies lay in the ruins. The stunned Marines can estimate at least 200 killed.

Line: As the Marines stagger in a half-daze through the massacred villagers and their ruined homes, they hear the sound of gunfire and screams coming from the far end of the village.

Sinker: If they move forward and check out the source of the sounds, they discover a group of 20 villagers being gunned down by troops in Chinese uniforms carrying PPsh-41 sub-machineguns. They also see other soldiers hacking up the fresh corpses with their bayonets and throwing the pieces into large cooking pots over slow simmering fire pits. The Marines can also pick out an officer being presented with some of the pieces of the victims. To their absolute horror, he proceeds to tear away at them with his teeth, the blood running down his uniform.

It is up to them to use what little ammunition they have left to try and save some of the villagers who are still alive (5D10 of them). There are 25 Chinese troops in the area, but they are not expecting an attack. The Major will have them withdraw if they take 5 or more casualties, as he does not know the size of the attacking force and is unwilling to risk his command.

Retreat Again!

Chi: The Chi in the mountains is +3 in the day and -1 at night.

Hook: The Marines now continue their attempt to link up with the 1st Marine Division, with the villagers they saved in tow. Needless to say, none of the villagers speak any other lan-

guage than Korean, which might make communication difficult at best. This will become very apparent in any stressful situations like attacks by Chinese troops.

Line: Random Contact Table

There is a 01-50% chance every 12 hours of being attacked during the day (6 am-6 pm) and a 01-20% chance every 12 hours of night attacks (6 pm-6 am).

- 01-20% Sniper** — A lone gunman takes shots at the Marines and villagers, picking on any stragglers.
- 21-40% Mortar Attack** — 2D10 shells fall into the squad's position.
- 41-60% Infantry Squad** — A squad (10 men) runs into the Marines while patrolling for survivors of the TF.
- 61-80% Infantry Platoon** — A platoon (30 men) runs into the Marines.
- 81-00% Infantry Company** — A company (90 men) are spotted by the Marines, making their way straight for them.

Sinker: The Marine squad has to travel five days to make it back to the 1st Marine Division lines, as they have been retreating at the same time. If the man on point for the squad makes his Prowl rolls, the chances of contact are lowered by -20%. The chances can be cut a further -10% to -20% at the G.M.'s discretion for particularly clever evasion ideas by the Player Characters. Needless to say, tactical options are hampered by the need to save the horror-numbered civilians. As well, the weather does not let up. The civilians are dressed for the cold as well as the Marines, but they have no food or water with them. The Marines will have to share what little they have until that too runs out. The Marines may still have an operational radio, and if they do they can try to get through (Radio: Basic roll) to set up a cargo drop by C-119. If they survive the five days, they run into the outlying units of the Marine Division and are taken into friendly lines. They discover the Marines are still on the move heading towards the port of Hungnam for evacuation.

New Orders

Chi: The Chi in the Marine perimeter is +3, as it is in the mountains.

Hook: The remnants of the Players' Marine squad are ordered to report to Divisional Headquarters (HQ). There they meet with the Divisional CO, Major General Oliver P. Smith, and a small handful of other officers, most of whom seem to be from the Intelligence branch. He requests to hear exactly what transpired during the destruction of TF MacLean/Faith and afterwards. If the Player Characters come clean about the village massacre, they notice two of the Intelligence officers exchanging a glance. After they are dismissed from the meeting, the two officers approach the squad. They give their names as Col. Johnson and Major Brown. They have the Player Characters go over their story again, paying particular attention to, and asking for details of, the village massacre. They thank them for their time and point out the mess tent where they can get some hot food, and the shower setup so they can clean themselves up.

Line: After the Player Characters have had some time to clean up and eat, Col. Johnson and Major Brown order them into a meeting inside a closed tent. There they are presented with the news that they are going to have to go back behind enemy lines to track down and kill the officer they saw at the village. They explain that they have heard of this man before, and

drawing on the Player Characters' description, pin him as the officer behind similar massacres of ROK troops who had surrendered and US Army personnel who had been overrun earlier in the war. He must be dealt with. Their squad will be replenished with fresh Marines (up to the standard complement of 13 men). It must be them, because only they can positively identify the officer in question. They will be operating under a particular time constraint, as X Corps will be evacuated from the port of Hungnam by the 24th of December. If they are not back by then, they will be left behind.

Note: It is therefore VERY important to keep track of the date.

Sinker: They must re-penetrate the enemy lines and head back to the village to begin tracking down the officer and his men.

Front Line Contact Table

There is a 01-50% chance every 6 hours of being attacked during the day (6 am-6 pm), and a 01-20% chance every 6 hours of night attacks (6 pm-6 am).

- 01-20%** Sniper — A lone gunman takes shots at the Marines.
- 21-40%** Mortar Attack — 2D10 shells fall into the squad's position.
- 41-60%** Infantry Squad — The Marines run into a squad of enemy troops (10 men).
- 61-80%** Infantry Platoon — The Marines run into a platoon of enemy troops (30 men).
- 81-00%** Infantry Company — the Marines run into a company of enemy troops (90 men).

If the man on point for the squad makes his Prowl rolls, the chances of contact are lowered by -20%. The chances can be cut a further -10% to -20% at the G.M.'s discretion for particularly clever evasion ideas by the Players. Once they have made their way through the mountains for five days (after the first two days, only roll for contact every 12 hours), they arrive back at the village. The scene is much as it was before, only now the hundreds of corpses are frozen solid in the last position they were in when they died. Using Tracking or any other relevant skills the Players can come up with, they begin to track the Chinese unit through the mountains, following a trail of discarded human remains and gnawed-on bones for two days. During this section there is no chance of running into any Chinese military units. They catch up with the killer platoon on the third day.

The unit they are following consists of an under-strength platoon, numbering only 25 men less any casualties taken in their first encounter with the Marines, plus the officer. Once again, as they are well behind enemy lines, getting the drop on them should be feasible. If they approach during the day, the unit will be holed up in a cave (-6 Chi within the cave, +3 Chi outside in the mountains) away from the sunlight. There are 5 guards posted at the cave entrance at any given time. During the night, the unit is on the move again in a north/northeasterly direction. Any small villages they pass through are given the same treatment as they gave the last one. The villagers are slaughtered to a man, and then some are further mutilated and consumed. Note that at night, Major Yung Ngo's Negative Chi Sensitivity will sense the Marine squad from miles away, but he is essentially blind during the day except for in the caves themselves. The Major will animate the corpses of his own men or fallen Marines in his defense. If the fight is going badly against his

men, the Major will abandon them in order to save himself. This will occur as soon as his unit has taken 10 casualties.

Track the Devil

Chi: Chi in the mountains is +3 in the day and -1 at night.

Hook: Chances are that the Major was able to effect an escape during the chaos of the last battle. If the Player Characters actually dispatch him, then ignore this section and proceed to **Final Retreat**. As they really do not know what they are dealing with, or what his weaknesses are, there is only a remote chance of them pulling off an early, easy victory.

With the Major fleeing, all that is left to do in the immediate area is mop up what is left of his unit. They will attempt to avoid being taken prisoner, but will not commit suicide to prevent it. If the Player Characters are lucky enough to grab themselves a prisoner, their job in tracking down the Major becomes a lot easier. If anyone succeeds on an Interrogation roll (and can speak Chinese), the prisoner will reveal to them their intended route of march and their destination. It seems the Major was heading back towards the Yalu River and the Manchurian border, in order to link up with an ally in the Chinese military. If no one has Interrogation, then a Player Character may try to use his M.A. to persuade the prisoner to talk (once again requiring the Chinese language). This will require the Player to roll under M.A. x 2. If successful, he gets the information on the route of march, but not about the link up. The route information can also be obtained by poring over the paper work left behind. It is all in Chinese, however. Baring any of the eventualities, the Marines can randomly attempt to stumble upon his trail. They have four days to do so, and have only a 01-15% chance of picking up the trail through random search. This can be raised to 01-25% with a successful Tracking roll.

Line: Traveling through enemy-held territory crawling with previously-shattered, and now re-building, North Korean Divisions, as well as Chinese troops heading for the front, not to mention the almost endless supply column, without getting caught, will take all of the Marines' skill.

Sinker: Random Rear Area Contact Table

There is a 01-50% chance every 12 hours of an encounter during the day (6 am-6 pm) and a 01-20% chance every 12 hours of an encounter (6 pm-6 am) at night.

- 01-07%** Sniper — A lone gunman takes shots at the Marines.
- 08-15%** Possible Ambush Site — The Marines may want to note the location for future use.
- 16-25%** Mortar Attack — 2D10 shells fall into the squad's position.
- 26-30%** Small Unmapped Village — This seems to be an undisturbed population of about 50 people.
- 31-40%** Medical Team — Lightly armed group of 12 men carrying 3 wounded men to the rear.
- 41-45%** Empty Supply Column — A group of 2D6 trucks heading back to the rear for more supplies.
- 46-55%** Infantry Squad — The Marines run into a squad of enemy troops (10 men).
- 56-60%** Civilian Contact — This could be peasant laborers, hunters, wood gatherers, etc.
- 61-65%** False Alarm — The Marines think they see/hear something that keeps them on edge.
- 66-75%** Infantry Platoon — The Marines run into a platoon of enemy troops (30 men).

76-90% Supply Column — A group of 2D6 trucks loaded with supplies for the front, with 10 guards.

91-00% Infantry Company — The Marines run into a company of enemy troops (90 men).

If the man on point for the squad makes his Prowl rolls, the chances of contact are lowered by -20%. The chances can be cut a further -10% to -20% at the G.M.'s discretion for particularly clever evasion ideas by the Players. They will have to travel after the Major for four days before they can catch up to him.

If the Marines think to try (and have the language skills to do it), they may attempt to get some knowledge of their opponent from the Korean civilian population. With a successful use of the Language skill, they may enquire as to the nature of the Major. If they tell all they know, the civilians can give them some vague hints as to the nature of their nemesis. They will assail them with convoluted mythology and confusing stories that sometimes contradict themselves. A successful I.Q. check will allow them to sift through the information and pull out a useful nugget of information concerning one of the possible vulnerabilities of an Undead Immortal.

At the Yalu

Chi: Chi in the Yalu River itself is +5, the surrounding hills are +3 during the day and 0 at night.

Hook: The Marines catch up with the Major just as he is having a nocturnal meeting with one of his allies in the Chinese military High Command (General Bing Chih). The meeting, in part, is to raise the Major to the rank of Colonel for his successful actions against UN forces. This will give him even more power and leeway to continue his barbarity against the civilian population of Korea. It is also part of a maneuver by the Major to get himself included in the structure of the Korean government, for after the anticipated victory over the UN forces. General Chih has the connections to help get him a permanent posting in post-war united Korea.

Line: This makes it imperative that the Marines put an end to his actions. As the meeting is being held in secret, there is not the usual high level of security around the General.

Sinker: It is the Marines' objective to kill the Major. Any other outcome is essentially a failure. Taking out the General will also help the war effort for the UN forces. The Major has whatever troops of his have survived the encounters with the Marines standing near him, and the General has a personal bodyguard (H.P.: 25, S.D.C.: 45, Chi: 20. **Attacks per Melee:** 3. **Martial Arts:** Martial Arts Hand to Hand (Agent). **Armed with:** PPSH-41) as well as a platoon (30) of Chinese troops in a loose semi-circle cordon around the meeting site, which takes place right on the bank of the Yalu River. There are no troops watching the river itself, which could potentially be used by the Marines to their advantage. They could use the bank of the river to cover their approach if the Marine on point makes a successful Prowl roll.

Final Retreat

Chi: Chi in the mountains is +3 in the day and -1 at night.

Hook: Successful or not, the survivors have to make their way back to the port of Hungnam before the Marines evacuate on the 24th of December.

Line: This will require them to go back through the enemy territory in reverse to get back, and then through the front lines to safety. Use the **Random Rear Area Contact Table** from **Track the Devil** for the Marines making their way back, until they get to the front line (same number of days it took to get out to the Yalu). Then use the **Front Line Contact Table** from **New Orders** to affect their crossing to friendly lines. Do not forget the effects of weather and exhaustion as the Marines trek their way back to safety.

Sinker: If they get back by the 24th, they are evacuated with the rest of the Marine force to the safety of the southern parts of South Korea. If they fail to get there in time, then they must continue to make their way on foot through swarms of enemy troops to safety.

Wrap-Up and Continuation Ideas

The Marines, if they make it back to safety alive, are met by Col. Johnson and Maj. Brown of Military Intelligence. They are debriefed and are released back to their unit. The two Military Intelligence officers can easily be used for further adventure hooks, either during the rest of the Korean War, or even after (recruit them into the organization). If they failed to destroy Major Ngo, he can become a continuing thorn in their side as they are called to work for Military Intelligence to investigate possible sightings and other weird phenomena that may, or may not, have anything to do with Ngo. This can then easily streamline into a more conventional **Beyond the Supernatural™** or **Ninjas and Superspies™** campaign.

There are also tie-in possibilities to *Destiny's Call* from **The Rifter® #14**. The Marines could get help from the Yung Monastery (a deus ex machina in case the Marines are getting wiped out). The adventure could also be inserted as a "test" during the Monastic Phase of *Destiny's Call* for the students. This would require a bit of re-tooling on the part of the G.M. to insert the ex-OSS Player Characters into the Marines, or just send them against the Major at the village, thus skipping the opening battle. There could also be the possibility that Major Ngo was working for the Infernal Demon Overlord I Gui in one of his plots, or Ngo could even be doing the bidding of the Yama King Yen Lo Wang. Then the **Ninjas & Superspies™** campaign could follow along from there.

Note: The battle for the Chosin, and in particular the destruction of TF MacLean/Faith, is based on historical fact. The US officers named (not including the Military Intelligence officers) are real, and their fates were as described in this adventure. Feel free, as always, to modify and develop the various aspects of *Hell: Frozen Over* as you see fit. Any queries or questions can be posted on the Palladium Message Boards under *The Rifter Forum*, the **Ninjas & Superspies & Mystic China** Board, or the **RECON** board, or you can directly e-mail me at erikgrowen@yahoo.com. Enjoy.

Erik Growen

Deluxe Revised RECON® Conversions

Player Character Options

The only MOS not available is Grenadier.

Replace the Assault Rifle skill with Semi-Automatic Rifle during Character Creation. The Grenade Launcher skill is available for use with the M7 grenade launching attachment for the M1 Garand Rifle.

Note that the Winter Survival skill, if picked, will function as the Medic skill for purposes of dealing with Frostbite. Medic skill is used in place of Medical Doctor to combat Severe Frostbite.

Roll 1d10 for Added Skill Grades and Rank

Skill Grade Adds

- 1-2: No adds, raw recruit (-1 on Rank roll).
- 3-5: +4 Grades, seen some limited action in Korea.
- 6-8: +7 Grades, seen serious action in Korea (+1 on Rank roll).
- 9-10: +10 Grades, World War II vet (+2 on Rank roll).

Rank

- 1-3: Private
- 4-5: Private First Class
- 6-8: Corporal
- 9: Lance Corporal
- 10: Sergeant

Rules Additions

Morale

Morale is a new Major Characteristic. This is to more accurately portray firefights where not everyone becomes Sgt. Rock. It is also useful in place of Horror Factor for this adventure. Morale starts off at a base level depending on rank (+1D10) and goes up (+1D5) each time the character survives a firefight (even if his/her side loses). Add a further +1D10 to the Marine starting Morale, to reflect their more elite training and status.

Starting Morale Levels by Rank:

- Private-PFC: 35
- Corporal-Lance Corporal: 40
- Sergeant-Staff Sergeant: 45
- Platoon Sergeant-Sergeant Major: 50
- 2nd Lieutenant-1st Lieutenant: 50
- Captain: 50
- Major: 55
- Lieutenant Colonel-Colonel: 60

Roll for Morale when the unit is ambushed, a friend gets WIA or KIA, a superior gets WIA or KIA, when under attack by enemy tanks, when under artillery fire, etc.

If failed first time, the Player Character must take cover. He may continue fighting, but will not expose himself.

If failed a second time, the PC will do an orderly withdrawal. This does not mean he has to stop fighting, just that any movement made must be towards friendly lines. The idea is to get out of the firefight.

If failed a third time, the PC routs, possibly even abandoning his weapons and his unit. Survival is all that counts.

When used in lieu of Horror Factor, failure to make the Morale roll the first time results in the Player Character freezing for 1D10 combat rounds. The second failure causes the Player Character to hide immediately, and the third failure has the Player Character fleeing the area at top speed, perhaps even abandoning weapons, equipment and the like.

The following modifiers to the Morale roll may be added for horror purposes:

- Seeing napalm victims: -15%
- Stacking frozen corpses: -10% (if failed, the next Morale check is made with a +10% modifier to the roll).
- Suffering Frostbite: -10% (if failed, the next Morale check is made with a +10% modifier to the roll).
- Witnessing the Massacre Site: -15% (if failed, the next Morale check is made with a +10% modifier to the roll).
- Witnessing the "meal" at the Massacre Site: -20% (if failed, the next Morale check is made with a +10 modifier to the roll).
- Major Yung Ngo: -10% (once the Player Characters have seen him in action at the village massacre site).
- Witnessing animated corpses: -20% (-30% if they are from the Player Characters' own squad; if failed, the next Morale check is made with a +10% modifier to the roll).

Battlefield Exhaustion

For the purposes of this adventure, the Player Characters will take a penalty of -5% on all skills for each straight day of combat. This means that during the first battle, the Player Characters will be fine on November 27th but on the 28th they will be -5%, and by December 1st they will be -20%. Exhaustion penalties are reduced by 5% per 6 hours of sleep or full day without enemy contact.

Korean War Small Arms

.45 Colt Automatic 1911A1 Pistol

- Country: U.S.
- Damage: 3D10+5
- Weight: 1.19 kg
- Length: 21.9 cm
- Magazine: 7 round box
- Rate of Fire: 3
- Maximum Effective Range: 50 m

7.62 mm Model 1895 Nagant Revolver

- Country: USSR
- Damage: 2D10
- Weight: .748 kg
- Length: 23.01 cm
- Magazine: 7 round cylinder
- Rate of Fire: 3
- Maximum Effective Range: 20 m

Tokarev M1933 Pistol

- Country: U.S.S.R.
- Damage: 2D10
- Weight: .769 kg
- Length: 19.5 cm
- Magazine: 8 round box
- Rate of Fire: 3
- Maximum Effective Range: 50 m

.45 Thompson M1 SMG

Country: U.S.
Damage: 3D10+5
Weight: 4.8 kg
Length: 85.2 cm
Magazine: 20 or 30 round box
Rate of Fire: 5
Maximum Effective Range: 200 m

7.62mm Type 50 Chinese Submachine Gun

Country: China
Damage: 2D10
Weight: 3.64 kg
Length: 83.8 cm
Magazine: 35 round box or 71 round drum
Rate of Fire: 5
Maximum Effective Range: 200 m

PPsh-41 SMG

Country: U.S.S.R.
Damage: 2D10
Weight: 3.5 kg
Length: 84.2 cm
Magazine: 35 round box or 71 round drum
Rate of Fire: 5
Maximum Effective Range: 200 m

M2 Carbine

Country: U.S.
Damage: 4D10
Weight: 2.286 kg
Length: 90.4 cm
Magazine: 15 or 30 round box
Rate of Fire: 5
Maximum Effective Range: 300 m

M1 Garand Rifle

Country: U.S.
Damage: 4D10
Weight: 4.3 kg
Length: 110.6 cm
Magazine: 8 round clip
Rate of Fire: 5
Maximum Effective Range: 600 m

SKS Rifle

Country: U.S.S.R.
Damage: 4D10+5
Weight: 3.85 kg
Length: 102.1 cm
Magazine: 10 round clip
Rate of Fire: 5
Maximum Effective Range: 400 m

Browning M1919A4 Machine Gun

Country: U.S.
Damage: 4D10
Weight: 14.06 kg
Length: 104.4 cm

Magazine: 250 round belt
Rate of Fire: 7
Maximum Effective Range: 1,000 m

M1917A1 .30 Caliber Water-Cooled Machine Gun

Country: U.S.
Damage: 4D10
Weight: 42.18 kg (with tripod and water)
Length: 97.79 cm
Magazine: 250 round belt
Rate of Fire: 7
Maximum Effective Range: 900 m

Browning M2 .50 cal Machine Gun

Country: U.S.
Damage: 5D10+15
Weight: 57 kg
Length: 1,676 m
Magazine: 105 round belt
Rate of Fire: 7
Maximum Effective Range: 1,310 m

DP Machine Gun

Country: U.S.S.R.
Damage: 4D10+5
Weight: 9.12 kg
Length: 129 cm
Magazine: 47 round pan
Rate of Fire: 7
Maximum Effective Range: 800 m

60mm M19 Mortar

Country: U.S.
Weight: 19.1 kg
Length: .819 m
Maximum Effective Range: 1,790 m
Minimum Range: 45 m
Blast Radius: 20 m

Chinese 82mm Mortar

Country: China
Weight: 59 kg
Length: 1.14 m
Maximum Effective Range: 3,600 m
Minimum Range: 18 m
Blast Radius: 25 m
Note: Can fire 81mm US mortar rounds.

M-101A1 105mm Howitzer

As in Deluxe Revised RECON®

M-30 4.2" Mortar

As in Deluxe Revised RECON®

MK II Pineapple Grenade

Country: U.S.
Weight: .596 kg
Blast Radius: 10 m

M7 Grenade Launcher for the M1 Garand

Country: U.S.

Weight: .596 kg

Blast Radius: 10 m

Range: 180 m

M20 75mm Recoilless Rifle

Country: U.S.

Weight: 51.94 kg

Feed: Breech

Maximum Effective Range: 6,400 m

Blast Radius: 20 m

Note: Could fire Smoke, HEAT and HE rounds. Blast Radius is for HE.

Average Troop Statistics

US or ROK Infantry

Armed with: M1 Garand Rifle

ST: 50, AL: 45, AG: 50, Morale: 40

US Marine

Armed with: M1 Garand Rifle

ST: 55, AL: 55, AG: 50, Morale: 45

Chinese Infantry

Armed with: PPsh-41 or SKS

ST: 45, AL: 50, AG: 50, Morale: 40

The Nemesis' Stats

Chinese Major Yung Ngo

("Eternal Hunger") of Military Intelligence

Undead Immortal

Armed with: Tokarev pistol, Sword, 2 Throwing Knives and a Fighting Knife.

ST: 80, AL: 72, AG: 67, Morale: 95

Skills: Unarmed Combat 98%, Detect Ambush 77%, Land Navigation 61%, Medic 62%, Winter Survival 84%, Communications: Basic 50%, Bayonet (Sword) 87%, Semi-Automatic Rifle 40%, Language Basic (Korean) 85%, Demolitions 73%, Silent Movement 75%, Intelligence: Basic 81%, Intelligence: Detect Unit & Rank 73%, Tracking 89%, Interrogation 95%, Pistol 85%, Knife Fighting 77%, Knife Throwing 72%, Sniping.

Special Abilities:

Karumi-Jutsu: He can reduce his body's weight by 85% with total concentration. He can fall from up to 2,000 feet (610 m) and land, suffering no more than 1D10 damage. Each additional 20 feet (6.1 m) inflicts 1 more point of damage. Can jump up to 50 feet (15.2 m), climb any surface without fear of falling, and tread lightly across delicate surfaces, or extremely fragile bridges.

Control Revulsion: Resistance to horror gives him +20% on Morale.

Fist Gesture: Psychic attack with a 75% chance to hit, range 35 feet (10.7 m), damage 3D10. Can only be attempted 5 times per day.

Appear as Dead: Can be a fairly convincing corpse by not moving and ceasing breathing for awhile.

Negative Chi Sensitivity: His senses are attuned to the flow of Negative Chi. In an area of Negative Chi, no matter how

slight, he can effectively "see" in total darkness, or through the shroud of a cloud or smoke. While tuned in to Negative Chi, he can sense every movement of any nearby living creature — even those who are miles away (provided the area of Negative Chi extends for miles). In an area of Positive Chi or no Chi, he loses all his special sensitivity and is dependent on the ordinary senses of the human body.

Animate & Control Dead: By touching any corpse, human or animal, he can attempt to fill it with Negative Chi and thereby animate it. If the corpse is fairly fresh and the brain is undamaged, it can be commanded to behave intelligently (or at least as intelligent as it was when it was alive); up to twelve bodies can be commanded. Other corpses, with brain damage or badly decayed (one week in the heat will rot the brain, but it can keep for weeks in the cold), must be constantly controlled by him and only one such being can be handled at a time. Any corpse animated by him will be subject to any commands delivered with Negative Chi.

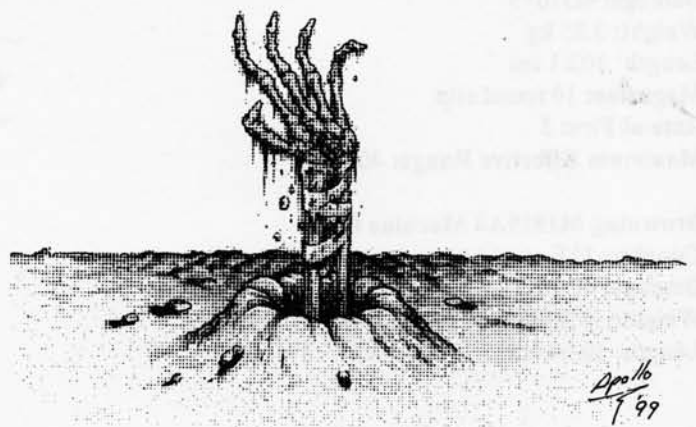
Weaknesses/ Vulnerabilities:

1. Positive Chi: Any area with a flow of Positive Chi works like a continual drain on him — ST points are lost every melee round equal to the flow of Positive Chi.

2. Sunlight: A corroding influence on the Undead, sunlight causes his flesh to burn. Superficial burns inflicted by morning or late afternoon sun do 1D10 damage for every ten minutes of exposure. The glare of the noon time sun does 2D10 damage for every ten minutes of exposure. Of course, where there is sunlight there is usually Positive Chi, which means further damage.

3. Water: While water itself does nothing to harm him, being immersed in water that flows with Positive Chi is potentially fatal. If he ends up in a stream, river, waterfall, ocean or lake where there is a powerful flow of Positive Chi, each melee round all the Positive Chi will turn into a Chi Attack, inflicting 2D10 points of damage for each point of Positive Chi flow. Chi damage is done directly to his ST. No defense is possible and his only chance is to get out of the water before all his ST is gone. Note that some waters, like stagnant pools, frightening looking swamps, sewers and certain underground currents, are filled with Negative Chi. In these waters he can take a refreshing bath.

4. Decay: He must constantly battle his own decaying flesh. Each time he slips up on his maintenance program (goes a year without eating properly), he starts to decay. Likewise, each time he takes serious damage in combat (40 or more ST), it can be further disfiguring, after all the flesh does not heal. At present he is somewhat thinner than normal, with a very pale complexion.



Dark Revelations

Nightbane®

An Optional Supplement for the Nightbane® RPG

By Jason Vey

Prologue

Excerpt from an anonymous letter addressed to Jamie DeDonnan, head of the Pittsburgh, PA branch of the Nocturnes:

It saddens me more than you could possibly know to hear of Tasha's departure from this world. But take heart in the faith that she is somewhere better, now. I wish I could tell you more, but you wouldn't understand. You wouldn't believe. Not even you, with all you've seen and endured. The surface of this war hasn't even been scratched — trust me on this much, at least. Tasha died not because of some simple Nightlord scheme and not because a group of hounds and hunters found her little war party. Tasha died, quite simply, because she knew too much. And there was nothing I could do to stop it.

I loved Tasha very deeply — probably much more than I should have — but there's a war going on out there, and it isn't the war you think it is. The Nightbane, the Nightlords, the vampires... you're all pawns in a game whose rules you don't even know. You fight alongside us, thinking we're just like you. You think we're just more freaks with extraordinary powers. You've seen some of us drop the mask, seen our Gregorian, and you just think we're Nightbane with impossibly beautiful Morpheus forms. Sometimes I pity you. Sometimes I want to laugh at you. Sometimes I have a burning desire to rip your hearts from your chests and show them to all of you. Usually I just envy you.

They say ignorance is bliss. They (whoever they are) don't know how true that is. The hardships you endure in this war are nothing compared to those I have known. They're nothing compared to the truth. Nothing compared to the war beneath the surface. If you really want to know as much as any of you can, find a Guardian and ask them about it, if you can even get them to talk. They're not much for conversation, and with what they've seen and what they know, I don't blame them.

My dear Jamie... You're pawns, and I'm truly sorry for that.

But try not to grieve for Tasha. You know what they say about love and war.

Dark Revelations

Night was always a time for predators. The only thing that really changed and evolved in the world was the nature of the beast. As technology advanced at blinding, deafening, blasphemous speed, so did the evolution of the predator follow. It didn't

matter whether the predator was natural or supernatural, mortal or immortal. The game was always the same. The only thing that really changed was the rules. And the game became so much more interesting when the prey was but another predator.

A lone silhouette perched on a high ledge circling the steeple of a not-so-ancient gothic cathedral. What city this was didn't matter; to him one looked pretty much like the next these days. Rows of skyscrapers built of steel and glass nestled among the countless shadows — one couldn't even call the city a concrete jungle anymore. It was all glass and steel, a technological jungle, a modern dystopia where anything was possible and the law of the land lay somewhere between the law of the jungle and the laws of Murphy. Out here it certainly was survival of the fittest, but one could never tell who that "fittest" was until someone else fell by the wayside and in this jungle, the victor in one battle often found himself defeated and humiliated in the next. That was the way of things here. When any and every pane of a magnificent skyscraper could be smashed with but a large stone hurled from the right hand, nobody was invincible, and he needed that now. It was his time to gain the advantage. It was his time to have revenge.

The gargoyle-still figure pulled a small box from his pocket and tapped it against his palm, then shook a small cylinder into his hand. There was a click, a spark, a flame from a very mundane cigarette lighter, and puffs of smoke rising in the blackness of the city night. The shadow took one last look at the girl who sat on the steps of the church far below. His keen ears picked up the muffled sobs that she shared with the emptiness around and inside of her. She was a once-normal and still very pretty Irish girl with flaming auburn hair and green eyes, a girl who'd been forced to grow up far too fast not five years ago and become a leader who lost one of her most valuable soldiers, and one of her best friends. He watched her and for a brief moment cried with her. Then, with the quiet rustling of enormous wings, the silhouette leapt from his perch and rose into the night.

"Soon, Joshua," he whispered. "Soon I will have my revenge."

* * *

Jamie DeDonnan sat on the stairs of the old church, as she had been for the past few hours, because she didn't know what else to do. She brushed the tears from her jade-green eyes and clawed a few stray strands of strawberry hair from her face as though her war was with them, with her emotions, rather than with the Nightlords. What was she doing here? Five years ago she was just another college student, a normal nineteen-year-old girl from Ireland studying dance in America, living with a great guy she'd planned to marry. A girl who'd gotten out, who was following her dreams when for so many it was hopeless.

Then, one day, the sun didn't come up.

The things she'd experienced since then were things nobody should ever see. The looters gunned Alex down and Jamie found

herself running through the streets of Pittsburgh after a fall down Mount Washington that would have killed any normal person instantly. She remembered vividly the clacking of the armored Hounds as they marched through the streets looking for her, trying to kill her for some reason that escaped her. She remembered the swooping silhouettes of the Hunters circling above. She could still taste the terror in her mouth. Why did she have to be one of the "chosen," as her mentor called it? Nightbane; it almost made her want to laugh. The first time her Morphus had emerged, she'd slaughtered a dozen men and several Hounds with them, all to protect a young teenaged boy whose grotesque Morphus had drawn too much attention and fear. And that, they say, was supposedly her *natural* form? A black panther with metal claws and teeth? A computer fused into her brain behind her eyelids? That was a reflection of who she really was inside? Somehow she doubted it. Who she was inside was simple, and it wasn't some sort of bionic animal. It was Fear. Fear personified.

And that was what it was all about, she supposed. That was what really kept the resistance movement going. It was the only way most of them could deal with all that went on around them. For a lot of people — Jamie included — fear was the only thing that enabled them to kill.

Fate, it seemed, had a little more than mere survival in mind for her. Only a few short years later, here she was, leading the Pittsburgh branch of the Nocturnes. There were several dozen Nightbane, Wampyrs, and humans under her command. Not a huge force, but organized and effective when they had to be. Jamie was a smart leader who used the different aspects of her organization, the adaptability and flexibility of accepting everyone, to her advantage. The humans made contacts with the Spook Squad, the Nightbane with the Resistance and the Warlords. The Wampyrs (when she could convince them to) could masquerade as full-blooded vampires and make contacts in that particular underworld. The Seekers had made contact with her, but she hadn't reciprocated yet. She wasn't sure if she could trust that specific organization. They meant well, she knew, but magic and shadowy dealings didn't go well together, in her book, and she was already afraid that there were spies in her organization. But she was a good leader.

Or so she tried to tell herself.

In the end, though, if she was such a good leader, why was Tasha dead? Why had she sacrificed her best friend and confidant to the Hounds and Hunters? The others thought that her ability to do such a thing was what made her a good leader, and in a way she supposed that was true. But it meant something else as well. It meant sacrificing a piece of something she'd fought so hard these past five years to hang on to. It meant giving ground to something that festered within her. It meant distancing herself from her troops, whom she cared very dearly for. It meant the beginnings of an admission that she was no longer a human being.

She was Nightbane. Her sole purpose in this time and place was to defeat the Nightlord invasion of this world and send the Ba'al rushing back to their Nightlands prison with their proverbial tails between their legs. She didn't like it one bit. She wanted to perform and dance. She wanted to sing, but dreams were no longer in the cards for her. Love was no longer in the cards for her.

But it obviously was for Tasha, she thought, glaring again at the letter in her trembling hands. How had Tasha hidden this from her? What did this person have to do with Tasha's death? And what did Tasha know that Jamie didn't? What was she hiding that was so important? If there was another facet to this war, Jamie had to know what it was, for the sake of her troops and her faction. Maybe for the sake of this planet, because every battle lost by the Nightbane was a victory for the Ba'al, and every victory for the Ba'al was a loss for humankind.

Jamie choked back another onslaught of quiet sobs and scanned the enigmatic note again. "The Lightbringers," she mumbled. "I suppose I'll have t'be findin' myself one of 'em, won't I? We'll get t'the bottom o' this mystery, if it takes the rest o' me bloody existence."

She crumpled the letter; the rage built inside her again. It was time to begin. The comfort once offered by a church was no longer there, and she had a job to do. She looked around to be sure there were no innocents about, and let her true self surface.

A sleek, jet-black panther leapt from the shadows of the cathedral and ran through the streets, its metal claws and fangs gleaming in the moonlight.

* * *

The clouds rolled in fast, and then the rain started — one of those soaking mists that seem to seep in even through doors and windows so that those in shelter are as miserable from it as those outdoors. The panther that was Jamie DeDonnan sat crouched in the shadows, drenched through. A low growl rumbled up from her belly, but it was not a growl of rage or anger; rather, the growl was one of pity and remorse. Water ran off of her sleek fur in rivulets and dripped from her whiskers, but she gazed out at those before her and knew that even in her situation, she was one of the lucky ones. True, she may be an outcast, forced to hide from the eyes of most people, walking in darkness where others walked in light. She may be forced to lead a shadow war against other monsters, also hidden from normal men. She may have to see those close to her die as part of that war. At least the deaths she saw therein served some purpose. At least, at the end of every day, she had a roof over her head, electricity, and running water.

Here, underneath a bridge on the Allegheny River, such things may as well not even have existed. Here, bodies shivered in the rain, huddled together in a futile attempt for warmth. Here, people died every day of exposure and disease, their lives wasted and empty. Had she tear ducts in this form, Jamie quite possibly would have cried at the sad plight of this community of the homeless and downtrodden. Still, she felt a strange kinship with these others who were cast from the light and hidden from the view of more fortunate men and women.

I'm looking at the future of humanity, she thought. *This is what lies in store for everyone if we lose.*

But the war wouldn't be lost. She couldn't allow that. By the goddess, Tasha's death would not be in vain. As distasteful a reminder as this place was, it was necessary for her to be here. This was the only place she knew of to find one of the blasted Guardians, curse their secrecy. Still, she supposed she should at least be grateful for their driving need to help ease the suffering

of these poor souls. Luca would be along; there was no doubt in her mind. So she sat crouched deeply in the shadows of her perch, an old stone platform under the bridge and about ten feet above the ground, and waited, comfortably hidden behind a shroud of darkness.

Her wait was not a long one. Soon enough, a brief glint of light and the glimmer of a trash barrel fire off of stark white skin flashed in the corner of her eye, drawing her attention to the figure approaching the encampment in the distance. *Here he comes.*

The Guardian glided among the people of this little community. He held his head high as he worked his way from one huddled group to the next and stopped at each to lend what aid and comfort he could. As always, Jamie couldn't help but admire him for a moment. Luca was handsome, for a Guardian. His features, though childlike, were finely chiseled, and his pale skin had the luster of porcelain. He wore his long, blond hair tied loosely back at his neck, and a white collarless shirt only served to enhance the light that somehow seemed to emanate from every inch of his body. There was a slight yellowish glow in his eyes, and he radiated an aura of peace and calm. The people of this place were glad for his presence, were visibly comforted by it. Jamie wasn't overly fond of the man; she thought he took his reputation to the extreme and enjoyed the power that came from playing his role just a bit too much, but he was still an impressive sight to behold, and he was actually doing some good in the process.

She let out a sigh and shifted back to her Facade, where a tear could finally make its way down her cheek. At least *someone* was doing good for these people, no matter her personal opinion of him. She resolved at that moment to just borrow him for a little while. She just needed answers, and she'd get them as quickly as possible, then let him get back to his duties. She sat back in appreciation and watched him move her way, biding her time as he worked among the sick. A bizarre combination of patience and anxiety welled inside of her, and she smoothed her black silk blouse in an attempt to make herself look more presentable. The rain had stopped and even here among the filth that defined the lives of these lost souls, there was an almost clean smell in the air.

It was time. Luca was right beneath her perch now, talking quietly with an old homeless man. The old man was crying — sobbing, actually, like a child — and Luca had his hand on the old man's shoulder. Luca said something, and like magic, the old man began to giggle through his tears. The two embraced like long lost brothers at a family funeral, and Luca sent the old man on his way. He stood with a sigh, his hands stuffed into the pockets of his khaki pants, and observed his handiwork for a few moments. Satisfied that the spirits of these people were lifted, at least for a little while, he turned to leave.

Jamie stepped from the shadows and said in a quiet voice, "*Dia duit*, Luca."

Luca looked up at her, his eyebrows raised. "Hello to you as well, Miss DeDonnan. I wish I could say it's a pleasure." He seemed surprised to see her, but not in the least startled and rather unmoved. Then, as an afterthought, he added, "Huh. What do you know? *Tuigim Gaeilge*."

"Ye speak Gaelic almost as well ye understand it, it would seem." Jamie leapt from her perch to stand face-to-face with the

Guardian. To Luca's mind she appeared in human form every bit the cat that hid inside her, with grace, stealth, and sleek beauty. She looked him directly in his pale gray eyes and said simply, "Let's talk."

"I'm afraid I don't have time for this," Luca said, turning once again to leave the scene.

Jamie caught him by the arm and spun him back around. Her grip was too strong for a woman her size, and her gaze like ice as she stared him down. "I dinna want t'be your enemy, so let's not force this," she whispered. "Why do you foster this tension between our factions?"

Luca gave a derisive snort. "*An dáiríre atá tú?*"

"Ye can speak English; Gaelic ain't a novelty t'me. Aye, to answer ye, I'm dead serious. It ain't the Nocturnes that're causing the trouble between us. We're all on the same side, Luca. The last thing we need is a war startin' inside the war."

"We're uneasy allies at best. You consort with *them*."

"Aye, it's true enough I've Wampyrs in my command. And can it be also true that in yer high-minded notion of good and evil, you've forgotten that they're just as much victims as anyone else?"

"Victims? The only good vampire is a dead one. Half or full, it's all the same. A bloodsucker is a bloodsucker."

"No, it ain't! It's a disease, and one they'd one and all give anything t'be rid of. But instead of playing the victims, they use the gifts this disease gives them to fight the good fight. Just like you and me."

"Look, Miss DeDonnan, if you came to argue moral philosophy, I'm afraid I really don't have the time. I truly am busy, and I get quite enough of this from Tasha when she comes to..."

"Tasha's dead, Luca."

Luca staggered backwards a step, shocked. "...Dead?"

"Aye. They — whoever they are — set her up. Actually, they set me up t' send her into a trap. Now can we talk?"

Luca hung his head for a minute, thinking. "My car is around the corner. Let's go somewhere more private."

* * *

The Cathedral of Learning was a Pittsburgh landmark. Towering over the city's eastern borough known as Oakland, the main building and pride of the University of Pittsburgh was always to Jamie's eyes a wonder to behold. It was always a landmark, like a beacon or lighthouse of old, with its gothic tower that stretched forty storeys into the sky and was visible for miles in every direction.

Luca led Jamie inside the Cathedral to the immense commons room that acted almost as a courtyard. Though Jamie had been here before, the incredible architecture and craftsmanship never ceased to amaze her. The stone walls and ceiling of the commons room were carved with dozens of stone arches and the room rose a full three storeys above the floor, so that students on the second and third levels could gaze down into the courtyard from three sides and view its arches, spires, and winding staircases. More than one student, Jamie knew, was caught breathless upon first entering the building, and it seemed a fitting place for their discussion. Jamie and Luca took seats in the cen-

ter of the room, facing one another, each trying to figure out where to begin.

"Shouldn't this place be closed at this time o' night?"

Luca dismissed the question with a wave of his hand. "The Lightbringers have ways into many such places, when it suits our needs. If you like, we can go to the museum later."

Cocky jerk, Jamie thought. He'd even seated himself in a chair that resembled a throne, and looked down his nose at her in her stiff-backed wooden chair. Why did the Guardians have to be so bloody self-righteous? This was a war, not some holy crusade. It was dark and dirty and cruel, and it was over survival, not for the purpose of "fostering the greater good," or some other such nonsense.

"I suppose it doesn't matter," she said, biting back a retort. "Uneasy allies we may be, but in the end that's better than enemies. I need your help."

"Took you long enough to ask," Luca said. He gazed at the arm of his chair and dug halfheartedly at some graffiti carved there. He seemed uncomfortable, suddenly, pensive. He seemed... distracted, as though he were wrestling with some inner turmoil, some half-forgotten memory. "How..." he hesitated a moment, genuine pain crossing his face. Lifting his head in a manner that was almost one of shame, he swallowed hard. When he spoke again, his voice was little more than a whisper. "How did it happen?"

Ababúna, I really thought I knew Tasha, but is there anyone who didn't love the girl? She regarded him intently, weighing just how much he needed to know. In the end, she decided that if she expected him to answer her questions, she'd better answer his.

"It was just supposed t'be a scouting mission. Simple, routine. Nothing overly dangerous. I'd gotten word from a sometimes-reliable source that the Ba'al had ceased all activity at the Point. Tasha went out with three others to check on the report, find out their numbers, the usual. Only one of 'em came back, and he died about thirty seconds after. Before he died, he gasped out something about an ambush. Something about them laying in wait, being after Tasha, the party being dead, demons and something called *Watchers*." She stopped, sniffing, and wiped the tears from her face before continuing. "I never heard anything like it before. All I could figure is some rogue faction, maybe Warlords bought off by the Nightlords. Who knows what? Anyway, that was two nights ago. Tonight I found this in my room, on my bed."

She reached into her pocket and withdrew the crumpled letter. She licked her lips to get rid of the dry, cracking feeling that had crept up on her, and offered the letter to Luca. "You loved Tasha, didn't ye?"

Luca managed a weak smile as he reached out to take the letter. "In the same way as you did; like a sister. We had some interesting discussions those times you sent her as an emissary to try and establish relations. Her loss will ache inside me for a long time. I tried to win her over to our faction; she probably never told you that."

Jamie had to admit Tasha hadn't.

"Mmm... she wouldn't have. Loyalty is a very rare commodity these days, and one Tasha had in abundance. I never had a chance. She believed far too strongly, as you do, that redemption can be found even among the vampires."

"And you don't? That seems a very narrow-minded view for those so dedicated to good."

Luca shrugged, leaning back and throwing his leg over the arm of his chair. "Redemption is a lovely concept, but unfortunately it's all-too-often a pipe dream. Then again, maybe it's instinctive. Remember; we Guardians don't know what we are any more than you Nightbane. Maybe we just aren't able to trust those with the taint of darkness in their blood. But I'm not a leader, just a soldier. I do what I'm told." He unfolded the letter and read over it, frowning. The smooth skin of his face became creased with lines of worry and confusion.

"How did she find out?" he muttered. "And why? My god, how could this happen?"

"What does it mean, Luca? Tell me. I have to know. Why'd she die? And what does it have t' do with me? That letter sounds a bit too much like a warning of some sort."

Luca sighed. "It is a warning. And it's a warning that never should've been issued. Why couldn't they just leave well enough alone? You'd have moved on, forgotten about it... sentimental fools!"

"Luca, what's going on? What does it have to do with the Nocturnes?"

"Nothing... and everything. God, what to tell you, here? I hate spin control... I guess there's not much of a way around it, now." He sized her up for a moment. "And personal feelings aside, you've proven yourself trustworthy enough. Okay, here goes: the war you're fighting is not the only war centered here. There's another one going on, a much bigger one. And you, me, the Nocturnes, the Ba'al, all of us, we're all occasionally used as pawns in this war. It's an unrelated war, but one that has an effect on everyone, all the same. The Guardians are stuck fighting a two-pronged fight, aiding against the Ba'al where we can, but keeping tabs on the other as well."

"What are you talking about?"

"Miss DeDonnan — Jamie — It's the war between good and evil themselves."

Jamie stomped her foot and rose to leave. "More Guardian propaganda. I'm tired o' this! I really thought you'd help me, god only knows why. Thanks for a lovely talk."

Luca leapt from the chair and grabbed Jamie by the shirt. "I'm not kidding, Jamie."

She turned on him with a snarl. "Let go of me, Luca. I swear I'll gut you where you stand."

"It'd be an interesting fight. But you won't start it. I know all about you. You abhor killing; you do it only when you have to. And while you may not like me, you know I'm not an enemy, just like you said."

The tears were welling up in Jamie's eyes again, tears of frustration, pain, and loss. She hated Luca for this nonsense. She hated everyone who may have had a part in Tasha's death. "Let go of me!"

"Jamie, I implore you, just listen to me for two minutes. When your scout talked about *Watchers*, he was right. They exist, and call themselves *Gregorians*. They travel all over the Megaverse, observing and learning, mostly, but sometimes teaching and guiding. Most of them are very good, creatures of light that some believe are akin to the Guardians. Anyway, they left the Earth millennia ago, their studies here having come to a

conclusion. When the Ba'al invaded this world and took over, they were drawn back here as well. But some Watchers have fallen from the light. No one ever thought it could happen, but it has. Some have turned to darkness. So now their quest has become a war, and the winner will affect the balance of the entire Megaverse."

Jamie looked at him, aghast. "This isn't propaganda, is it?"

Luca shook his head and continued. "There are so few true Gregorians left. Eons of fighting has dwindled their numbers. They're so rare... Tasha found out. She knew too much, and none of the Watchers could have that, particularly the evil ones. The light side is winning, for now, and should the Ba'al find out that they're pawns of an even greater force, it would all be over for the Fallen ones. Look; I can't tell you any more. I can't give you details, I can't give you names. I've put myself in danger just telling you what I have. But you're right. You needed to know. As long as you don't have proof, as long as you haven't seen anything, you're relatively safe. Take the knowledge I've given you and lock it away. Know that Tasha died on the right side and take what comfort you can in that. But I implore you: *do not seek any more answers*. If you do, you may find the same fate as she did. That's all I can say. I'm sorry if it isn't enough. It's just going to have to do."

Luca started towards the door, then turned once more. "And Jamie?"

"Yeah?"

"Remember I said before we couldn't trust those with the taint of darkness in their blood?"

"Aye, I remember."

Luca smiled — a genuine and warm smile. "There's no taint in your blood. Oh, and don't worry about locking up. Someone'll be by to handle that."

Then he was gone.

Jamie sat for a few moments, digesting what she'd been told and wondering why in a world where she herself was a shape shifting monster, and demonic beings were her archenemies, she had such a hard time believing all this. Finally, with a shake of her head, she rose from her chair, left the building and descended the outer stairs back to the street. She walked in such a daze that she was almost on top of the fight in the parking lot before she noticed it was happening.

* * *

David hurtled through the night sky, reveling as he always did in the freedom of flight. His thoughts this night, however, were anything but free. Rather, they were locked in sorrows — his own, and the sorrows of the poor Irish girl, Jamie DeDonnan, the reluctant leader of a group of rebels with no idea what it was they were truly rebelling against. She had loved Tasha, perhaps in a different way than he, but with no less intensity. Now she was alone for the loss of a sister (sisters in arms and in soul if not in blood, to paraphrase the old adage), and he was alone for the loss of a beloved.

So it was that he flew, shedding tears that the rushing wind blew from his face as quickly as they fell from his all-too-human eyes. And so it was that he flew harder and faster, fighting with himself in a vain attempt to outrun his sorrow and

the self-loathing that stemmed from the tragedy he had in his mind and heart brought about. The pain he'd caused others, the pain he himself endured, the loss of someone dearer to his heart than he'd known it was possible to be... after so long, he was just tired. He wanted it to end, wanted to be a normal human again, if he ever was that to begin with. But in the end, that path wasn't his to choose or follow. He took what his superiors placed before him, like they all did. His place in things was no more his to decide or argue than the Nightbane's, the Guardians', or even the Infernals'. There was a war to be fought, and right now, vengeance to be had.

Tears end quickly when anger hides behind them. Rage overcomes even the most debilitating, heart-rending pain. It is that way with mortals, and for those of David's ilk it was no different. The tears dried up instantly when he felt the twinge of energy that told him his quarry was near. It was late; witnesses were very unlikely. No worries, there, which was fortunate. Joshua sat somewhere below, perhaps unsuspecting, but probably lying in wait. It was the way of the Infernals to use innocents as bait and traps. Tasha's murder was very likely a setup. It didn't matter; Joshua would die this night, even if it was the last thing David accomplished in this world. But where was he? Where in the sea of cold, electric light and black shadows below did he hide? He was close, that much David knew. He could smell the fiend, now.

There. That small parking lot below. Brightly lit, but surrounded by shadow and alleyways. The perfect place for an ambush, and just where David knew he was baited to be. The advantage was his, though; an ambush only works on the unsuspecting. Not only was David certain the ambush was waiting for him, he was prepared for it, whatever it was. He gave a fluttering of his immense wings and touched down, trying his best to look innocent, if that was at all possible after everything he'd been through.

He didn't have to wait long. A few tense moments passed when a voice reached his ears that set his blood to boil. The voice said, simply, "Hello, David," and came from somewhere above. David let loose a feral snarl and cast his eyes skyward, to the roof of the low building bordering the rear of the parking lot. A lone car screeched past on the otherwise deserted street behind him; he ignored it, searching the ledge above for the source of the voice. It took only seconds for David's inhumanly acute vision to spot the muscular form of an African-American man perched on the ledge, gazing down and awaiting his acknowledgment. The harsh glare of the streetlights backlit the man, rendering him a silhouette save where single glints of light here and there shone off of smooth, hardened ebony skin.

Joshua. The dark form shifted, muscles rippling, as it patiently waited, granting David the next move.

"You're a dead man, Joshua," David growled, an unnatural calm and clarity settling over him as he faced down his quarry.

"Man? Interesting choice of words. Maybe, once. Then again, maybe never. Maybe *neither* of us ever really was."

"Perhaps. There is one thing we certainly do *not* have in common, however. We shall not both leave this place tonight."

Joshua shook his head. "And here I thought you Pyros didn't hold grudges. It doesn't have to be this way, David. We used to be friends. The only difference between you and me is that I learned that fighting the good fight gets you nowhere. Come

with me, old friend! Let me show you the *true* power and glory that waits for us when this war is done!”

“This war will never end, Joshua. That, I have known for a very long time. But as long as it rages on, it is my place to fight on the right side of the battle. Now, if we are done talking, let us finish this once and for all, murderer!”

“Murderer? Ah, the Nightbane woman.” Joshua clicked his tongue. “I wonder how the rest of your beloved Celestials would feel about your petty quest for vengeance? How does that fit into your sacred morality? Your code of right and wrong? But very well; I’m here. Come get me, David... *If you can.*”

As Joshua spoke those final words, shadowy figures emerged from the shadows of the streets and alleyways to either side of the building and parking lot. The black, skeletal forms moved slowly and steadily toward David in a twisted mockery of military formation, taking up positions in a horseshoe pattern around him, Darkblade spears gleaming wickedly in the streetlights. Above, two other dark forms, winged and also skeletal in nature, alighted on either side of Joshua, crossing their own spears in front of the man as though taking up sentry positions to guard him. Joshua folded his arms and smiled broadly, daring David to begin the conflict that was now all but inevitable.

“Hounds and Hunters,” David hissed. “I knew you sold your soul to the Dark for a pittance, Joshua, but I never dreamed you’d lower yourself to consort with puppets of the Ba’al!”

“They serve their purpose. It’s your move, David. Fight or flee. They’re here for you, in case you haven’t figured that out yet, but should you flee or come for me, they’ll be more than happy to tear this neighborhood to rubble.”

“So be it, traitor,” David replied, and with blinding speed he was in the midst of the monsters, springing talons and gutting one before the movement could even be registered by the others. It went down without a sound. Pressing his advantage, David swung his other clawed hand around, tearing the jaw off of a second Hound. This one recovered quickly, however, and thrust its spear at David’s exposed rib cage. David wasn’t quick enough this time, and the blade tore a gaping, bloody gash in his side.

David grunted, but gritted his teeth against the pain. He reached out and clamped his hand down upon the creature’s face, uttering an incantation in a long forgotten tongue. Almost instantaneously a blinding white light streamed forth from the creature, beaming from its eyes and every joint, crack, and opening in its armored form. In seconds, the light dissipated and the remains of the second Hound crumbled, clattering to the ground and scattering like so much broken glass.

Eight left. But now David’s advantage of surprise was used and gone. The remaining Hounds moved as one, faster than David would have thought possible. In a heartbeat he was surrounded, their Darkblades flashing in, scoring hit after hit, opening wound after bloody wound. Still David fought on, almost matching the Hounds wound for wound, his eyes glowing yellow with divine fury. It was hopeless, he knew; yet he couldn’t give up. This was for Tasha, and for all the Luciphim everywhere.

David lunged forward and took the head from another, evening the odds down to seven, but at the same time, he felt the searing of a Darkblade biting deeply into his back. Pain erupted through his body like blinding explosions in his brain and he

collapsed, gasping, on his knees. The circle of hounds widened instead of closing in as they backed away, conceding the kill to the one who had made the incapacitating blow. David could hear, even through the maelstrom of agony in his head, the grinding exoskeleton of his executioner as it stepped forward for the killing blow.

This was it, then; he was finished. Healing himself at this point was simply not an option; it would take too long. It seemed there was only one thing left for him to do. Bowing his head, he began to pray. “I’m sorry, Tasha,” David whispered, “It would seem I have failed you. Soon we shall be together, and I promise you I shall look after you in the next world, better than I did in this one.” With those words he waited, accepting his fate.

Suddenly, there was a roar, and the rush of air as something hurtled through the air just above David. Then came a resounding *CRASH!* and the sounds of battle erupted once again all around him. He closed his eyes tighter, and shook his head in an effort to fight through the pain and discern what was happening. It was then that an all-too-familiar voice broke through the throng, saying, “It certainly seems as though you two could use some help, Miss DeDonnan.”

Another voice, this one feral, bestial, but still somehow feminine, replied, “Aye, Luca. We’re both needin’ all the help we can get about now.”

There was a flash of light and the sound of another Hound striking the wall with preternatural force. David closed his eyes and meditated, allowing his own healing process to kick in. The cavalry, it would seem, had arrived.

* * *

Joshua watched the battle from the rooftop with an overwhelming sense of satisfaction and power. The Hounds obeyed his every command, died at his whim, and now they were about to destroy another of his own kind, all because he desired it. He’d never known such power could be his; all his life he’d seen it in the hands of those who tormented him, those who held and beat him down. Now it was his, and he was using it as they’d all used it against him all his life. He felt a slight twinge of regret that it had to be David dying down there; but then again, this was war, and what was it they said about “all’s fair?”

Then the other two showed up: Luca and that Irish woman. Suddenly everything he’d relished about this battle was crushed under the metallic claws of a Nightbane and the light beams of a Guardian. And there, in the middle of it, lay his only prize — David, still suffering and struggling to heal the massive amount of damage the Hounds had inflicted before the other two arrived on the scene. Rage bubbled inside Joshua, his blood was as a kettle about to burst. He leapt to his feet, screamed, and thrust his fists skyward. By all that was dark and unholy, he’d salvage something out of this if it was the last thing he ever did.

He pointed down at David’s prone form and instructed the Hunters, “Bring him to me.” One of the two creatures looked pointedly at Joshua and it seemed for a moment as though some silent communication took place. “Now, you fool! Before he heals completely!”



The two Hunters swooped down without further hesitation into the middle of the fray. They scooped David up and flew back to the roof long before Jamie or Luca had a chance to stop them. They dropped the man at Joshua's feet and stepped back to rigid attention. They became two grotesque mockeries of gargoyles in their stillness.

"So now it ends," Joshua taunted. "You should've taken my offer, David. The Infernals could've given you the world."

"Is that what they promised you?" David gasped. "That's probably what they promise all the fallen. But there's only one world, Joshua, and thousands of us. How can they give *all* of us the world? You're a fool. You and all the Obscuraphim. Tasha knew it; that is why she refused your advances. That is why she never loved you. And *that*, old friend, is why you murdered her, you heartless monster!"

David's wounds were closing; Joshua knew rationally that he should finish this now, but the temptation to hurt and taunt his former friend was too much to ignore. Those last words hit home. Those last words hurt, and Joshua was determined to hurt David back. Joshua kicked the weakened man in the face, sending David sprawling backwards, a fresh trickle of blood running from his mouth. David reached up, calm but still weak, and wiped away the viscous fluid.

"And so my statement was even more accurate than I intended," David said.

"You took her from me, David! You took her love! She was mine! Mine!"

"I took nothing, Joshua. I was no threat to you. Whatever her feelings, I loved her as a father loves his only daughter — nothing more, nothing less. Pyros or no, grudge or no, when someone takes a man's daughter, the man will seek vengeance. She was as close to a daughter as I in all probability will ever get. Mark my words: in this world or the next, I shall avenge her as such."

"Even at the end, you're still so overconfident. You always were that way, you cocky fool! She was mine, and I'm going to take your life in payment for losing her!"

Joshua charged, a sword of black energy springing to life in his hand seemingly out of nowhere. Rage was all he felt and all he knew. Rage would kill this pathetic weakling who always made him feel so small and insignificant.

Rage made him overconfident. Rage showed him the sight of a weak, injured form on the ground. Rage made him blind until it was too late. He reached his target and raised his blade for the kill when David's hand shot forth with that blinding speed, clamping around Joshua's neck and cutting off the airflow. Joshua's sword vanished and he gripped David's hands in a vain effort to pry the fingers from Joshua's throat and open his air passage.

David stood, almost completely healed, and lifted Joshua high off the ground. In his anger, he completely forgot his control, and his Gregorian manifested, his eyes glowing fiercely, his black claws springing forth, his silvery-white wings spreading

wide behind him. His eyes burned with divine fire from his burnished-bronze face and he glared at the object of his fury. "And you, Joshua, always did underestimate your foes. Tasha, by-the-way, was *not* yours. She was nobody's but her own. *She* chose her path. *She* chose who to give her heart to. If it was not you, that is because you were simply not worthy of her."

With that, David hurled Joshua back across the roof onto his back and advanced. Joshua skittered backwards, now too terrified even to evoke any of his dark power. David caught him again, this time by the shirt, and lifted him off the ground.

"Now, Joshua," he said, "You will die."

"No!" Joshua cried. "Hunters! Do something! Kill him!"

David spun, his arm extended towards the Hunters; a roaring blade of orange fire manifested in it. He leveled the blade at the Hunters and said, "I should exterminate you just for being what you are. But this battle is over and it will not serve my purpose. I know that though you do not speak you possess some spark of intelligence. You cannot win, here. Listen; there is but silence in the parking lot below. The battle is over. Your Hound comrades are defeated. Flee now, and you have my word you will be spared. Go and tell your kin what happened here. Give the Ba'al this message: you cannot win here. Now *go!*"

A moment's hesitation passed, and the two Hunters turned and lifted off of the roof, flying away as quickly and silently as they came. With a thought, David banished the sword from existence, then slammed Joshua to the ground, straddling him with one knee on either side.

"What will you do, David? Kill me?"

"As many times as I can."

"Then you'll be just like me. What happened to your precious morality? Your sensibility? What would your precious Celestials think? You can't kill me. It goes against everything you fight for. After all; I could be redeemed." Joshua spit the words at David like a curse.

"Perhaps you are right, Joshua. Perhaps you can be redeemed." For a moment, David let up his grip. Joshua shifted, unable to believe that David was actually going to let him go. Then a curtain of red flashed in front of him as David struck. At first there was only pressure, then pure agony hit as David's hand tore through the flesh of Joshua's chest, shattering his breastbone and gripping his very heart. Sight returned in that one instant, and Joshua saw and heard everything with a clarity he'd never before experienced.

"But not in this life," David finished. "I'm sorry, old friend. I have trusted and been betrayed by you far too many times in the past. May you find peace in the next world."

With those words, David tore Joshua's heart from his chest, then dropped it on the limp body of his friend.

* * *

Jamie crested the top of the fire escape and discovered that the man who only minutes ago had been so grievously injured now needed no help. He had undergone an astonishing change, his eyes glowing with yellow fire, enormous, silvery-white wings rising high into the sky above him. In fact, the tables appeared to have turned, and he straddled the powerful-looking

African-American man who apparently had instigated this whole attack. A brief exchange between the two men followed, which Jamie could not hear, then she watched in horror as the winged man viciously tore the heart from the other's chest, dropping his victim and the heart to the ground at the same time and hanging his head in sorrow. As she approached the man warily, he kissed two fingers and touched them to the forehead of the dead man, and Jamie could have sworn she heard him say, "Kyrie Eleison, Joshua. Rest in peace, brother."

Though Jamie moved as silently as the hunting cat that lived in every pore of her being, the unearthly-looking man turned to her. There was a wisdom and sadness in his eyes that spoke of ages long gone, and things Jamie hoped never to see.

"Ye're not Nightbane, are ye?" She stammered.

He managed a resigned smile before he replied. "No. I am not. My name is David."

"Ye murdered that man! Ye didna' need to kill him! Ye had him defeated!"

"No, Miss DeDonnan," Luca said from behind. He crested the fire escape and came forward to join her. "This was not murder. This was vengeance."

"For Tasha?" Realization dawned and she gaped, wide-eyed, at the man. "It was you. You sent me the letter, didn't ye?"

"Yes, Jamie. I sent the letter. Tasha was as a daughter to me, and I shall always blame myself for her death. But at least I have redeemed my own failings, to some degree."

"Ye're a Gregorian — one o' Luca's Watchers — ain't ye?"

David laughed — an odd reaction, given the circumstances, but he had to admit to himself it felt good. "You flatter me. For true Gregorians everything is black and white, good and evil. We who reside here have no such luxuries. We must all deal with shades of gray."

"Then what in the name o' Hades are ye?"

"You invoke the wrong side," David said, and from the half-smile on his face it was evident he was attempting a joke, though the humor was lost on Jamie. Serious again, David cocked his head and gazed at Jamie's features. He reflected on her Earthly beauty for a moment before continuing. "I am Athanatos."

Before Jamie could press further, Luca spoke up. "Watchers fight their battle on their own plane of existence, Jamie. The energies from that battle corrupt and influence our world, but the beings themselves cannot manifest here. So they grant to some unborn children the tiniest portion of their essence. Those children are Athanatos. They are the true soldiers and generals of this war. It's not about the Nightlords and the Nightbane. It's not about the Guardians. It's not about the Vampires. It's not about any of us. It's about good and evil at their most basic. We all do our parts, but this war is bigger than all of us put together."

"And by knowin' this, I'm a player, in just as much danger as any of ye."

"Truer than you know, dear Jamie, though none of us are *truly* major players," David sighed, "but this time I shall be more involved in your defense. What happened to Tasha shall not happen to you. I swear it."

"I can take care o' myself," Jamie said, "though a bit o' company now and again's never a bad thing." She smiled at him.

"And now that I know the truth, I think I can begin t' let her go."

David looked down at the surprisingly peaceful form of Joshua at his feet and said, "So can I."

"Who was he, anyway?" Jamie asked.

"A mistake, Jamie. A terrible mistake I made so many years ago. I was so young. Too young... to be a teacher."

"It may sound a bit callous, but for what it's worth, it would seem ye've redeemed that error."

"Yes, it would. But at what cost?"

"It's war," Jamie said, walking to the edge of the rooftop and looking out over the city. "Much as none o' us want t' face her, we all know Tasha knew what she was getting' into. Dinna' blame yerself."

"Are you sure about this?" Luca whispered to David.

"Sure as I have ever been of anything, my friend. Besides, it would seem that it's too late, now."

"I guess you're right."

"Do you trust her, Luca?"

"Implicitly." Luca looked at David and flashed a mischievous grin, "But don't tell her that."

"Good enough for me."

Jamie walked back over to the two of them. "What're you two whisperin' about?"

Luca smiled at her. "Friendship."

Sirens sounded quietly in the distance. "I think that's our cue," Luca said. "Shall we?"

"Allow me," David said. He scooped Jamie up in his arms and took off into the night, Luca close behind. Later, the police would have a mystery on their hands that would no doubt vanish into the annals of the Preserver Party's files, but for now three new friends and comrades-in-arms were safe again in the shadows of the night.

Introduction

Welcome back to the world of the Nightbane, a world of darkness and terror where nothing and no one is what they seem. A world where best friends can become lethal enemies as quickly as a mirror shatters, and where each and every shadow hides creatures best left to the blackest corners of human imagination.

You are the intrepid heroes of this world, beings cast out from everyday society and forever removed from the world and people you once loved and called familiar. You fight a war you never asked for, but which may have already consumed your entire existence. You fight for a people who despise and fear you for what you are, because they are all you know. You fight for them because it's better hiding from mortal eyes than being discovered by the Ba'al and their minions. You are Nightbane.

And you are not alone in your battles. There are other factions aligning with you, and perhaps against you at the same time. There are mortal humans exiled from a corrupt and controlled government, hunted and fighting the same war you fight, albeit for somewhat different reasons. There are mystics and psychics seeking to learn about you and your foes. There are the vampires, who claim this world as their hunting grounds, and

tolerate no interlopers. And there are the mysterious Guardians, creatures of light who are as mysterious and enigmatic as they are powerful. You all fight different fronts of a war to save the planet from being engulfed in the darkness of the Nightlords.

If only it were that simple.

In the Beginning

The following is the history of the battle between Light and Dark, as told to many newly revealed Athanatos. Nobody knows if it is true. All that is certain, is that the Athanatos themselves are as mysterious as the Nightbane, similar enough that they may even be cousins to those manifestations of the Formless Ones, but different enough to give pause to that theory as well. Athanatos tend to be very high and mighty as a result of their own accepted history, though not a one can offer any sort of evidence to support the validity of the tale.

There is a war going on, a war of cosmic proportions that could affect the entire Megaverse, and it is centered here, on this Earth, and on alternate Earths in millions of dimensions all over the Megaverse. It is an eternal war, of which the battle between the Nightbane and the Ba'al is only one small front.

It is the very war between the forces of Light and Darkness themselves.

This war has raged for eons and rages worse than ever in these nights as the signs of every religion and philosophy's doomsday prophesies are interpreted by doom criers, psychics, and by those who simply need something to hold on to. But one thing is becoming clearer and clearer to many people, mortal and immortal alike: things are changing, and something's got to give.

At the heart of this great struggle is a concept, nothing more, nothing less. It is difficult to rationalize a war that affects the lives of billions revolving around a simple concept, and yet, it is not so far fetched after all. The concept in question is that of the struggle between good and evil, Light and Darkness. It began millennia ago, with a race of beings called *Gregorians*, and known as Travelers and Watchers, who observed and marveled over the mysteries of the Megaverse. These Gregorians were not especially powerful or important in the grand scheme of things, but they were eternal, with no physical bodies to record history, and with the ability to communicate only through mutual understanding of ideas and concepts. Above all, the Gregorians were a race of beings without a beginning. None among them knew from where they came, or how they came to be. So they watched, and searched for the answers. As stars were born and died, the Watchers looked on and smiled. As Light pulled itself from Darkness, they laughed in admiration. As worlds were born, they gazed in wonder. Thus the Gregorians were content to be.

Things always start small.

Then, something wondrous happened. As living creatures pulled themselves from the primordial ooze of creation, the Gregorians finally saw in these primitive beings the answer to a mystery that had plagued them since the beginning of time; the secret of their own birth and evolution. Confronted and teased by this possible link, which some refer to as Creation, and others as Evolution, the Watchers burned with a need to know and understand. That need was to be their downfall, and would bring to

one small corner of an insignificant galaxy the next stage in a conflict whose ramifications would change the face of the Megaverse.

In their quest for knowledge, the Gregorians realized the need for focus, so they split into groups, with each group observing a different area of the Megaverse. One particular group centered its attention on a small, blue orb that seemed to span dimensions upon dimensions, reflecting itself in universe after universe, the world in itself a stable dimensional nexus that seemed to spawn all manner of life and creation and link together all the universes of the Megaverse. It looked upon this planet and studied its inhabitants: tiny, insignificant beings who called themselves *humans*. Somehow, in the toils of these mortal creatures, the Gregorians decided that the answer to all of their questions lay. Their fascination with humans grew, and they came to love and cherish the creatures. Within them the kindling spark of that which became a burning desire to guide and teach these humans was born. So they sent to the planet a few who would walk among men and bring back the answers they desired. These found that through drawing upon one of the four elements — Earth, Air, Fire, and Water — they could take on such manifestations of their beings that would allow them to become physical. From there, the Travelers could take on almost human forms and walk among men. Thus was the race of Gregorians diminished in number as a new race was born. Gregorians became physical; they were beings of creation and worldly things. Those that remained spiritual beings were content to watch, learn, and keep guard. The Gregorians were constantly in contact with their insubstantial cousins, each learning from the others' experiences and coming to appreciate and care for the struggles of mankind.

It was deemed inappropriate and dangerous for the Gregorians to walk unfettered among these primitive beings, and so a great experiment was created, in which the Gregorians went among a single, small community of humans to teach and guide them, and see what could be learned in the process. A great city arose, the first City of Men, with towering spires of gold and silver and jewels, and it is said that in this city, civilization was born. For thousands of years this city stood as a testament to the achievements of Those Who Walked Among Men, and legends of the gods of old were born of the union.

Then calamity happened. More and more Watchers became curious and underwent the transfiguration to Gregorian, taking on physical form. Before long, Gregorians far outnumbered Watchers, and some of the Gregorians learned they could use their power to influence and manipulate humans. These began interacting with the population in ways previously deemed dangerous and wrong. It was then that the Gregorians first experienced the human emotions of Love, Passion, Joy, Anger, Hate, and Sadness. The Gregorians of the City of Men taught to their charges the craft of Forging, from which weapons were wrought from bone and wood and ore, and the secrets of sorcery, and wars were fought in the names of Those Who Would be Gods. Men and women spilled each other's blood in the streets, all for petty greed and passion and hate.

But the worst was yet to come. Of all the emotions they discovered, there still remained Envy; it was not long before all of the Gregorians realized that humans innately possessed qualities they could only emulate, but never truly possess. Some turned to

hatred of humanity as a result, and these caused great pain and suffering wherever they went, taking great pleasure in the futile effort to demonstrate their superiority over men, and finding great pain in the emptiness that no amount of inflicted suffering could ever fill. Some Gregorians loved the humans more for their differences, and in this love made the other fatal mistake of taking mates for themselves among the mortals. In an attempt to help and better the species they taught the humans secrets the primitive beings were not yet ready to learn, such as the mastery of magic and technology. Their sorrow in discovering that they could not create offspring with the humans, however, that their mortal forms were little more than illusion and not completely functional, drew ever more from the fold.

As the Gregorians began one by one to fall from the Light, a mysterious power known to this day only as The Dark crept in, took root within them, separated them forever from their kin and infected them with the desire to punish the humans for daring to possess qualities they could not. Gregorians and Watchers, The Dark whispered, were as gods to men and should rule over them. As these Gregorians brought into the world the concept of Evil, the others, who were not tempted by the flesh of man, tried in vain to draw those they called Fallen back into the Light. It was the Gregorians of the element of Earth who first learned the secret of implanting a human infant with a tiny shard of Gregorian Essence that would leave on Earth a legacy and progeny of the Gregorian in question. But rather than reunite the Watchers, this new miracle only divided them further. The evil ones, drunk on power and glory, used this new ability to create armies for themselves among the mortals. The war between the forces of Good and Evil was begun even before the two concepts themselves had solidified. Worse, the violence and bloodshed wrought by the folly of the Gregorians drew the attention of others — demons, Deevils, Alien Intelligences, great forces of Darkness that were irresistibly drawn to the evils perpetrated by these would-be gods.

As these tragedies unfolded, the Watchers found themselves paralyzed with confusion and misunderstanding. How had the experiment gone wrong? What horror had simple curiosity wrought? How could they reconcile these *emotions* they had never experienced before? And worst of all, how could they right the wrongs they had inflicted? With even greater terror the Watchers realized that in allowing the transubstantiation to Elemental, then Earthly form, they had split themselves into groupings that no longer were linked to the others as they once were. There were so many unforeseen consequences of the interaction with humanity that the Watchers found themselves helpless and even more discontent. One thing was clear: these horrors were the fault of the Watchers' irresponsibility. They had forsaken their place in the cosmos as watcher spirits and through interference had brought evil among mortals. They were obligated to fight the battles of the war their ignorance had begun.

Then arose the greatest calamity of all: the vision and intent of the original Travelers split in two. One faction, the vast majority of the race, held true to the good emotions and to the positive applications of the dark ones: vengeance in the name of justice, retribution against the wicked. These became known as Luciphim, or Sons of Light. The other, darker division that sprung forth, became the Obscuruphim, Sons of the Darkness, and represented all that is considered evil and unholy by the

morally just and upright. Hate, Envy, Rage, and all the negative applications of beautiful emotion: murder in the name of passion, torture for beauty's sake. Even though far less in number, these Obscuruphim gained much ground in the war, making up in brutality and cruelty what they lacked in numbers.

Despite their war with one another and their sheer moral opposition, some Luciphim and Obscuruphim remembered their origins and original purpose and thus had no true hatred for one another. Often they would leave their respective armies to come together and exchange notes, share what each had learned and come to understand in the hopes that one day they could again reunite and move on.

Meanwhile, the planet around which the conflict began was spoiled. The City of Men was wiped completely from the face of the Earth, and not even a shard of pottery remained to attest to its glory. The Gregorians were forced to agree that by the time the war was over and their understanding complete, all signs of the conflict would in all likelihood be wiped away, never to be remembered again. While the Obscuruphim relished this notion, the Luciphim wept for it and resolved to do everything within their power to prevent this horror and preserve the world below. Certain human psychics and mystics who tapped into the fringes of the Gregorian communications began to draw prophecies of Apocalypse and Armageddon and mankind learned to live in fear of these beings, turning to the gods as a means of diverting the inevitable. The calamity continued and humanity was ever more corrupted by Good and Evil alike, but the war continued on with the Celestial and Infernal factions stretching their influences throughout the Megaverse, manipulating and forging alliances with mankind, gods, Intelligences, Demons, and Deevils alike. In the days before history was recorded, the Luciphim gained one of their greatest victories when their forces banished the Ba'al, a sect of dark sorcerers who served the Dark as a means to dominate and control their fellow humans, to a dismal reflection of Earth known as the Nightlands. Yet still the war raged on, with neither side gaining a clear advantage and no solution of understanding in sight for the two rival halves of the broken whole. In fact, the War became even more fragmented, with some Watchers of Obscuruphim paths finding the value in goodness, and some of the Luciphim falling to the Dark. New divisions were drawn, and the factions became known as Celestials, warriors of the sky, who held true to a higher morality, and Infernals, warriors of the Abyss, who fell to the depths of the Demons and Deevils with whom they kept consort.

What the Celestials did not realize was that while the Ba'al were trapped, the place in which they were imprisoned was the very source of the evil power they sought. The Nightlands was indeed where the mysterious, nameless corruption known as the Dark germinated. Over the ages it fed, nourished, corrupted, and altered the Ba'al, who patiently bided their time until the day come when they would have their revenge on the forces of Light and take back what they felt was rightfully theirs: the Earth itself.

Eventually, the heart and numbers of the Celestials prevailed, and the Infernals were driven back and all but destroyed. Centuries and millennia passed, and mankind began to move on. The gods faded, as did belief in magic and the supernatural. The Watchers saw a chance to save the beings they had once loved,

and for a time relinquished their power to take mortal form on this world as well as the power to create offspring with mortals. Many of the offspring that still lived were destroyed out of hand, but several of the more clever warriors managed to hide themselves among the mortals whose lives they once shared. It was through the removal of their influence, the Watchers hoped, that humanity would return to a time of simpler virtues and come to forget the corruptions forced upon them by a greedy and uncomprehending race of cosmic travelers. The war, it was decided, could be fought on purely spiritual grounds, for the Travelers had surely learned enough by now to once again leave the humans in peace. There were other worlds, where magic was still strong and their existence accepted, where the Watchers were needed. A few would remain to carry on the ancient traditions of observation, but it was time for Watchers as a whole to leave the Earth.

This again proved to be a grave error on the part of the one-time Watchers. Without guidance, the mortals engaged in good for the sake of good and evil for the sake of evil, often bouncing madly between the two extremes without reason or rhyme. There were no true ends to their means, and worse, while the Infernals had been practically wiped out, the power known as The Dark still thrived, and the Earth spiraled towards its own destruction. It was only when agents of The Dark seduced certain occultists and Priests of Night to begin garnering their power to re-open the portals to the Nightlands that the Watchers decided there was only one solution: the war must be returned to Terrestrial grounds. If the humans must destroy themselves, let it at least serve a purpose. The Watchers' participation in these battles was severely limited this time, in an attempt to be more subtle, and keep the war from spilling over into mass destruction as it had thousands of years before, and to protect their dwindling numbers. The Dark, whatever it may be, had not revealed itself, so there was no reason for the Spirits of Light to make known their own presence, lest they draw it out and further tragedy ensue. So the power to create offspring was once again called upon by the Watchers, and the Athanatos, noble warriors who were half-human, half-Watcher, once again returned to the worlds of the Megaverse.

As these new Athanatos began to appear all over the world, it became clear that they must be instructed in their purpose and the meaning of their lives and power. Those ancient warriors who had gone into hiding millennia before, when the war was stopped for the first time, began to reappear, calling to them those warriors best suited to their individual causes and codes. They educated the young ones in the True History of the world and universe, told them of the war and its importance, and guided them to the path they needed to follow. These new youngsters were so full of fire and energy that the war began again, in the shadows and alleyways of the city nightlife, in the deep forests of the countryside and mountains, and deep in the deserts of the east. The war took on new life and a ferocity never before seen — the ferocity of a wayward generation given purpose and meaning to lives that had been nothing but black and empty before.

The Watchers acted none too soon; almost simultaneously with the return of the Athanatos, the servants of The Dark finally learned of a way to break the dimensional barrier, however briefly, between Earth and the Nightlands, and Dark Day com-

menced. Worse, the Watchers found to their horror that though they might be a race of Light, their offspring were in many ways all too human and quite susceptible to the temptations of The Dark. Many Athanatos fell, and the terms Celestials and Infernals once again came into being, now referring to the Earthly manifestations of the Gregorians. This brings us to the modern day, when the war has begun anew, and the fate of the whole world hangs in the balance. The Dark has never been closer to bringing about a final Armageddon, and the forces of Light have never fought so fiercely to prevent this horrific event from happening.



The Athanatos

Like the Nightbane, the *Athanatos* are major players in this war between Light and Darkness. They are effectively half-Gregorian, men and women whose mothers were implanted with just a tiny shard of Gregorian Essence while the child grew in the womb. Much like their Nightbane brethren, the Athanatos are supernatural shape shifters with great and mysterious powers, and much like the Nightbane, they are people who live normal lives until one day their true nature is revealed to them and they find themselves drawn into a great war that they never asked for, and may want no part of, but must fight or die in nevertheless.

The major difference between the Athanatos and the Nightbane is that most Athanatos know the true nature of the war they fight. They realize that in the grand scheme of things, even the mighty Ba'al are but pawns and puppets of the all-powerful Intelligences at the center of the storm. While

many seek to defeat the Nightlords and many others work alongside the evil ones, almost all realize that even upon the elimination or victory of this threat to Earth, the only thing that alters is the severity of a symptom. The disease — the war — will still remain, and perhaps will never, ever end.

The Revelation

Athanatos live their lives as ordinary humans until (again, like the Nightbane) sometime in their teens or early twenties. When the timing is right and they've learned the earthly skills they'll need to fulfill their destiny, an event much like the Nightbane Becoming occurs. This event is known as the *Revelation* and differs from the Becoming in several important ways. First, it is rarely truly a spontaneous event as the Becoming can sometimes be. The Revelation does often occur during a moment of severe stress, anguish or (usually) danger. Elder, experienced Athanatos sense when a young one is ripe for the change and seek him or her out. Enemy factions will seek to destroy the child before the Revelation occurs, in an effort to deplete their enemies' numbers and gain advantage. They all-too-often succeed, for a moment of danger, even life-threatening danger, is not enough in and of itself to trigger the change. It requires a focused effort on the part of the young one *and* an elder Athanatos. The effort on the part of the young one can be subconscious, much like an adrenaline rush that allows a normal man to lift a car in order to save a friend or loved one. The focusing of energies on the elder Athanatos' part, however, is always a concerted and conscious effort.

On rare occasions, an enemy will trigger the Revelation to confuse the young one and make for a more interesting kill, but more often the Revelation only occurs when an ally either finds the young one before an enemy or rescues her from an enemy. This also means that the Revelation rarely occurs in a public place (unless triggered by an enemy for effect and unwitting assistance from innocents), but generally in a quiet place where the new Athanatos and her prospective mentor can talk and form a bond as teacher and pupil. For instance, perhaps a prospective Athanatos is running from a pack of Hounds. An elder has tracked him down and helps the young one to escape. They break down a long, dark alley where no one can see them. The Hounds close in, the elder concentrates, and suddenly the new Athanatos bursts forth in all his glory. Together the two finish off the Hounds. Then the explanation begins.

Once the shock of the Revelation wears off, the instruction and indoctrination into Athanatos life commences. The young Athanatos is taught the story of the war and of the Celestial and Infernal Ones, of the Watchers, their forms, purpose, and powers. The fledgling is also taught the use of her own special abilities and instructed in the development of new abilities as she grows in experience and power. She is introduced to other members of her faction and her faction's allies and briefed on enemy factions. Slowly but surely, she inevitably comes to accept her place in the grand scheme of the Great War, and adapts to her new life as a Celestial or Infernal warrior.

Perhaps the hardest part of the life of a fledgling Athanatos is the acceptance of the fact that she can never return to the life she once lived. It is far too dangerous, for her, her faction, and her mortal relations. Most Athanatos that attempt to return to their old lives wind up dead or hurting someone they love dearly. Often young Athanatos will secretly visit and watch over their for-

mer loved ones for a time, never revealing their presence and weeping silent tears as the acceptance of what they are slowly sinks in. These Athanatos are referred to as "Psichi Prostatia," or "Protector Spirits," by others and usually are left alone out of respect — even, oddly, by enemies. Perhaps the pain of the transition becomes an integral part of who and what the Athanatos is, so much so that they can never forget or let go of it, and so it has grown into an unspoken law among the warriors that a Psichi Prostatia is off-limits as a target for attack. These "Prostatia" are often melancholy and prone to emotional outbursts as they reconcile their soul with the conflicting piece of true Gregorian that burns inside. Some never achieve reconciliation, and simply fade away from life in general, unable to cope with what they are and unable to return to what they were. These poor creatures are known as *Lost Souls* and typically live as hermits in deep, secluded wilderness areas, away from all other intelligent life, as their sanity dwindles away. Eventually, someone usually comes across one of these souls, and if they are found by another Athanatos, for good or for evil they are usually put down out of pity and remorse.

Most Athanatos, however, learn to cope with their condition within a relatively short time span — often a matter of months. Watchers tend to choose strong and hearty souls for the sharing of their essence and do not often misjudge the future character of the child they choose to parent, and as such *Lost Souls* are a very rare occurrence. The condition of an Athanatos' final coming to terms with her nature is as varied as the Athanatos themselves — as varied as mankind itself. Sometimes it's the danger of battle, sometimes it's quiet acceptance. Sometimes it's a grudging, downhill battle with the mentor that does it. In any case, most Athanatos eventually grow to become soldiers in the Great War and fight with pride for their brethren in arms and their cause.

The Hosts and Paths

As with anything, no two Athanatos are exactly alike. They are as diverse as the stars, the sun and moon, even humanity. But they can be (and usually are) grouped together in several important ways. The first of these ways is through their *Host*. The term is a means to divide the Athanatos into their five major groupings. These groupings are a representation of the type of Watcher that spawned the individual Athanatos. They also determine the elemental bent of the Athanatos in question and have a direct effect on her powers. The groupings are as follows:

Choma — Spirits of Earth

Pyros — Spirits of Fire

Hydros — Spirits of Water

Aeras — Spirits of Air

Necrosis — Spirits of death and darkness. These Athanatos are not spawned by Watchers, per se, but by demonic entities from the Astral Plane known as *Necrophim* (see **Nightbane® Book 1: Between the Shadows™** for more information on the *Necrophim*).

After the Athanatos' *Host* is established, the next important aspect of his being is his *Path*. The *Path* represents the general code of ethics, morals, and psychological bent of the character. According to myth, the paths were originally sired by ancient Athanatos who fathered certain concepts and philosophies. At

one time the paths were named for those ancient Athanatos who sired them, but it has since become taboo to speak the names of these great and revered beings. Those who foster the causes of Evil tend to follow the paths of the Fallen, who have been seduced by the Dark. These Athanatos are known collectively as *Obscuruphim*, or "Children of Darkness." Others, named after the Watchers who realized the Gregorians' errors and fought on the side of Light, are known as *Luciphim*, or "Children of Light." The Gregorian Paths and what place they fulfill in Athanatos society, are listed below. Put quite simply and into game terms, an Athanatos' *Path* is similar to his O.C.C. This will be explained in more detail later.

The Obscuruphim:

Scourges — Warriors, bloodletters.

Necromancers — Sorcerers and black mages (all Necromancers are *Necrosis*).

Seers — Prophets and psychics.

Magii — Scholars and scientists.

The Luciphim:

Valiant — The crusaders and warriors.

Defenders — The guardians, protectors of the innocent.

Vindicators — The vindicators, adjudicators of the guilty and spirits of righteous vengeance.

Infiltrators — The agents and messengers, lords of the Earth (All *Infiltrators* are *Choma*).

What This All Means

An Athanatos' *Host* determines his elemental attunement. It manifests in the form of psychic abilities and certain mystic powers. It also determines to some degree the appearance of the Athanatos' *Gregorian* form, which will be discussed later. The *Path* of the Athanatos serves (as earlier stated) as his O.C.C. It grants class skills, "other" skills, combat abilities, and in some cases mystical powers such as magic and/or additional psionics.

It should also be noted that just as there are a multitude of differences in human philosophy and ideology, so are there among the Athanatos. Just because an Athanatos' *Path* is technically classified as *Obscuruphim* does not necessarily mean he is evil or serving The Dark. It just represents his aptitudes and general bent towards a certain ideology. The same holds true for the *Luciphim*. Not all of them are good and noble. The forefathers of the ideologies were such (good or evil, as classified), but player characters can, often do, and *should* break the mold. Take, for example, the *Scourges* and *Valiant*. Both classes are warriors. The major difference is thus: *As a general rule*, a good *Valiant* would defeat a foe in combat and show mercy, perhaps bidding his opponent to view his defeat as an opportunity for redemption. The good *Scourge*, on the other hand, seeks to utterly stamp out her evil enemies, believing that redemption is a pipe dream for the weak. Again, this will be discussed in more detail later.

The Factions

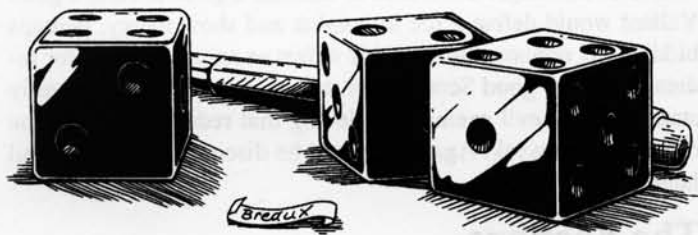
As with any war, the battle between Light and Dark is fought between two opposing factions. It is a bitter, brutal, and painful war that all-too-often turns friend against friend and brother against brother; for the line between good and evil is rarely clear-cut. It is a battle of shades of gray rather than one of black

and white. Power corrupts, and far too many Athanatos begin on the Celestial side, only to drift over to the Infernal. Likewise, violence and destruction can wear one down and many Infernals find themselves so tired of killing and hate, that they find their own redemption and turn to the light. The factions in the war are aptly and obviously named the Celestials and the Infernals. Oftentimes they will refer to themselves as Luciphim and Obscuruphim (light and dark, respectively), but this distinction is far more blurred, as it relates to Paths as well as factions. Thus, only those who truly understand the nature of the shadows of this war, and very ancient Athanatos, will use such a distinction. Far and wide, the most common terms for the factions of the War are Celestials and Infernals.

Both sides use intrigue, manipulation, and power games to further their cause, but the motives often differ widely. Infernals, for instance, would double-deal, bargain, and threaten in order to take command of a battalion of Hounds and Hunters to use at their beck and call. Celestials would more subtly guide and manipulate the forces of light against these foes, only stepping in themselves when the time was just right. Both sides agree upon one thing, however. The world at large must never discover the existence of the Athanatos. Should a force such as the Nightlords ever learn of their existence, the Athanatos would be wiped out, an even greater threat than the Nightbane.

All Athanatos serve a faction, whether willingly or unwittingly, officially or honorarily. Athanatos who by and large further the cause of good are Celestials; those who serve evil, Infernals. Most player characters will probably be Celestial Athanatos, battling alongside Nightbane brethren against the tyranny of the Nightlords. In fact, many Athanatos pass themselves off as Nightbane with Morphus forms of Unearthly Beauty.

Within the two major factions, the battle is broken down further into factions named after the Paths that by and large serve the two ideologies — Obscuruphim Paths for Infernals, and Luciphim Paths for Celestials. Rogue members of Paths (i.e. Scourges who serve on the side of good or Defenders on the evil side) almost always find themselves adopted by similar Paths on the side they serve. What this means is that a Celestial Scourge would most likely find herself a member of the Valiant faction. Most of this, however, is detail and story oriented trivia that is not essential to the playing of a character (G.M.s should keep track of such facts, however, for story elements and tension). How all of this (Host, Path, etc.) works in game terms will be discussed in the next section.



Creating the Athanatos

Creating an Athanatos is in most ways exactly the same as creating any other character for one of Palladium's games. As with any supernatural creature, there are some different choices

to make and tables to roll on, but all-in-all the process is very similar to that of creating the Nightbane.

The Eight Attributes: Determine these as normal, rolling 3D6 for each attribute and recording the totals. Adjustments will be made later for the Athanatos' Gregorian form, but in human form these will be the attributes.

Attribute Requirements: No Athanatos may have any attribute less than 11.

Choosing a Path: Choose a Path (O.C.C.) for your Athanatos. Record special abilities and skills from this Path. Paths are described later in this section.

Hit Points and S.D.C.: Hit Points are determined by adding the roll of 1D6 to the P.E. attribute, plus 1D6 per level, as standard. S.D.C. is determined by the roll of 2D4x10. Athanatos (even in their human form) are much more resistant to physical damage than most people.

P.P.E. and I.S.P.: Each Path and Host grants the Athanatos character a base P.P.E. and I.S.P. for use with his or her mystic and psionic powers. P.P.E. and I.S.P. are recovered at a rate of 10 per hour of rest or meditation, and 1D6 per hour of activity. Close proximity (within one mile/1.6 km) to a ley line doubles the recovery rate.

The Host and Gregorian Form: Choose or roll randomly for the Athanatos' Host, which will determine his or her Gregorian transformation. Random tables are as follows:

- 01-24% Choma
- 25-45% Hydros
- 46-68% Aeras
- 69-90% Pyros
- 91-00% Necrosis

Please note that as was stated earlier, if a player will be creating an Infiltrator or a Necromancer, there is no need to roll, as their Host is pre-determined (Choma for Infiltrators, and Necrosis for Necromancers). Players may also, at the G.M.'s discretion, be allowed to select their Host rather than roll randomly for it.

The Gregorian Manifestation

The Gregorian is the "true" form of the Athanatos, much as the Morphus is to the Nightbane. However, things for Athanatos are a bit more complicated. An Athanatos cannot hide from her true nature as easily as can a Nightbane. They are constantly at risk of exposure during times of danger or duress. However, the Athanatos has a much greater degree of control over willing shifts than does a Nightbane. In game, this means several things. First, the Athanatos can manifest portions of her Gregorian without undergoing a full transformation. To do this, the Athanatos must pay 10 P.P.E. for each feature she wishes to manifest (claws, eyes, wings, etc.) Manifestation of an individual feature requires one action per feature manifested. Shifting into full Gregorian requires no expenditure of P.P.E., and takes one melee round unless a successful M.E. roll is made (just as a Nightbane), in which case the shift takes one action. Secondly, an Athanatos in danger or under almost any form of extreme stress (anger, lust, intense fear, etc.) must make a M.E. save to

resist her Gregorian manifesting. If this save is failed, a minor but still noticeable transformation takes place — her eyes might glow with a wicked fire, for example. If the Athanatos fails and is not able to remove the source of the stress within one melee round to control herself, she must make a second M.E. roll (at a -4 penalty) to resist undergoing a full manifestation of her Gregorian.

It gets worse. While causing the Gregorian to manifest is a simple matter of thought and will, once even a small piece of Gregorian is manifested, the Athanatos must pay 20 P.P.E. to shift back to human form. The Gregorian Essence that is a constant smoldering ember within the soul of an Athanatos cannot be so easily quashed once it bursts into flame. The life of many Athanatos is a tortured, solitary existence as a result. Even among Nightbane, the Athanatos cannot often find comfort, for their unexpected and uncontrolled shifts all-too-often draw unwanted attention from civilians and especially NSB Agents, which means the Nightlords.

Powers of the Gregorian Manifestation

Ability Score Adjustments: Certain abilities can only be utilized during the manifestation of Gregorian form, and the Athanatos' power is dramatically increased. Add 10 to the Athanatos' P.S. score, which becomes supernatural in Gregorian form. Also add 5 to P.E. and P.P., with appropriate ability and Hit Point adjustments made. These adjustments apply if at least 2 features of Gregorian are manifested.

S.D.C. and Hit Points: In full Gregorian form, all Athanatos double their existing Hit Points and add 3D6x10 to their S.D.C. scores, in addition to bonuses granted by their host or path. S.D.C. bonus is stable and should be determined once, at character creation, not each time the Gregorian manifests.

Flight: In full Gregorian form the Athanatos can fly at a speed of up to 70 mph (112 km). She can maintain this speed for one minute per P.E. point. If she flies at a relaxed pace (half of normal), double the time before she needs to rest.

Combat: Each Host has its own natural weaponry that can be used in melee combat. Some have talons on their hands, some have the Drowning Touch, etc. These specific abilities are listed with each Gregorian form. The forms also have special powers, ranging from Nightbane talents to psionics to some spell-like abilities. At 3rd level, all Athanatos gain the ability of Psi-Sword, which can be utilized as long as at least one feature of the Gregorian form is manifested.

Natural A.R.: The full Gregorian form provides a natural resistance to damage, which is demonstrated in the form of a Natural A.R. (On *Rifts*® Earth, Athanatos become M.D.C. creatures in full Gregorian form.)

Regeneration: Each Host regenerates a certain amount of damage per round. This regenerative power differs between Hosts, but is universal and will function even on a comatose Athanatos, so long as a successful save vs coma/death is made each round. A failed save means no regeneration that round and standard effects for coma. In this manner, it is possible, though difficult, for an Athanatos to die from blood loss or internal injury while comatose. If an Athanatos' heart is removed, however, the Athanatos cannot regenerate and is permanently dead. Also, the Athanatos' natural regenerative process does not function during strenuous activity; in order for the process to work, the Athanatos must remain still and rest or concentrate.

Extraordinary Vision: an ability that can be manifested in and of itself. When this ability is manifested, the Athanatos' eyes glow with an eerie green light that changes to a glowing form of her attributed element when she is angry. A Pyros' eyes will burn with fire, a Hydros' will glow as pools of water, etc. With this power manifested, the Athanatos sees in daylight as though she were a hawk, and sees in darkness as an owl.

Physical Stature: Most Athanatos are giants. The only exception is the Aeras Host, who are far shorter in stature than the others. Modifications to the height of the Athanatos while in Gregorian form are listed under each type of Host.

Powers of Light: Almost all Athanatos have powers of light similar to some of those possessed by Guardians. They can generate light equivalent to sunlight exactly as Guardians can, with the same P.P.E. cost, but cannot generate shields of light or fire beams of light. Athanatos can also cause a small, glowing ball of light to appear in the palm of their hand. Once created, the ball can be placed in the air in the immediate vicinity of the Athanatos (usually above her head) and will remain there for its full duration, following the Athanatos as she moves. This glowing ball has the same effect on undead as a holy symbol (cross). It costs 30 P.P.E. to manifest and lasts 1 round per level of experience. Also, Athanatos share the ability of *Super Regeneration* with the Guardians.

It should be noted that the Necrosis Host does not have these powers over light. Their powers of death and darkness are detailed fully in their section.

Other: Athanatos are immune to supernatural transformation, including magic, vampirism (cannot be turned) and lycanthropy. Also, like the Nightbane, Athanatos have the power to sense one another. Their aura is such that Nightbane also sense Athanatos, but believe them to be kindred (fellow Nightbane). Athanatos, however, can sense the difference between the two species. It is in this manner that the Athanatos may hide among the Nightbane and still carry on their covert war with one another. Athanatos age at roughly the same rate as Nightbane: one year for every hundred years of life.

Hosts of the Athanatos

The Choma

Description: Like the Watchers they emulate, the Choma by and large are seen as the epitome of nobility, quiet courage, and physical power. They tend to keep a tight lid on their emotions, which leads them often to come off as cold and haughty. In truth, however, their tendency to remain cold and logical is a defense mechanism, for their emotions when uncapped are explosive. Many Choma in the past have hurt more than one person inadvertently in the throes of an emotional outburst. Infernal Choma, in fact, are the sheer opposite, embracing their feral and bestial nature to its most destructive end.

Full Gregorian Appearance: Add 1D6 feet (0.3-1.8 m) to height, skin turns a golden color and well-defined muscles ripple all over the Athanatos' body. The character's weight doubles. Hair becomes a bright, shining gold, almost the color of the sun, and when angered, eyes glow with flecks of metallic gold. Wings appear as hawk or eagle wings in color. Weight does not affect flight (the ability to fly is as much magical as anything else, though the Choma's wings must be manifested to do so).



Attributes: Add 1D6 to the character's initial P.S. score. This is a one-time bonus applied at the time of character creation and applies to both Human and Gregorian forms.

Combat: In Gregorian form the Choma's fingertips become shards of stone, as sharp as shale and as tough as diamonds. These claws do 2D6 damage, plus the Athanatos' P.S. bonus. In addition, add 3D6 additional damage to physical blows (punches, kicks, etc., but *not* claw attacks) due to the hardness of their earthen bodies. A Choma's claws can cut through almost any substance (the only exception is diamonds) at the rate of 1 foot (0.3 m) per melee round.

Psi Sword: Appears as a diamond blade glowing with a faint light.

Natural A.R.: 15

S.D.C.: Add 1D6x10 to S.D.C. while in full Gregorian form.

Horror/Awe Factor: 10

Special Abilities: The Choma has power over the land and physical objects. Thus, at first level a Choma gains the psychic power of Telekinesis. For every two levels thereafter (3rd, 5th, 7th, etc.), the Choma may choose one power from the following list:

Summon Inner Strength

Levitation

Resist Fatigue

Resist Hunger

Resist Thirst

Healing Touch

Psychic Purification

Object Read

See the Invisible

Once the Choma reaches 5th level, the following powers may be chosen in lieu of those above. These powers are "Super" Psionics and are described in **Nightbane®**, **Book 2: Between the Shadows™**:

Telekinetic Punch

Telekinetic Kick

Bio-Manipulation

Super Telekinesis

*(Note: If the G.M. and players have access to the **Heroes Unlimited™** main book, the super ability Control Elemental Force: Earth may be substituted for the Telekinesis ability, but I recommend attaching an I.S.P. cost to the abilities so as not to unbalance the game. For suggestions on what I.S.P. costs to attach to which powers, simply compare the super ability with the psionic powers of Pyrokinesis, Electrokinetic, and Hydrokinesis, and assign what you feel are appropriate costs based on those powers.)*

Regeneration: The Choma regenerates 1D6x10 points of damage every round of inactivity.

I.S.P.: M.E. Attribute, plus the roll of 2D6x10. Add 1D10 per level.

Base P.P.E.: P.E.x2 plus 4D6, plus whatever is gained from the Athanatos' Path.

Individual Features: The following is a list of features that can be manifested independently as part of a partial transformation (see "Creating the Athanatos" for details on partial manifestations).

Altered Height (includes attribute alterations)

Wings (can fly)

Eyes (includes altered vision)

Claws

Body Appearance (gold skin and musculature — includes S.D.C. bonus)

The Aeras

Description: Like the Watchers they emulate, Athanatos of the Aeras Host by and large are seen as the epitome of compassion and strength in tolerance. They are peaceful, gentle and kind, with a soft spot for children and pregnant women. They are the healers of the race, seeking to ease the pain that the Hydros avenge. Infernal Aeras are the opposite; these have become embittered towards what they see as their low rank in the grand scheme of things and often use their innocent appearance to seduce and undermine those in power in an attempt to gain power of their own.

Full Gregorian Appearance: Subtract 2 feet (0.6 m) from height, and 1D6x10 pounds (4.5-27 kg) from weight. The Aeras Gregorian is childlike and innocent in appearance. Their skin is smooth and unblemished, and has a pink flush to it. Aeran wings are small and white, and their eyes when angered glow with yellow flame.

Combat: The Aeras is not the most effective member of the race in melee combat. Their tiny claws do only 1D4 damage. However, they make up for their lack of damage potential with their devastating Neural Touch. By expending 10 P.P.E. the Aeras Athanatos can send a jolt of electricity into a victim's nervous system. This jolt acts in much the same manner as a stun (or "tazer") gun, incapacitating the victim unless a successful save vs knockout (14 or better) is made. Victims of the touch collapse to the ground and lay dazed for 2D4 melee rounds. Worse, on a roll of "natural" 20, or any critical roll (depending on hand to hand skill), victims are -6 to save from this attack, and duration is doubled as well as damage.

Psi Sword: Appears as a blade of crackling electricity.

Attributes: Aeras add an extra 1D6 to both their initial M.A. and P.B. scores. This is a one-time bonus applied at the time of character creation and applies to both Human and Gregorian forms.

Natural A.R.: 11

S.D.C.: Add 1D4x5 to S.D.C. while in full Gregorian form.

Horror/Awe Factor: 10

Special Abilities: The Aeras has power over the element of air. Thus, at first level an Aeras gains the psychic power of Electrokinetic. For every two levels thereafter (3rd, 5th, 7th, etc.), the Aeras may choose one psychic power from the following list:

Healing Touch

Ectoplasm

Exorcism

Induce Sleep

Summon Inner Strength

Increase Healing

Deaden Pain

Psychic Diagnosis

Once the Aeras reaches 5th level, the following powers may be chosen in lieu of those above. These powers are equivalent to the psionics and/or spells listed in the **Nightbane®** main rule book:

Mind Bolt (Master Psionic — See **Nightbane®**, **Book 2: Between the Shadows™**)

See the Invisible
Cloud of Slumber (Spell)
Call Lightning (Spell)
Energy Disruption (Spell)
Summon Fog (Spell)
Restoration (Spell)

Regeneration: The Aeras regenerates 2D6x10 points of damage every round of inactivity.

I.S.P.: M.E. Attribute, plus the roll of 2D4x10. Add 1D10 per level.

Base P.P.E.: P.E.x2 plus 6D6, plus whatever is gained from the Athanatos' Path.

Individual Features: The following is a list of features that can be manifested independently as part of a partial transformation (see "Creating the Athanatos" for details on partial manifestations).

Altered Height (includes attribute alterations)
Wings (can fly)
Eyes (includes altered vision)
Claws
Neural Touch (hands and arms crackle with electricity)
Body Appearance (childlike — includes S.D.C. bonus)

The Pyros

Description: Like the Watchers they emulate, the Pyros Athanatos by and large are seen as the epitome of courage, conviction, and strength of will. They are quick to anger and often difficult to control in group settings. Often, Pyros Athanatos will take risks that border on foolhardy in their eagerness to prove their valor or avenge an insult. However, much like fire, the Pyros' temper burns hot but brief. Pyros rarely hold grudges and prefer to settle things in the heat of the moment.

Full Gregorian Appearance: Increase height to 7 feet (2.1 m), but weight stays the same. The Pyros are tall and wiry, bordering on lanky. Skin is a deep, metallic bronze. Hair becomes a fiery red and seems to writhe and flow as though a constant wind were blowing through it. The eyes of a Pyros burn with fire when he is angry. Wings are a metallic silver or bronze. Weight does not affect flight (the ability to fly is as much magical as anything else, though the Pyros' wings must be manifested to do so).

Combat: In Gregorian form the Pyros sprouts claws of red hot metal. These claws do 2D6 damage, plus the Athanatos' P.S. bonus. In addition, the Pyros' touch burns as fire, inflicting up to 3D6 damage, plus a 50% chance of igniting combustibles. The Pyros can control the intensity of this fire damage in increments of 1D6, from none to the maximum (3D6). Note that damage from fire cauterizes wounds and is not cumulative with claw damage. Also, there is never blood loss from fire damage.

Psi Sword: Appears as a blade of fire.

Attributes: Pyros add an extra 1D6 to the character's initial M.E. score. This is a one-time bonus applied at the time of character creation and applies to both Human and Gregorian forms.

Natural A.R.: 13

S.D.C.: Add 1D4x5 to S.D.C. while in full Gregorian form.

Horror/Awe Factor: 12

Special Abilities: The Pyros has power over the element of fire.

Thus, at first level a Pyros gains the psychic power of Pyrokinesis. For every two levels thereafter (3rd, 5th, 7th, etc.), the Pyros may choose one power from the following list:

Summon Inner Strength
Empathy
Impervious to Fire
Impervious to Cold
Resist Thirst
Healing Touch
Empathic Transmission

Once the Pyros reaches 5th level, the following powers may be chosen in lieu of those above. These powers are equivalent to the spells listed in the **Nightbane®** main rule book:

Fire Bolt
Circle of Flame
Fire Ball (Improved from Pyrokinesis version — see spell description)
Compulsion
Blinding Flash

Regeneration: The Pyros regenerates 1D8x10 points of damage every round.

I.S.P.: M.E. Attribute, plus the roll of 2D4x10. Add 1D10 per level.

Base P.P.E.: P.E.x2 plus 6D6, plus whatever is gained from the Athanatos' Path.

Individual Features: The following is a list of features that can be manifested independently as part of a partial transformation (see "Creating the Athanatos" for details on partial manifestations).

Altered Height (includes attribute alterations)
Wings (can fly)
Eyes (includes altered vision)
Claws
Fiery Touch
Body Appearance (Bronze skin and musculature — includes S.D.C. bonus)

The Hydros

Description: Like the Watchers they emulate, the Hydros Athanatos by and large are seen as the epitome of vindication, and are called "hammers of the innocent." They are peaceful and kind, and abhor violence and suffering. However, where such things exist the Hydros are often compelled to stamp out the cause of such suffering without mercy. They are champions of the weak and downtrodden, and the protectors of the defenseless. A Hydros who witnesses an injustice quite often will not rest until she sees the perpetrator brought to justice. Infernal Hydros seek to control and dominate through subtle manipulation rather than brute force. It is exceedingly rare to find a Miscreant or Diabolic Hydros; even Infernal ones tend to be Aberrant, treating their underlings with respect and fairness.

Full Gregorian Appearance: Add 2D6 feet (0.6-3.7 m) to height, and 1D6x10 pounds (4.5-27 kg) to weight. The Hydros Gregorian is perhaps the most startling transformation to behold of all the Athanatos, as they do not resemble human beings at all. Rather, they appear as tall, humanoid sea horses. Skin is scaly and brown, and armored plates run from

their pointed, dragon-like snout down their back. They have no wings; rather, they develop fins on their back and appear to swim through the air when they fly. These fins must be manifested in order for the Hydros' flight power to function. When angered, the eyes of a Hydros glow with an eerie light resembling a bluish-green light placed at the bottom of a deep, rippling pool. The Hydros are the rarest of all the Athanatos.

Combat: In Gregorian form the Hydros has no claws; rather, spikes jut from their forearms resembling bone arm blades. These blades inflict 1D6 damage, plus P.S. bonus. In addition, the Hydros may, by spending 10 P.P.E., utilize a power known as a *Drowning Touch*. Victims of this touch must save vs non-lethal poison (16 or better) or immediately begin suffering the effects of drowning. Their lungs fill with fluid and all bonuses, skills and checks are reduced to 50% of normal. Immediately they take 2D6 points of damage (temporarily) to their P.E. score. From there they must save every round or take an additional 2D6 to P.E. When P.E. reaches zero, the victim falls unconscious.

Once unconscious from a *Drowning Touch*, all the fluid that filled the victim's lungs oozes out through the victim's skin within one round. From that point the victim remains unconscious for 1D6 hours, during which time they recover lost P.E. at a rate of 2D6 per hour.

Psi Sword: Appears as a blade of ice.

Attributes: Hydros add an extra 1D6 to their initial P.E. scores.

This is a one-time bonus applied at the time of character creation and applies to both Human and Gregorian forms.

Natural A.R.: 13

S.D.C.: Add 1D4x10 to S.D.C. while in full Gregorian form.

Horror/Awe Factor: 15

Special Abilities: The Hydros has power over the element of water. Thus, at first level a Hydros gains the psychic power of Hydrokinesis. For every two levels thereafter (3rd, 5th, 7th, etc.), the Hydros may choose one power from the following list:

Summon Inner Strength

Ectoplasm

Presence Sense

Sense Evil

Resist Thirst

Increase Healing

Deaden Pain

Sixth Sense

Once the Hydros reaches 5th level, the following powers may be chosen in lieu of those above. These powers are equivalent to the spells listed in the *Nightbane*® main rule book:

Breathe Without Air

See the Invisible

Extinguish Flame

Banishment

Resurrection

Regeneration: The Hydros regenerates 1D6x10 points of damage every round.

I.S.P.: M.E. Attribute, plus the roll of 2D4x10. Add 1D10 per level.

Base P.P.E.: P.E.x2 plus 6D6, plus whatever is gained from the Athanatos' Path.

Individual Features: The following is a list of features that can be manifested independently as part of a partial transformation (see "Creating the Athanatos" for details on partial manifestations).

Altered Height (includes attribute alterations)

Fins (can fly)

Eyes (includes altered vision)

Bone Arm Blades

Drowning Touch (hands and arms become pseudo-reptilian in appearance)

Body Appearance (humanoid sea horse — includes S.D.C. bonus)



The Necrosis

Description: No one knows how the Necrosis came into being.

The origin of their parents, the Necrophim, is a mystery. Were the Necrophim once Gregorians? Likely, no one will ever know; but whatever the reason, these evil creatures of the Astral Plane have the power to create hybrid offspring that are every bit Athanatos. Like the Watchers of Death (the Necrophim — see *Nightbane*® **Book 1: Between the Shadows**™) they emulate, the Necrosis Athanatos by and large are seen as the epitome of perversion, outside of nature and representative of the nega-elements of death and decay. They are cold and calculating, merciless in combat and ruthless in the pursuit of their ends. Very few Necrosis are Luciphim; the very nature of the corrupt essence within them bends them towards evil from birth. For reasons unknown, in the late twentieth century (late 1990's) to the present, more

and more young people are showing a disturbing trend towards evil; this is partially due to the presence of Necrophim essence planted in legions of unborn children during this time.

Full Gregorian Appearance: Unlike other Athanatos, Necrosis are roughly human size and build. There is no adjustment to their height or weight. Skin and hair are jet black, and eyes when angered glow a menacing red. Wings are leathery and bat-like in appearance (must be manifested to fly).

Combat: Perhaps the least effective in direct combat, due to its lack of special attacks and moderate damage. In Gregorian form the Necrosis does not have claws, but rather grows chain-like tendrils from his wrists which can be used in a whip or flail-like fashion, inflicting 2D6 points of damage, plus supernatural strength bonus.

Psi Sword: Appears as black-lit energy.

Attributes: Necrosis add an extra 1D6+3 to the character's initial P.P. score. This is a one-time bonus applied at the time of character creation and applies to both Human and Gregorian forms. However, they also must subtract 4 from their initial M.A. scores to represent the aura of death that surrounds them at all times.

Natural A.R.: 10

S.D.C.: Add P.E.x2 to S.D.C. while in full Gregorian form.

Horror/Awe Factor: 13

Special Abilities: The domain of the Necrosis is darkness, death and decay. Thus, at first level, the Athanatos gains the power to Shadow Meld as per the spell (with appropriate P.P.E. cost) and gains the *Nightbane Talent* of The Shroud. Thereafter, for every other level (3, 5, 7, 9, etc.) the Necrosis can choose one of the following spells or psionic powers:

Summon Inner Strength

Inflict Pain

Detect Good (as Detect Evil, but reversed)

Death Trance

Ectoplasm

Deaden Pain

Empathic Transmission

Once the Necrosis reaches 5th level, the following powers may be chosen in lieu of those above. These powers are equivalent to the spells listed in the *Nightbane®* main rulebook and *Nightbane® Book 3: Through the Glass Darkly™*:

Reanimate Flesh

Bloodward

Shadow Meld

Traitorous Hand

Domination

Horrific Illusion

Call Ectoplasm From Others

Apparition

Life Drain

The Druid's Head

Destroy Undead Flesh

At Level 8, the following spells are also accessible:

Create Zombie

Minor Curse

Sickness

Fatal Growth

Restoration

Regeneration: The Necrosis regenerates 1D6x10 points of damage every round.

I.S.P.: M.E. Attribute, plus the roll of 2D4x10. Add 1D10 per level.

Base P.P.E.: P.E. attribute plus 3D6x10, plus whatever is gained from the Athanatos' Path.

Individual Features: The following is a list of features that can be manifested independently as part of a partial transformation (see "Creating the Athanatos" for details on partial manifestations).

Wings (can fly)

Eyes (includes altered vision)

Chain-Like Appendages

Body Appearance (black skin and hair — includes S.D.C. bonus)

Body Appearance (as above, but includes attribute bonuses)

The Paths

Earlier I stated that an Athanatos' Path was equivalent to the character's O.C.C. This is both true and misleading. For the purposes of game mechanics, the character's R.C.C. will be Athanatos. The Path is probably more akin to the skill packages of Nightbane characters, albeit with a special ability or two thrown in for good measure. Every Athanatos uses the same experience chart, no matter their Host or Path. However, Athanatos are genetically predisposed towards a certain set of aptitudes based on the spark of Gregorian Essence within them. In reality, it's not much different from humans. Did you ever take an aptitude test when you were in high school (or earlier) that told you what skills you were geared towards? Granted, they're not always accurate in real life, but it's the same general idea.

In addition, each Path grants its followers a set of special abilities that modify, add to, or in some cases supercede those of their Host. Thus, the combination of Host and Path lead to a unique individual, different from every other Athanatos. Paths are organized as follows:

O.C.C. Skills: A list of skills automatically awarded to the Athanatos at character creation, just as in every other Palladium game.

O.C.C. Related Skills: Additional talents and areas of training the Athanatos may find through schooling or at the hands of his or her mentor. Represented as a list of categories from which the player may choose skills for his character. Each category will have a one-time bonus listed that is applied to each new skill chosen from that list. Athanatos characters choose eight O.C.C. Related Skills at level one and an additional skill at levels two, four, five, six, eight, ten, eleven and thirteen.

Secondary Skills: Secondary Skills are areas of interest and expertise that the character has "picked up" on his own — hobbies, independent study, etc. As a general rule, Secondary Skills are chosen from the same list as O.C.C. Related Skills, but do not enjoy the benefits of the one-time bonus listed in parentheses next to each category (i.e. don't apply the listed bonus). However, G.M.s should be open-minded about allowing characters to pick up skills not in the list if there's a good reason why the character could've learned a specific skill. Concept overrides the letter of the rules every time. It's

about characters, after all, not rules. Each character may choose four Secondary Skills at first level and one other at levels three, seven, nine and twelve.

O.C.C. Abilities and Bonuses: The special powers, bonuses, magic, psionics, etc., that set each Athanatos apart from the next. Record these abilities on your sheet in the appropriate area. Note that some abilities are not available until later levels, and some increase in power as the character grows.

Experience: Athanatos use the Nightbane/Guardian Experience Table.

The Paths of the Athanatos

The Obscuraphim — Paths of Darkness

The Scourges

The Necromancers (Prerequisite: Must be Necrosis)

The Seers

The Magii

The Luciphim — Paths of Light

The Valiant

The Defenders

The Vindicators

The Infiltrators (Prerequisite: Must be Choma)

The Seers

Other Paths know the Seers as prophets and as sensitives. Their visions of the future and sensitivity to the true nature of things make them valuable assets to both sides of the War.

O.C.C. Skills:

Literacy: Native Language and one of choice (+25%).

Language: Native Tongue at 98%.

Lore: Demons and Monsters (+20%)

Lore: Geomancy and Ley Lines (+20%)

Lore: Religion (+20%)

Cryptography (+10%)

W.P. Modern: Choose One.

W.P. Ancient: Choose One.

Hand to Hand: Basic

O.C.C. Related Skills

Communications: Any (+5%).

Domestic: Any.

Electrical: Basic Electronics only.

Espionage: Intelligence only (+5%).

Mechanical: Basic only.

Medical: First Aid only (+10%).

Military: None.

Physical: Any except Acrobatics or Gymnastics.

Pilot Skills: Pilot Auto, Truck, or Motorcycle only.

Pilot Related: Navigation only.

Rogue Skills: Any (+10%).

Science: Any (+15%).

Technical: Any (+20% to Language and Lore skills).

Weapon Proficiencies: Any, except Heavy.

Wilderness Skills: None.

Secondary Skills: Standard, from above list.

O.C.C. Bonuses and Abilities: +3 to save vs Horror Factor, +1 additional at levels 3, 6, 9, and 12. +1 to P.S., P.P., and P.E. when in Gregorian Form.

See Truth as the Nightbane Talent, at third level.

Psionics: The Seers are psionic, possessing psychic sensitive abilities. At first level they may choose 3 powers from the

Sensitive category. For every 2 levels thereafter, they may choose 1 additional Sensitive power. In addition, at levels 2, 5, 8 and 12, the Seers may choose one power from either the Physical or Healing category. At levels 5, 9 and 13, the Seers get one power from the Master psionic category. Seers are considered Master Psionics. Powers are in addition to those granted by their Host.

I.S.P.: Seers add 1D6x10 to initial I.S.P. and an additional 2D10 per level of experience, in addition to I.S.P. granted by their Host.

The Necromancers

The Necromancers are mages of the darkest arts. Every Necromancer is a Necrosis, and thus has none of the powers of light that other Athanatos possess. Rather, they gain the enhanced access to spells of darkness that other Necrosis gain, as well as several other powers over darkness and death. Celestial Necromancers are rare, but they do exist; these tortured souls seek to reject the darkness that is so much a part of their essence, using it towards beneficent ends in a (some would say futile) attempt at atonement.

O.C.C. Skills:

Literacy: Native Language (+25%)

Language: Native Tongue at 98% and one other of choice (+15%).

Lore: Demons and Monsters (+10%)

Lore: Vampires (+10%)

Lore: Geomancy and Ley Lines (+10%)

Disguise (+10%)

Math: Basic (+15%)

W.P. Modern: Choose One.

W.P. Ancient: Choose One.

Hand to Hand: Expert

O.C.C. Related Skills

Communications: Radio: Basic only (+5%).

Domestic: Any.

Electrical: Basic Electronics only.

Espionage: None.

Mechanical: Basic only.

Medical: Any (+10%).

Military: Any (+5%).

Physical: Any (+10% where applicable).

Pilot Skills: Any (+15% to Automobile, Motorcycle, Truck only).

Pilot Related: Navigation only.

Rogue Skills: Concealment, Palming, Prowl only (+10%).

Science: Any (+10%).

Technical: Any (+10%).

Weapon Proficiencies: Any, except Heavy.

Wilderness Skills: Any (+5%).

Secondary Skills: Standard, from above list.

O.C.C. Bonuses and Abilities: +3 to save vs Horror Factor, +1 additional at levels 4, 8 and 12. +1 to P.S., P.P., and P.E. when in Gregorian Form.

Animate Dead: Necromancers possess the fearsome ability to animate dead bodies and control them for brief periods of time. The character can animate one body/skeleton per every two levels of experience. This is accomplished in a similar fashion as other Athanatos turn dead. The Necromancer cre-

ates a ball of blacklight in the palm of his hand, then floats it above his head. The ball lasts for 1 round per level, then vanishes, at which time all animated corpses crumble to dust. Each dead body has 80 S.D.C. and is +3 to strike and parry, but does not dodge. Animated bodies may utilize guns and hand weapons if so commanded by the Necromancer controlling them. If the Necromancer is within 300 feet (91.5 m) of his controlled dead, the corpses are +3 to save vs turning.

Anti Arcane as per the Nightbane talent, at 3rd level.

P.P.E.: Necromancers add 1D4x10 to initial P.P.E., plus 1D8 per level. This is in addition to the P.P.E. received from their Host.



The Scourges

The Scourges are known by the other Paths as warriors in the fullest sense of the word, with emphasis on "war." Bloodletting is their life, the heat of battle their food and drink. These are the characters that actually take *pleasure* in the dirtier aspects of the War. Many Scourges have grown up on the streets, in organized gangs or running solo. All are violence personified. There are Celestial Scourges, but these seek to utterly stamp out the Infernals, believing that redemption is a crock (or claiming so; in reality, they just don't want to give anyone the excuse). Other Celestials wonder if the Celestial Scourges aren't just a little too much towards the dark end of the gray. Among the other Celestials it is an accepted truth that you don't turn your back on a Scourge, whether he's an enemy or a companion.

O.C.C. Skills:

Literacy: Native Language (+25%)

Language: Native Tongue at 98% and one other of choice (+15%).

Detect Ambush (+5%)

Demolitions (+10%)

Physical: Choose two, excluding Hand to Hand skills.

W.P. Modern: Choose Three.

W.P. Ancient: Choose Three.

Hand to Hand: Assassin (if evil) or Martial Arts.

O.C.C. Related Skills

Communications: Radio: Basic only (+5%).

Domestic: Any.

Electrical: Any except Electrical Engineer (+5%).

Espionage: Sniper, Tracking, Counter-Tracking only (+10%).

Mechanical: Basic, Auto Mechanics, and Weapons Engineer only (+10%).

Medical: First Aid only.

Military: Any.

Physical: Any (+10% if applicable).

Pilot Skills: Any (+15% to Automobile, Motorcycle, Truck only).

Pilot Related: Navigation only.

Rogue Skills: Any (+10%).

Science: None.

Technical: Any (+10%).

Weapon Proficiencies: Any.

Wilderness Skills: Wilderness Survival, Hunting, Track Animals, Skin and Prepare Hides only (+5%).

Secondary Skills: Standard, from above list.

O.C.C. Bonuses and Abilities: +2 to save vs Horror Factor, +1 additional at levels 4, 8 and 12. +4 to P.S., P.P., and P.E. when in Gregorian Form.

Blood Bath as per the Nightbane elite talent, but the Scourge obviously doesn't need to meet the prerequisite. Rather, the activation cost for Scourges is 16 P.P.E. rather than 8, and when they activate this talent, large open wounds erupt on their bodies, from which the blood sprays.

Serrated Claws: The claws of the Scourge are serrated, inflicting an extra die of damage in combat.

P.P.E.: Scourges add 1D4+10 P.P.E. to their initial P.P.E. scores.

The Magii

Known by the other Paths as scholars, the Magii study science, lore, and mysticism and are probably the most diverse users of magic among all the Athanatos.

O.C.C. Skills:

Literacy: Native Language and two of choice (+25%).

Language: Native Tongue at 98% and two others of choice (+15%).

Lore: Demons and Monsters (+20%)

Lore: Vampires (+20%)

Lore: Geomancy and Ley Lines (+20%)

Lore: Nightbane (+20%)

Lore: Nightlands (+20%)

Lore: Religion (+20%)

Astronomy (+20%)



Cryptography (+10%)
 W.P. Modern: Choose One.
 W.P. Ancient: Choose One.
 Hand to Hand: Basic

O.C.C. Related Skills

Communications: Any (+5%).
 Domestic: Any.
 Electrical: Basic Electronics only.
 Espionage: Intelligence only (+5%).
 Mechanical: Basic only.
 Medical: Any (+10%).
 Military: None.
 Physical: Any except Acrobatics or Gymnastics.
 Pilot Skills: Any (+15%).
 Pilot Related: Navigation only.
 Rogue Skills: Any (+10%).
 Science: Any (+15%).
 Technical: Any (+15%).
 Weapon Proficiencies: Any, except Heavy.
 Wilderness Skills: None.

Secondary Skills: Standard, from above list.

O.C.C. Bonuses and Abilities: +3 to save vs Horror Factor, +1 additional at levels 3, 6, 9 and 12. +1 to P.S., P.P., and P.E. when in Gregorian Form.

Magic: The Magii have access to *all* spell and ritual magic, no matter the specialization (this includes Fleshsculptor, Mirror Mage, and other schools of magic). In addition to their normal (Host granted) spells, Magii may select 3 spells from

levels 1-4 at first level. At each level thereafter, the Magii may select one new spell from any level up to her own level of experience. This selection is always in addition to any special abilities granted by the Magii's Host. Also, the Magii may choose to cast any spell as a *ritual*. Doing so adds 1D4 hours to casting time of the spell, but doubles range, duration, and power.

P.P.E.: Magii add 3D6x10 to initial P.P.E. and an additional 2D10 per level of experience, in addition to P.P.E. granted by their Host.



The Infiltrators

Called "Couriers" by the other Athanatos, the Infiltrators are the swiftest, sneakiest, and in some ways most dangerous of all the Paths. They are the spies, and the messengers of the War, exposing operations and undermining enemy factions. All Infiltrators are Choma.

O.C.C. Skills:

Literacy: Native Language and two others (+25%).
 Language: Native Tongue at 98% and two others (+25%).
 Lore: Demons and Monsters (+10%)
 Lore: Religion (+10%)
 Tracking (+25%)
 Military Etiquette (+25%)
 Streetwise (+10%)
 Disguise (+25%)

Intelligence (+20%)
W.P. Modern: Choose Two.
W.P. Ancient: Choose Two.
Hand to Hand: Martial Arts or Assassin, if evil.

O.C.C. Related Skills

Communications: Any (+10%).
Domestic: Any.
Electrical: Basic Electronics only.
Espionage: Any (+20%).
Mechanical: Basic Mechanics only.
Medical: First Aid only (+5%).
Military: Any (+10%).
Physical: Any.
Pilot Skills: Any (+5%).
Pilot Related: Any(+5%).
Rogue Skills: Any (+15%).
Science: None.
Technical: Any (+10%).
Weapon Proficiencies: Any.
Wilderness Skills: Land Navigation only.

Secondary Skills: Standard, from above list.

O.C.C. Bonuses and Abilities: +2 to save vs Horror Factor, +1 additional at levels 3, 6, 9 and 12. +3 to P.S., P.P., and P.E. when in Gregorian Form.

The Shroud as the Nightbane Talent.

Alter Appearance: By spending 25 P.P.E., the Infiltrator can alter her physical appearance (but not Gregorian Form) to resemble anyone of either gender she has seen, or can perform general appearance alterations as she wishes. This ability functions as the Disguise skill at 80% efficiency when trying to mimic a specific person, and the Infiltrator must have seen the person she is attempting to mimic at least once. When performing non-specific alteration of features, the skill works at 98% efficiency. Alterations last until the Infiltrator expends 10 P.P.E. to return to her normal form. Changes in size are restricted to six inches (15 cm) maximum, and weight alterations are not possible. Nor can the Infiltrator alter her voice using this power.

Psionics: Telepathy, Sixth Sense, Suggestion, Alter Aura, Mind Block.

I.S.P. Infiltrators add 2D6x10 to initial I.S.P. and an additional 1D10 per level of experience, in addition to I.S.P. granted by the Host.

The Valiant

The Valiant tend to be the generals and tacticians of the War. It is they who lead or seem destined to lead the factions in the War. One thing a Valiant can always be counted on for is honor, for even the Infernal Valiant tend towards the Aberrant alignment rather than Miscreant or Diabolic. It has been said that if you've got to depend on another for survival, a Valiant is always a good one to have at your back.

O.C.C. Skills:

Literacy: Native Language (+25%)
Language: Native Tongue at 98%.
Lore: Demons and Monsters (+20%)
Lore: Religion (+20%)
Strategy/Tactics (+25%)
Military Etiquette (+25%)

Streetwise (+10%)
W.P. Modern: Choose Three.
W.P. Ancient: Choose Three.
Hand to Hand: Martial Arts

O.C.C. Related Skills

Communications: Any (+10%).
Domestic: Any.
Electrical: Basic Electronics only.
Espionage: Any (+10%).
Mechanical: Basic Mechanics only.
Medical: Any.
Military: Any (+15%).
Physical: Any.
Pilot Skills: Any (+5%).
Pilot Related: Any(+5%).
Rogue Skills: None.
Science: Any (+5%).
Technical: Any (+10%).
Weapon Proficiencies: Any.
Wilderness Skills: Land Navigation, Hunting, Track Animals only.

Secondary Skills: Standard, from above list.

O.C.C. Bonuses and Abilities: +3 to save vs Horror Factor, +1 additional at levels 3, 6, 9 and 12. +3 to P.S., P.P., and P.E. when in Gregorian Form.

Smite Evil: By expending P.P.E. the Valiant can inflict great amounts of damage to undead, demonic, or evil supernatural creatures. The Valiant must make physical contact (*touch*,



bare-handed, no weaponry) with the target to use this power. If the touch is successful (can *not* be combined with a normal hit! the Valiant must channel the power through his fingertips and thus must *touch* his target) then holy light seems to stream from the target's eyes, mouth, ears, and indeed forms an aura around the target. This attack inflicts 1D10 points of damage per 10 points of P.P.E. spent. The channeling of energy takes some time, so using this power uses all of the Athanatos' attacks for the round in which it is attempted. Use of this power also nullifies the Valiant's automatic parry for the round. Since the power requires physical contact and the channeling of power, it can be parried as normal. Successfully parried attacks have no effect, but the power is still channeled — P.P.E. is still spent, and the Valiant cannot attack further that round. Note that this power simply does not function against other Athanatos (Valiant know this instinctively).

P.P.E.: Valiant add 2D6x10 to initial P.P.E. and an additional 1D10 per level of experience, in addition to P.P.E. granted by their Host.

The Vindicators

The Vindicators are hunters of the guilty, punishers of the wicked, and bringers of vengeance. Wherever, whenever an injustice is done or an insult is had, there is a Vindicator hunting the perpetrator. Infernal Vindicators are quite dangerous, taking personal insult at the least slight and exercising vengeance through pain, punishment, terror, and torture as well as through death.

O.C.C. Skills:

Literacy: Native Language (+25%)
 Language: Native Tongue at 98%.
 Lore: Demons and Monsters (+20%)
 Lore: Religion (+20%)
 Tracking (+25%)
 Military Etiquette (+25%)
 Streetwise (+10%)
 W.P. Modern: Choose Three.
 W.P. Ancient: Choose Three.
 Hand to Hand: Martial Arts, or Assassin if evil.

O.C.C. Related Skills

Communications: Radio: Basic only (+10%).
 Domestic: Any.
 Electrical: Basic Electronics only.
 Espionage: Any (+10%).
 Mechanical: Basic Mechanics only.
 Medical: First Aid only (+5%).
 Military: Any (+10%).
 Physical: Any.
 Pilot Skills: Any (+5%).
 Pilot Related: Any (+5%).
 Rogue Skills: Any (+15%).
 Science: None.
 Technical: Any (+10%).
 Weapon Proficiencies: Any.
 Wilderness Skills: Land Navigation, Hunting, Track Animals only (+15%).

Secondary Skills: Standard, from above list.

O.C.C. Bonuses and Abilities: +2 to save vs Horror Factor, +1

additional at levels 3, 6, 9 and 12. +3 to P.S., P.P., and P.E. when in Gregorian Form.

Psionics: The Vindicators must be in top physical form to carry out their place as avengers. Thus, like the Seers and Defenders they get psionic powers to assist them. At first level, the Vindicators may choose 3 powers from the Physical psionic category. For every 2 levels thereafter they may choose one additional Physical power. In addition, at levels 3, 5, 9 and 12, the Vindicator gains one power from the Sensitive category *and* one power from the Master category. Vindicators are Master Psionics.

I.S.P.: Vindicators add 2D6x10 to initial I.S.P. and an additional 1D10 per level of experience, in addition to I.S.P. granted by their Host.



The Defenders

The Defenders tend to be the protectors and nurturers of the others. It is those of this Path that most often end up as Protector Spirits in the time after their Revelation.

O.C.C. Skills:

Literacy: Native Language (+25%)
 Language: Native Tongue at 98%.
 Lore: Demons and Monsters (+10%)
 Lore: Religion (+10%)
 Lore: Vampires (+10%)
 Military Etiquette (+20%)
 Paramedic (+10%)

W.P. Modern: Choose Two.

W.P. Ancient: Choose Two.

Hand to Hand: Expert

O.C.C. Related Skills

Communications: Radio: Basic only (+10%).

Domestic: Any.

Electrical: Basic Electronics only.

Espionage: Any (+10%).

Mechanical: Basic Mechanics only.

Medical: Any (+20%).

Military: None (except O.C.C. skills above).

Physical: Any.

Pilot Skills: Any (+5%).

Pilot Related: Any (+5%).

Rogue Skills: Any.

Science: None.

Technical: Any (+10%).

Weapon Proficiencies: Any.

Wilderness Skills: Any (+10%).

Secondary Skills: Standard, from above list.

O.C.C. Bonuses and Abilities: +4 to save vs Horror Factor, +1 additional at levels 4, 8 and 12. +2 to P.S., P.P., and P.E. when in Gregorian Form.

Shadow Shield, as the Nightbane talent, at 3rd level.

Psionics: Defenders are healers and have psionic powers to match. At first level they may choose 3 powers from the Healing category of psionics. For every 2 levels thereafter, they may choose 1 additional Healing power. In addition, at levels 2, 5, 8 and 12, a Defender may choose one power from either the Physical or Sensitive category. At levels 5, 9 and 13, the Defender gains one power from the Master category. Defenders are considered Master Psionics. Powers are in addition to those granted by their Host.

I.S.P.: Defenders add 2D6x10 to I.S.P. at first level, and an additional 1D10 per level thereafter. This is in addition to I.S.P. received via their Host.

Other Forces in the War

The Guardians

It's an all-too-common tale told among the Nightbane: "...a friend of a friend was in deep trouble, facing down a dozen or more Hounds and Hunters, N.S.B. agents, or worse. There was nowhere to run, nowhere to hide, no friends in the immediate proximity to call for help. The friend-of-a-friend was done, I mean 'throw down your guns,' 'fall on your sword,' whatever. Nobody could stand up to the type of odds she was facing. Then, out of nowhere, these weird... things... showed up. Like the cavalry riding over the hill, they just opened up on the Hounds, Hunters, or whatever, with beams of light and Kung Fu fighting. Two of 'em took out about three-quarters of the pack before my friend's friend could even recover. When it was all over, the weirdoes vanished like they were never there. Me? I never seen anything like that myself, but my friend's friend don't lie, and hey, our faction leader heard the story and said somethin' about 'Guardians,' so it must be true."

The **Guardians** are forces of light in the darkness of Earth after Dark Day. They hearken back to a legendary (some would say mythical) time when the forces of good took up arms to bat-

tle evil with a zest and fervor rarely found in these troubled times. But they are as mysterious as they are powerful and (most believe and hope) good. For every human or Nightbane rescued by these strange powers of good, there are a dozen who need rescue that don't receive it. Why? Who are the Guardians, and above all, what do they know?

The answer to that question is simple: they know the truth. Well, at least to an extent.

Fledgling Guardians act on instinct, drawn to wherever evil thrives, and driven by an unknown urge to stamp it out. The Nightlords are to be driven back, but vampires are to a Guardian's eyes the ultimate perversion and must be utterly wiped out. However, a young Guardian left to his own devices for too long inevitably will become a danger to himself and to those around him, not to mention the Guardian race as a whole. Elder Guardians see it as their job to collect and guide these children of the Light, teaching them their purpose and imbuing them with a sense of direction, much as elder Nightbane and elder Athanatos do with their own "children." Thus it has gone for millennia. Nobody knows where, when, or how it all began, but there is no doubt that the numbers of Guardians has gone up since Dark Day, just as have the numbers of other preternatural creatures.

The connection between the Guardians and the Athanatos, however, goes all the way back before recorded history began in any reliable sense. Nobody, not the Athanatos and certainly not the Guardians, knows from where these strange beings hail or



who creates them, but the Athanatos believe they are agents of a strange force they refer to as "the Light," sent to balance out the corruption of the Dark. This being the case, it was imperative that the Celestials make contact with the Guardians early on, lest they be misled by the Infernals and turned from their divine path. Together the good Athanatos and the Guardians worked for centuries, keeping the existence of the Guardians secret. In a very real sense, the Guardians were a "secret weapon" in the war against evil. More importantly, the Celestials like to think that Watchers are in some way a manifestation of the Light and they, too, are thus spawned of the Light. If this is so, it stands to reason that there is some mysterious and intrinsic connection between Guardians and Athanatos. No one knows for sure what (or even if) the Light is, any more than anybody knows what the Dark is. Perhaps one was created as a backlash of the other? Perhaps none will ever know.

All that is certain is that like Yeats' "center that did not hold," things did indeed fall apart. The Luciphim and Obscuraphim were no longer the clear-cut lines between good and evil they once were. Luciphim turned to darkness and Obscuraphim to light. New lines were drawn; the terms "Celestials" and "Infernals" were coined to further divide the Athanatos into clear lines once more. The "traitors" among the Luciphim who had fallen to darkness told the Infernals of the secret warriors of light. The Infernals needed a weapon of their own to balance the scales. Unholy rituals were performed, during which the Infernals sought to bring a force of darkness into the world as powerful as the light the Guardians represented. It is said that at that point the first vampire intelligence made known its presence on the Earth, and vampires, the archenemies of the Guardians, were unleashed upon the world. The War had taken on its first smaller facet.

In the years to come, the War would take on many other faces and be fought on thousands upon thousands of other fronts, and entire races would be spawned and destroyed, but the battle between the Guardians and the Vampires would take on a life of its own, just as the battle between the Nightbane and the Nightlords appears to have done. Only time will tell if the newest front in the War will stand the test of time as has the bitter feud between these physical manifestations of light and darkness.

Most Athanatos pray it won't.

The question, then, is still, "what exactly do the Guardians know?" Again, to an extent they know the truth. Your average, every day, run-of-the-mill Guardian, however, doesn't know much in the way of details. They know of the existence of Athanatos and Watchers; they know the war against the Nightlords is one facet of a greater war between the forces of good and evil, but their outlook on the situation sometimes tends to lean more towards a philosophical outlook — the faithful against the fallen. The truth of the matter remains hidden. The truth of the Guardians' existence and their purpose in the War remains largely a mystery to the vast majority of both Guardians and Athanatos.

Vampires

The eternal and violent enemies of the Guardians, Vampires have walked the earth since the early days of man. While Guardian lore says that Vampires were created as a reaction to

the discovery of their presence, Vampires claim that the world was theirs long before the Guardians set foot on the world.

The lore of the undead speaks of a "Golden Age of Darkness," when the Vampires ruled over man and demons walked the earth at will, taking pleasure from the screams of the innocent and suckling from them as masters of a worldwide slaughterhouse. Humans were cattle, sheep, food to be herded, cultivated, used, and thrown aside. Then, claim the Vampires, came the Guardians to destroy all that they had built, to return the world to the control of mortal men. Vampires know nothing of the Athanatos or the greater war. Their very nature makes them self-centered and haughty, and the existence of other supernatural beings is inconsequential. The idea that they are pawns in a greater war is ludicrous to their sensibilities.

Later came the Ba'al, whom Vampires at first saw as allies in Darkness. But then the Ba'al betrayed the undead in their quest for their own power. The Vampires, feeling that the world should belong to them and them alone, stood to fight these usurpers of all that was rightly theirs. Evil turned in upon itself and the Vampires found themselves assisting in the banishment of the Ba'al unwittingly, and in one of the greatest paradoxes in history, the ultimate evil of the Vampires was a powerful force for goodness.

For millennia thereafter, the Vampires lived in secret, their war with the Guardians carrying down through the centuries as they strove to once again to rule over the billions of mortals that had sprung up all over the world like a pox.

Now, though, the Ba'al have returned and again threaten the dominance of the Vampires. The signs of the Apocalypse are all about, and the undead are determined to once again be the lords of their own destiny. They are wild cards in the fight, true servants of evil with no concerns towards ally or enemy. At all costs, they will win the war and reclaim the world they see as theirs to rule.

Demons and Deevils

Perhaps two of the ultimate forces for evil, Demons and Deevils exercise all the facets of that which is darkest within the human soul. Some ancient lore equates Demons and Deevils with those Gregorians who turned to evil, but how reliable can this be? Such lore also calls Demons and Deevils one and the same. In fact, the two are the bitterest of enemies, again exemplifying the truism that evil turns in upon itself.

The truth of the matter is that even most Demons and Deevils do not know the truth of their origins. If the lords of Dyval and Hades are aware of the source of their existence, they say nothing to their underlings, and in fact appear to relish the prestige of being thought of as fallen Watchers. Indeed, it is said that many Watchers who fall from the light tend to mysteriously vanish without a trace, with no faithful willing to take credit for the slaying of the corrupted creature. Oftentimes soon after the fallen Gregorian vanishes, there are reports of Demonic or Diabolic activity perpetrated by creatures that in some way resemble the former Watcher. This would seem to support the idea that Watchers who fall far enough from the light become Deevils or Demons. However, it is known that Deevils and Demons cannot create Athanatos, a fact that contradicts the notion. It is possible that these tales are spread by Demons and Deevils to add mystery and power to their image. Strangely, this



is one secret that is somehow securely kept. Even a Demon or Deevil Lord under the power of a binding spell can refuse to impart such information to his captor, or even lie in response to such a question. Why this is, is not certain, but many a would-be Demon summoner has been driven insane by the foul creatures' clever and twisted responses to such questions, believing such responses to be magically-forced and absolute truth. In the end, some puzzles are better left unsolved.

Whatever their true origins, Demons and Deevils hate Athanatos above all else, and will often abandon their own squabbles with one another to unite against these forces of light. This is fortunate for the forces of darkness, for the last known figures indicate that there are more good Athanatos than there are evil. Were it not for the acts of demonic legions, the forces of good would have apparently long ago won the war. It is unfortunate for the Athanatos, however, because Demons and Deevils are quite aware of their existence, and actively hunt Athanatos for sport, hoping that the Gregorians find some measure of pain in the tortured screams of their offspring.

Another theory is that Deevils and Demons were created of mankind's own base urges and desires. When the first Watchers fell from grace, sowing the seeds of evil in mankind, it is conceivable that these feelings of hostility and negativity were too powerful for human beings, who had never known such animosity, to yet control and thus took on a life of their own, becoming personifications of the things humanity most reviled and feared.

Worse yet, it is not out of the realm of possibility that just as Watchers may be manifestations of Light, so then Demons and Deevils may well be free-willed manifestations of The Dark. If so, all worlds everywhere should tremble in fear, for it means the War inevitably will spread to corrupt the entire Megaverse before a solution can ever be had.

Whatever their origins, Demons and Deevils are out there, walking among humankind, consorting with, manipulating, controlling, and assisting the forces of evil against the Light while warring amongst themselves continuously. It is a testament to their sheer power and persistence that they yet exist when one takes into account the violence they perpetrate among their own ranks. There is no bargaining with a Demon or Deevil, no deal in which anyone comes out on top except the minions of Dyval and Hades. If you discover you've made a deal with a Deevil, all that's left to do is kiss your soul goodbye.

What, if anything, the Demons and Deevils know about the true nature of the War is also something of a mystery, but there is evidence to show that they have some idea of the truth of what it all means. Some Demons have been known to mention The Dark in their rantings, and some Deevils have been heard to mock the War on occasion when facing down with a member of the forces of light. It is likely that despite what they may or may not know, Demons and Deevils do not care for causes and such. They are evil to the core and care only for that evil and for sowing it among the realms of mortals. This makes them both wild cards in the war, and ideal pawns of The Dark.

Pittsburgh After Dark

Hey... come here. We need ta' talk, yo. You mus' be Ian; I know you know what I am, just like I know what you are. Yeah, I look like a Warlord, so what about it? I useta' be, then I seen the light, you know what I'm sayin'? Sometimes somethin' happens, makes you see the error of your ways, yo. 'Sides, the Colors let me move around up in the Hill without too much trouble. A lot o' my boys is still up there, and they alotta help when we need 'em. Too many vamps up there, feedin' off the poor, cuz they think nobody misses 'em. They's wrong, yo? I miss 'em. Lotsa' friends an' family up there, you know?

Listen. No, don't talk — listen. It's cool you goin' by plane and all, but it ain't too smart. They's N.S.B. agents all over da place in these airports. We gotsta' get outta here. Fast. You came to find the Nocturnes... you found 'em. I'mo' take you to the rest of 'em, then we'll give you the run down.

30 minutes later, a small apartment on the South Side...

This here's Jimbo... Heh, he don't like it when I call him that. Sorry 'bout that, James. He be our resident bookworm. Ain't nobody knows the politics o' the factions like him. He'll give you the low down. I'll be 'round if you wanna throw down with some o' the less friendly elements later. Keep it real, bro. Peace out....

Hi. Sorry about Coleman. He can come on a little strong, sometimes. But he knows how to get the job done and he's good to have watching your back. Have a seat. I'm James. Yes, you guessed right. I'm a Wampyr. I'd offer you a beverage, but I'm afraid I don't have anything in the 'fridge that would suit your palate. If our intelligence is correct, you're Nightbane, yes? Wonderful. It's always nice to make the acquaintance of a fellow Nocturne from another city. I'm afraid you'll find things a little different, here, though. Well, for one, we don't have any full-blooded Vampires in our ranks here. Their tendency towards the darkness, figuratively speaking, is just a bit too strong, and in the past some unfortunate incidents have occurred. Probably due to all the mystic energy from the nexus point.

What nexus, you ask? Just how much do you know about Pittsburgh? Probably not very much at all, I'm guessing. We're a major city, but thankfully one that most people tend to overlook, especially since most of the steel mills shut down back in the 70's. Our other claim to fame, as it were, is the Three Rivers — the Ohio, the Monongahela, and the Allegheny, all of which meet up at Point State Park. There's something else that a lot of people don't know; we have a fourth river. It runs underground and it's the one that feeds the fountain at the Park. All four rivers have ley lines following them, so you can imagine that a pretty powerful nexus point is just sitting there at the park, waiting to be tapped for good or ill. Naturally, I wouldn't visit the park if I were you — the name is pretty much a leftover from the days when that's what it was. It isn't much of a park anymore. Now it's more like a battle zone. The Nightlords picked up on the mystic energy at the site of the fountain right quick shortly after Dark Day and they wasted no time in establishing their supremacy. Since then, it's been a ragtag fight over control of the area. Whoever wins will get a pretty big advantage.

Well, enough of my yammering. I've got some business to take care of... Jamie — she's our leader — needs me to have a talk with Mike, a contact of mine from the Spook Squad. Yes, I said "Spook Squad." Things aren't quite as cut-and-dried here as in some other cities. People teeter back and forth between factions like a pendulum. Another problem we have.

Here, this is a paper the local Seekers have thrown together in hopes that we could somehow get the info out to some other cities. Hopefully you'll agree that our best hope for victory is to network, and the best way to do that is to share information. It'll tell you a bit more about the city — you could think of it as a survival guide to Pittsburgh. Take heed of what's in there; it could save your life. Enjoy my digs; you've the run of the place while I'm gone. All I ask is that you keep the shades drawn. I cut it pretty close getting in sometimes, and I don't want to have to worry about beams of happy light streaming in when I'm running from the dawn. Thanks. I'll try to bring back some proper food and drink for you.

Oh! One more thing — if you get really bored, there's a club down on Carson called the Lava Lounge. Go to the kitchen and ask for Cajun sushi. They'll take you in back and you can spend some time with some of the local Nightbane... Club Freak, I think you Nightbane call it? In any case, it's a safe place. I would ask that you try and stay out of trouble tonight, until Jamie gets things settled for your visit. We'd hate to lose our first contact with the Nocturnes outside since the Nightlords cut our supply lines. I'll see you at dawn. Enjoy the paper, it's a good read.

A Dissertation on the City of Pittsburgh

By Eric Pathwalker, Seekers, Pittsburgh, PA

Introduction

My name is Eric Pathwalker, and I have been chosen by the Seekers in this city to work up a paper describing the state of affairs in Pittsburgh, and as they bid, so I attempt to accomplish. However, while I do fancy myself a scholar, I have never been much of a writer. This being the case, I apologize if my writing is a bit dry herein, but I will try to be concise, to the point, and

as brief as possible. Pittsburgh has many interesting facets to explore, and I will endeavor to touch upon a few of the most fascinating and important as far as the war against the Ba'al is concerned.

Since the majority of this paper will discuss mystic phenomena, I shall here list my credentials in an effort to demonstrate my worthiness to comment on these matters. I am a member of the Navajo nation and a practicing Arcanist. I am a member of the Seeker Council in the city and also an avid follower of the path of Shamanism. For generations my family has been the Shamans of my people, and I was set to follow in their footsteps. That is, until happy coincidence guided me to this town under the auspices of opportunity to learn more worldly skills, which I reasonably thought would supplement my mystic knowledge and allow me to better guide my people along their chosen path. I am still young, some would say, at the age of twenty-four, but the blood of the mystics runs strong in me and I have been guided and trained along the Path since birth — something many men twice my age cannot attest to for themselves. I have, in fact, found my young age to be a great advantage when dealing with the many other factions in the war against the Ba'al, as many of the leaders of these factions are either young (so they identify with me) themselves, or well into their middle ages (so they tend to underestimate my potential). As mystics, we must understand that any shortcoming can be turned into a potential advantage if one knows how to utilize it properly. All this being said, I would ask that however this document escape the city, copies be passed to the Resistance, Underground Railroad, Nocturne, and Lightbringer factions of other cities in addition to the Seekers. At this point, however, we deem it unwise for the A.D.A. (often referred to as the "Spook Squad") not view the contents of this document due to their prejudice against the supernatural.

Now I will begin my analysis of Pittsburgh. I pray that Father Bear will guide my pen as I write.

Ethnic Diversity

I came here from a Navajo reservation in New Mexico in the year 1999, shortly before the tragedy of Dark Day, one of the few young men and women blessed with a scholarship for Native Americans to study at the University of Pittsburgh. I was instantly taken with the cultural diversity of Pittsburgh, and made it my personal quest to delve into the mysteries that always lie beneath the surface of so many different ethnic backgrounds living in one locale. Not only is Pittsburgh a hotbed of ethnic diversity, but with six colleges and at least as many technical schools within the city proper and surrounding boroughs, it is a hotbed of philosophical diversity as well, which means that there is an abundance of private and organized mystical study here. I would assume (and it certainly seems logical) that the presence of the nexus at Point State Park lends itself to the attraction of mystics from all over the world, whether they realize it or not. Even dormant mystics, in my observation, are drawn to places of mystic power, such as ley lines and nexus points.

Where there is diversity on such a large scale, there is bound to be subculture. Pittsburgh has its share of this as well. The hip-hop subculture, while somewhat subdued compared to cities like Los Angeles or New York, is certainly a presence, and from what I understand, if one wants to make contact with a member

of the Warlords faction, it is in this subculture one must seek. Actual hip-hop clubs are few and far between, but perhaps the most notable place to find such enthusiasts of the genre is at the hip-hop nights hosted by a local club, Laga. This club, in fact, is a force to be reckoned with in the city and I will discuss it in more depth later in this treatise.

More powerful than the hip-hop culture, though far more subtle in its operation and manipulation of events, is the Goth culture. Goths are everywhere, and have been since the mid-90's when the genre enjoyed a serious resurgence and moved from a garage sub-genre of music to a mainstream, full-fledged genre of its own. With the music came a slew of rebellious young people in a generation that had no identity of its own, aching for something to identify with. Goth was a siren song to these young men and women and before long body piercing, tattoos, and black clothing became the commonplace order of the day. But for many of these kids, "the look" wasn't enough. They wanted to rebel against mainstream sensibilities and values as well as aesthetics. Thus did many take to the call of paganism, and while most were "dabblers" with no real power, for whom the *image* of being pagan was enough, there were a select few with dormant magical and psychic abilities (and not a few Nightbane among them) that exploded into brilliant light under the tutelage and guidance of books and mentors. Many are now actively involved with the Seekers and have moved out of the rebellion that started them on their path, but have discovered in Goth something to truly fill a void that existed inside of them. I admire these "True Goths," as I call them. They are a secretive and quiet lot; it is rare that a True Goth will spout off about his or her expertise in the mystic arts, as they understand that magic is not something to flaunt, but to be used as a tool to subtly manipulate events for the better. They also tend to know the rules as far as the streets go, which makes them incredibly valuable allies and informants, if not confidantes. Indeed, most every cabal and coven in the city has at least one Goth member, and more than a few are composed entirely of these black-clad enigmas. They have power and must not be underestimated. I have in the past had contact with a woman who I know only as "Cheri" who has served as my contact with the Goth subculture, and her information has proven immensely reliable, as has her assistance in the operation of several inherently perilous rituals.

Another sad fact of life in a region of ethnic diversity is organized crime and gang activity. In a place like Pittsburgh, however, these factors serve a useful purpose in the diversion of and battle against the Nightlords. The mischief they cause is oft-times more than sufficient to distract N.S.B. agents from investigating our and other factions' wide and varied operations. Also, I am of the understanding that several crime families and gangs have specially trained enforcers to deal with the supernatural threat posed by the Nightlords. This, if it is true, could paint such families as puppets or fronts for the A.D.A., who would certainly view human criminals as preferable to the supernatural evils presented by Vampires and Nightlords, and the Nightbane-led gang the Warlords. The real problem with organized crime is that while it may serve a purpose in its own way, it is inherently dangerous, and those who walk the streets alone at night have one more aspect of the shadows to fear. While more "traditional" criminal families tend to leave alone those who do not affect their concerns or business, gangs are all-too-often thugs who brutalize and victimize the innocent as well as those involved in their own underworld activities.

Truly, the ethnic diversity of Pittsburgh is one of our greatest assets and worst dangers. Below is a list of several prominent ethnic neighborhoods.

Bloomfield — North of the city proper, Bloomfield is the "Little Italy" of Pittsburgh, dubbed so by its own residents. Great pasta there, and don't forget to visit the Bloomfield Bridge Tavern for good music on the weekends. Just keep your true face hidden; the people here (so far as I know) are largely ignorant to the larger picture.

The Strip District — Situated just outside the city to the northeast, the Strip is during the day like an old-fashioned open-air market on Penn Avenue. Parallel, on Smallman Street, are a host of clubs, bars, and specialty shops. A lot of Asians live in and around the Strip, and they're pretty territorial after the sun goes down, at least off of the main roads: Penn Avenue and Smallman Street. Probably best for them. Still, I've seen some strange things go on in the shadows of that neighborhood, and there have been sightings of some odd lights in the sky late at night. As far as the "scene" goes for the normal people though, this is "the" place to be on weekends, and even certain weeknights. On Smallman and Penn (the two "safe" streets) there are clubs and bars 2 or 3 to the block. Needless to say, since Dark Day the amount of disappearances in this area has increased threefold. I understand, though, that some of the clubs (particularly Area 51, Pluto's, and Valhalla) have special arrangements made for some of the more unsavory (yet normally heroic, nonetheless) elements of the city if one knows who to talk to, what to say, and what face to put on.

Deutchtown — on the North Side of the city, known (not surprisingly) also by the moniker "German Town," this area houses many of the Germanic residents of the city. Lots of urchins in this area — it spawns a lot of the gang activity in the city. My suspicions are that it is also a feeding ground for Vampires. The North Side of Pittsburgh also houses the Penn Brewery and the Andy Warhol Museum.

Hill District — where many of the African Americans in the city reside, there is a great deal of ethnic pride in the heritage represented here. Sadly, the average per capita income in this area is perhaps the lowest in the entire city, and the general dissatisfaction with the state of affairs spawns perhaps more gang and criminal activity than anywhere else in the city. The Warlords apparently call the Hill their turf, and woe betide the man, woman, Nightbane, or any other who treads on these streets without the Warlords' permission. The Hill separates the city proper from its eastern borough, Oakland.

South Side — not so much an ethnic neighborhood as a hotbed of subculture, the South Side by and large is the party area of the mid-to-late 20's and thirtysomething crowd in the city. Rivals the Strip District in the number of bars, but has no dance clubs to speak of and generally attracts a different sort of crowd; the "singles scene" isn't as dominant on the South Side as in the Strip. The South Side also houses a number of cafés and bistros, as well as the now-abandoned Rex Theater. The grapevine among the Seekers is that a secret cult of some sort meets in the theater at least once a week, but as yet our efforts to infiltrate this cult have been unsuccessful. If the Goths are in the know, they are currently very tight-lipped on the matter. If you are looking to make contact with the Goth subculture, there are two places worth checking out on the South Side: the Lava Lounge

and the Beehive coffee house. The same people own both establishments (one a bar, the other a café), and rumor has it that both also have special back rooms (again, if you know who to talk to and what to say). Like the Strip District, there is a high rate of disappearances here.

Oakland — Like the South Side, this is not so much an ethnic neighborhood as a subcultural one; Oakland, situated to the east of the city proper, houses both the University of Pittsburgh and Carnegie Mellon University. Also in Oakland is the Carnegie Museum and Library, a tourist attraction for a long time. Life in Oakland is fairly typical of any college town these days, I would assume. Places of note in Oakland include Club Laga, where on Friday nights during their “Ceremony” night, members of the Goth culture are present in abundance. A good place to make contacts, but beware: Vampires often hide among the masses, not so noticeable among the pale makeup and dark clothing of the Goths. Indeed, Club Laga, while not so Nightbane-friendly as some other clubs in the city, is a place where many human and undead movers and shakers in the city gather in abundance. More often than not, there are Nightbane in their Facade form hiding among the masses as well. On Thursdays and Saturdays Laga hosts “Hip-Hop night,” which tends to bring a less savory element out. At one point shootings and arrests were common, but as of late the police have been a bit more lax in their patrolling of the city (a bit of sarcasm; one can’t help but wonder why that is). Another curiosity in Oakland is the abandoned King’s Court Theater, which once housed the Pollinator, a bar and club featuring live bands. The same people who operate the Beehive and Lava Lounge on the South Side owned the place, but it closed down suddenly and somewhat mysteriously in the year after Dark Day. It has remained vacant ever since, and it is possible that whatever cult may be operating out of the Rex also has a base there.

The Nexus

The reason why Pittsburgh has the problems it does, and the reason why our contact with other cities is so low. Each of the four rivers in Pittsburgh (the Monongahela, the Allegheny, the Ohio, and the underground river that feeds the fountain at Point State Park) has a ley line following its course, which means practically the entire city sits on one of these ley lines. Mystic energy and psychic phenomena are in abundance since Dark Day and there are whispers, rumors, and accounts of creatures more terrifying than even the most horrific Morpheus form of any Nightbane walking the shadows.

Needless to say, such an abundance of mystic energy is a veritable treasure trove for both the Nightlords and those opposing them. Worse, the four rivers meet at Point State Park, which means a nexus point of incredible power. Since Dark Day, the park has been closed to the public following several hundred-eyewitness accounts of a horrific, black-tentacled beast erupting from the fountain itself and devouring at least half a dozen innocents. There are shady reports of a few cloaked figures chanting and the creature being surrounded by energy (a cabal of witches? Night Priests, perhaps? There is truly no way of knowing) before vanishing. Since then, N.S.B. agents, Hounds, and Hunters patrol the area relentlessly. The powers of the Nightlands are firmly in control of the nexus, and whatever horrific rituals they use it to perform is something most of us do not wish to visualize.

Attempts to reclaim the nexus occur almost weekly, but our sources believe these attempts are not in earnest, but merely undertaken in an effort to keep the Nightlords off-balance, that they may not fully utilize its power. If any organized attempt is to be made to take the park, it must be through a combination of resources, with all the factions combining in effort. Sadly, I do not know if this is possible, but the leader of the Pittsburgh Nocturnes, Jamie DeDonnan, is making a concerted effort to bring it about. The only thing that is certain is that skirmishes between the factions and the forces of the Nightlords have been occurring with more frequency every night. Something is happening. Something big.

The last organized effort to take the Point took place approximately one year ago, in 2004. The Resistance and Nocturnes organized a massive strike, which took place at midnight. The park and the surrounding area were chaotic with battle, and the city rang out with a maelstrom of pained screams, rending flesh, and explosions. Indeed, the city was nearly torn asunder by the mystic forces pulled forth from the nexus by both sides. For a time, it seemed that the battle would be the city’s death knell. Tentacled horrors seemingly drawn from the depths of Hades itself raged against one another, against the enemies they were drawn forth to destroy, against those who summoned them.

For hours the battle raged on, with neither side gaining a clear advantage and both sides suffering heavy casualties. In the end, for all the destruction they had wrought, the Nightbane failed to take the park, and the battle was inconclusive. They did, however, succeed in throwing off the tentative hold the Nightlords had established on the area, leaving it once again a contested area and a battle zone. In a way, I suppose, this is a victory, since the Nightlords have thus been unable to complete whatever diabolical scheme they were undertaking at the nexus.

The Factions

The factions in Pittsburgh are for the most part secretive and largely ineffective. The last major battle caused so many casualties among the Nightbane legions in the city that by and large they and their allies are still licking their wounds, fighting merely for survival, and awaiting the day when their numbers grow large enough to allow them to strike out yet again. The closure of over ninety percent of the city’s secret supply routes by the Nightlords does not bode well for this. Many Nightbane who have come to this city to make contact with one of the factions wind up staying permanently, by choice or by force.

The Nocturnes: The major movers and shakers in Pittsburgh; led by Jamie DeDonnan, she uses the flexibility of accepting anyone and everyone into her fold to its fullest potential. In my opinion she is destined for something far greater. I have met Jamie on several occasions. She is warm and friendly, but a reluctant leader. If she can ever leave this reluctance behind and accept her destiny full-on, she will certainly be a force to be reckoned with.

The Resistance: Here in Pittsburgh, mostly the Resistance is fragmented. Once upon a time they were quite organized, rivaling the Nocturnes for control of the Nightbane power base. Nobody knows really what happened, but sometime last year, after the attempt to take the Point, they dwindled and indeed have almost vanished. The general consensus among the Seekers is that Nightlord infiltration decimated their ranks. Now there are a

half dozen cells holding out and conducting guerilla raids on Nightlord power bases. They rarely make much of an impact.

The Underground Railroad: Who knows who, what, when, or where they are? Since the splintering of the Resistance, the U.R. has gone even further into obscurity than before. They keep their numbers, power base, and routes a closely guarded secret.

The Warlords: These troublemakers are everywhere, it seems. They control the Hill District and North Side areas of the city, but have recently spread throughout the city proper and the surrounding boroughs and even suburbs. It is an alarming trend I see developing, but alas, the underworld contacts the Warlords maintain enable them to thrive in exceptionally hostile environments.

The Lightbringers: Led by an enigmatic character named Sara, as far as I can tell, they've surprisingly made recent steps to establish relations with the Nocturnes, something that is previously unheard of. This is mostly due to a member of the faction named Luca who has become friends with Miss DeDonnan, and a member of an apparently new faction who calls himself David.

The Seekers: We keep to ourselves and observe, mostly, waiting for the right moment to strike. We've attempted to make contact with Miss DeDonnan, but as yet she has not returned our overtures. It would appear that for whatever reason she does not trust our motives. I can only hope that will change in time. Truth be told, much of our time these days has been spent studying the appearance of a new faction, calling themselves Celestials. They seem to be very vehement in their desire to defeat the Nightlords, who apparently they refer to as "Infernals." Members of this faction appear almost universally to be Nightbane with angelic Morphus forms. They call themselves "Athanatos," according to our intelligence. It remains to be seen whether or not such fanatics are an asset or a detriment to the war.

The A.D.A.: They don't talk to the other factions much; their distrust of all things supernatural makes them a wild card in the battle for the Point, and most of the factions agree they are not to be trusted. There are several members of the A.D.A. who secretly support the other factions through feeding information and supplies, but I suspect these actions are unauthorized and would be severely punished if discovered.

City Maps and Plans

Maps of the city, as well as tourist-style brochures, are readily available on the Internet, for those who would wish to join the battle for the Point.

Notable Personalities

Jamie DeDonnan

Leader of the Nocturnes, Pittsburgh, PA

True Name: Jamie DeDonnan.

Race: Nightbane.

Attributes: I.Q. 14, M.E. 13, M.A. 18, P.S. 14, P.P. 18, P.E. 15, P.B. 20, Spd. 13

Hit Points: 46

S.D.C.: 34

P.P.E.: 165

Alignment: Scrupulous.

Disposition: Brave, serious, and sad. She wears the burden of her leadership like a wound, but accepts it rather than running away. She is kind and friendly, if a bit guarded.

Description: A stunningly beautiful Irish girl (appears to be 19 years old) with auburn hair and jade green eyes. She has a few freckles dotting her cheekbones and tends to dress in black; her favorite outfit is a black silk blouse, cinched and belted over black jeans and black cowboy boots.

R.C.C.: Nightbane.

Level of Experience: 7

Skills of Note: Sign Language 65%, Climb 65%, Prowl 93%, Escape Artist 60%, Intelligence 50%, Concealment 76%, Detect Concealment 83%, Disguise/Impersonation 88%, Locate Secret Compartments/Doors 53%, Palming 48%, Ventriloquism 31%, Lore: Demons and Monsters 55%, Lore: Nightbane 60%, Lore: Magic 25%, Lore: Athanatos 28%, First Aid 98%, Acrobatics/Gymnastics/Tumbling: Walk Tightrope 80%, Sense of Balance 98%, Parallel Bars/Rings 74%, Backflip 88%, Swimming 85%, Wilderness Survival 60%, W.P. Auto Pistol, Computer Operation 70%, Sing 80%, Dance 80%.

Special Abilities: Nightvision, 200 feet (61 m) in Facade, 1000 feet (305 m) in Morphus.

Morphus Appearance: A black panther with metal claws and teeth. Her eyes in Morphus form resemble glass monitor screens with miniscule readings constantly flashing across them. There are computer jacks at the base of her skull and in each foreleg, above the paws.

Sense Nightbane 480 Feet (146 m).



Supernatural Attributes, 250 S.D.C., 78 Hit Points, add 16 to P.S., +13 to P.E., +40 to Spd, and +9 to P.P.

Horror Factor: 12

Other: Mirror Walk, Immunities, Immune to transformations, leap 30 feet (9.1 m) from standing and 60 feet (18.2 m) with a running start.

Talents: Darksong, The Shroud, See Truth.

Combat Skills: Hand to Hand: Basic (Facade), Hand to Hand: Martial Arts (Morphus).

Weapons: In her Facade form, Jamie carries 2 Makarov 9mm pistols that deal 4D6 damage each (hollow point bullets). In her Morpheus form, her metal claws inflict 3D6 damage, plus supernatural strength, and her bite inflicts 3D6.

Notes: Before Dark Day, Jamie DeDonnan was a relatively normal girl; she grew up in Dublin with her family and had a normal, fairly happy childhood. Her parents informed her at the age of 12 that she had been a foundling, left on their doorstep as an infant, and while the news took some adjustment, Jamie was always one to bounce back.

At the age of 17, she came to America to study musical theater at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh, PA. It was there that she met the love of her life, Alex Martinson, a computer engineering major at her university. After a year of dating, Alex proposed marriage and the two moved into an apartment on Mount Washington, overlooking the city.

Things looked to be the picture of the American Dream for Jamie until March 6, 2000, when the sun didn't come up. That morning, Jamie was up before the crack of dawn as always, surfing the net, when she stumbled upon a strange website with bizarre stories and prophecies. These "Wanderer Diaries" caught her attention and she got so caught up in reading the tales and history therein that she didn't hear the noise outside at first.

By the time she diverted her attention, the Dark Day riots were in full swing. Looking out the window, she noticed the black sky and was confused. By this time of morning the sun should be up... and people were going crazy. Alex came into the room, a calming influence as always, and suggested they just stay put until everything blew over.

It seemed like a good idea, but it wasn't meant to be. Looters came into the apartment, intent on robbing the place. Alex stood up to fight and was fatally shot. When the men attempted to accost Jamie, she threw herself out the window in a panic. There was a flash of pain, then blackness.

The fall down Mt. Washington would have killed any normal person, but Jamie was soon to find out she wasn't normal — not anymore. Now, five years later, she leads the Pittsburgh branch of the Nocturnes and struggles to unite all of the factions in the city against the Nightlords. For more on Jamie, see the "Dark Revelations" story, at the beginning of this supplement.

Luca

Member of the Pittsburgh Lightbringers

True Name: Luca (Unknown).

Race: Guardian.

Attributes: I.Q. 22, M.E. 20, M.A. 21, P.S. 18, P.P. 22, P.E. 20, P.B. 17, Spd. 30

Hit Points: 92

S.D.C.: 190

P.P.E.: 200

Alignment: Principled.

Disposition: Haughty and more than a little arrogant, but a genuinely good soul at heart. He believes in the divinity of the Guardians in the battle between Light and Darkness, and is the first one to point out mistakes and flaws in others' morality. However, all he really wants to do, in the end, is help people.

Description: As most Guardians, Luca resembles a young teenager, though even he doesn't know his true age. His unblemished features are sharp and chiseled and he wears his long, blond hair tied loosely back in a ponytail. He favors a white, collarless, button-down shirt and khaki pants. Occasionally he will don a black trench coat to complete the ensemble, but only in cold weather.

R.C.C.: Guardian.

Level of Experience: 5

Skills of Note: First Aid 98%, Holistic Medicine 75%, Paramedic 60%, Lore: Nightbane 35%, Lore: Athanatos 40%, Lore: Guardian 50%, Lore: Religion 60%, Sing 65%, Dance 45%, Public Speaking 75%, Language: Spanish 98%, Language: English 98%, Cook 55%, Pilot Automobile 65%.

Special Abilities: Precognitive Senses, Supernatural Senses, Super-Regeneration, Healing Touch, Powers of Light, Nullify Magic, Fly, does not need to eat, drink, or breathe, but needs sunlight to survive.

Horror Factor: 9 or 12 when using powers (Awe).

Notes: Luca knows more than he should about the true nature of the War, mostly due to his close friendship with David. This knowledge puts him at great risk almost continually, but he accepts this burden and in fact wears it like a badge of honor. He considers himself a soldier, just doing his part, but he's more than willing to do whatever that part requires, short of cold-blooded murder. He is serious, honorable, and good to the core, but also understands that not everyone is like him and recognizes the need to occasionally perform unsavory acts — this is war, after all. He is not above showing off his position as a Lightbringer by flaunting the resources at his disposal, to impress someone into recognizing the power and importance of his faction. His trust is not easily earned, and often he will not admit it even after someone *has* earned it, but once he considers someone a friend he is true and loyal. By the same token, he is not forgiving of betrayal and carries a grudge a long way.

When not battling the Nightlords, Luca spends much of his time among the homeless, bringing warmth, food, comfort, and some small measure of cheer into their downtrodden lives.

David

Celestial Athanatos

True Name: David Albright.

Race: Athanatos, Pyros Host.

Attributes: I.Q. 14, M.E. 18, M.A. 13, P.S. 18, P.P. 19, P.E. 15, P.B. 14, Spd. 16

Hit Points: 50

S.D.C.: 90

Natural A.R.: 13

P.P.E.: 172

I.S.P.: 123

Alignment: Scrupulous.

Disposition: The paternal figure, always trying to look after everyone. David gets attached too easily and knows it; as a result, he sometimes has to ask Luca about the trustworthiness of potential allies. David is loyal and open, but serious. His jokes are rare and not often very funny. When he does laugh, however, his laughter tends to raise the spirits of all about him.

Description: Six foot (1.8 m) tall male (in human form), handsome but not striking, with ruffled, dirty-blond hair and a tanned complexion. He is partial to motorcycle jackets, blue jeans, combat boots, and dark sunglasses — the real “rebel without a cause” look.

R.C.C.: Athanatos, Valiant Path.

Level of Experience: 8

Skills of Note: Speak, Read, and Write English 98%, Lore: Demons and Monsters 75%, Lore: Religion 80%, Strategy/Tactics 55%, Military Etiquette 55%, Streetwise 75%, W.P. Sword, Knife, Blunt, W.P. Auto Pistol, Submachine-gun, Revolver, First Aid 70%, Tracking 65%, Pilot Auto 80%, Pilot Motorcycle 80%, Land Navigation 80%.

Psionics: Pyrokinesis, Psi-Sword, Summon Inner Strength.

Magic: Fire Ball, Compulsion.

Special Abilities:

Gregorian Manifestation: Seven feet (2.1 m) tall, bronze skin, hair turns a fiery red and wings are silver. Add 100 S.D.C. in

Gregorian Form, +10 to P.S., +5 to P.P. and P.E., double existing Hit Points, fly, regenerate 1D8 points of damage per round, Extraordinary vision, powers of light, +5 to save vs Horror Factor, Aura Sense, immunity to supernatural disease and transformation, Smite Evil.

Combat: Hand to Hand: Martial Arts; claws do 2D6 damage, plus P.S. bonus, or by weapon or Psi-Sword.

Weapons: David carries a survival knife (1D6) and a .45 caliber pistol (8D6).

Notes: David, while not exactly an Elder Athanatos, has been around the block. He endured his Revelation a good sixty years before Dark Day as a young soldier in World War II and adjusted well. He came to Pittsburgh shortly after Dark Day and made the acquaintance of Luca shortly thereafter. The two quickly became fast friends. David took to Luca at first mostly to protect him, due to the knowledge of the Athanatos that he had shared with the Guardian. Soon, though, David came to know Luca as a dear, true, and loyal companion. Over time he came to establish interest in some of the other factions, mainly the Nocturnes, due to his love for a young Nightbane named Tasha. For more on this, see the preceding story. The stirrings of romance are currently beginning to spark between David and Jamie DeDonnan, much to the chagrin of both of them. Both understand that in war there is neither the time nor stability for love, but neither can they fight their feelings for one another.

Siege on Tolkeen™



Official “Optional”

Hook, Line & Sinker Adventures

By Bill Coffin

The following are a bunch of Hook, Line and Sinker adventures that did not make it into **Coalition Wars™ Six: Final Siege**; mainly due to space limitations. We thought Rifts fans might enjoy having them as a possible addition to their Siege on Tolkeen adventures, so here you are.

Hook, Line & Sinker™ are a handy adventure format where only the barest elements for an adventure are provided. The rest of the development is left to the G.M. HLS adventure outlines work well both as stand-alone adventures or as stepping

stones in a larger campaign. Use only the ones that strike your fancy, spin off an entire campaign of your own from one or more HLS or play ‘em all! Stringing the HLS adventures together and/or adding them to your own adventure creations can create a Siege on Tolkeen *campaign* that could last months!

The Hook is the current situation or location of the adventuring party.

The Line is an opportunity for adventure that presents itself to the player characters. Think of this as the “bait” or enticement for the party to enter the adventure.

The Sinker is the “clincher” to the Line. The Sinker presents the party with a dilemma or development that makes the situation a true adventure.

Note: Hook, Line & Sinker adventures were originally created by *Jolly Blackburn*.

Traitors Among Us

Stunned by the stalemate at the Outer Wall, the CS digs in as High Command assesses its options. Withdrawal of any kind has been ruled out; the CS has made it clear that they will destroy Tolkeen or expend the last of its strength trying. This has become more than a war against a particular mage nation. It is the CS’s grand statement that the power of technology — *their* technology — is greater than any magic force on Rifts Earth. Thus, the assault force will remain in place, keeping pressure on Tolkeen city until something breaks the impasse. On a daily basis, fighter-bombers attack the city’s interior and positions on



both defensive walls in an attempt to create a tactical gap the ground forces can exploit. Long-range missile strikes are called in to blast at the city's center, but it is more to bolster CS morale than anything else. (Tolkeen's citizens have long since figured out to live and store their precious materiel underground and use the surface buildings as temporary cover.) On the flip side, Tolkeen gunners lack the firepower to inflict withering damage upon the CS forces arrayed at their doorstep. With their ammunition stores running low, Tolkeen's defenders must wait until the CS forces make close assault upon the wall to open fire. But, Tolkeen does not mind its inability to counter attack for the moment, since they hold the upper hand. Even with the constant air attacks and missile strikes, the Coalition has proven unable to breach the city's walls, which it must do to capture the city. As long as that remains the case, Tolkeen can afford to wait. As it has throughout the Siege on Tolkeen, the mage nation has hoped that the longer the fight drags on, the harder it will be on the Coalition. Tolkeen has the home ground advantage; the CS must maintain long supply lines and survive in a hostile environment. Moreover, the CS already is feeling the pinch of a war in Free Quebec, and it can not maintain a double front forever, not with a dozen other potential enemies to worry about. That is why High Command needs a break regarding the standoff at the Outer Wall, and it knows just how to get one.

A full year before the Siege on Tolkeen began, the Coalition seeded Minnesota with dozens of secret operatives masquerading as scholars, adventurers, mercenaries, and the like. The espionage business has always been something the CS excels at. It must, after all. With so many real and potential enemies threatening its borders, the Coalition must have an ace intelligence gathering operation in force. And not just intel, either. Deception, misdirection, and a whole ration of other dirty tricks are the Coalition's stock and trade when it comes to undermining enemies it has trouble blasting into submission. Once the assault

force ran into trouble at the Outer Wall, it was Coalition Intelligence that had to come to the rescue. At the time, the Coalition had upwards to thirty agents placed within the city. Among these were a number of Tolkeen *double agents*, personnel working for Tolkeen but secretly taking orders from Chi-Town. These turncoats have yielded great results for the Coalition throughout the war, and now they would do so again. Using coded messages embedded in the text of propaganda leaflets dropped into the city, High Command issued a simple order to all active double agents: get somebody to open up a section of the Outer and Inner Wall. If the Coalition could not blast its way through or scale over the top, then it would have to convince somebody on the inside to open the door and let the Coalition waltz in.

In the end, it came down to just one rogue operative, a sniveling coward named *Quetcher Flogg*, a failed student of magic who was born and raised in Tolkeen. Forever bitter at the entire Kingdom for their ability to command powers he could never comprehend, Quetcher was an easy recruit for the Coalition. And when commanded to open the doors to the invaders outside, all he had to do was steal a few large P.P.E. batteries, use a little psychic potential of his own to charge them up, and whammo! Instant open door along the Inner Wall. Of course, the entrance could have been closed just as easily by another citizen, were it not for an unusual Techno-Wizard device rigged up by Quetcher himself. (He was not entirely incompetent, and as history shows, had some potential as a Techno-Wizard.) The gadget in effect "lodged" the door in the walls open, making it impossible to close for at least another 24 hours. Immediately thereafter, Quetcher repeated the same stunt on the Outer Wall, and in an instant, Tolkeen's invulnerability was gone.

Sealing the Breach

Hook: When the Outer Wall opens up, the Coalition is more than ready for it, and they pour in like a barbarian horde. In a fortunate turn for Tolkeen, the actual portal through the door is not so wide that a great deal of Coalition forces can squeeze through at once. There is a bit of a bottleneck effect, especially as heavier units try coming in. Tolkeen uses this to its advantage, and sets up multiple murder stations near the entrance to blast Coalition intruders as they enter.

Line: For a while this strategy works. The Coalition is slowly making progress, but the Tolkeenites are exacting a horrific toll. Of every ten CS troopers that enter the "Traitorous Gate," seven to nine die. Virtually *no* heavy equipment survives the entry process, and before long, the mountain of slagged robots, vehicles and power armor form a secondary roadblock to the entrance into Tolkeen.

Sinker: Still, the Coalition progress is inevitable, and after a while, even the entrenched Tolkeen gunners become exhausted at all the killing, and must withdraw to replenish their weapons stores and tend to their wounds. Meanwhile the Coalition continues to take a shellacking as it enters the city until it overruns those defensive guns that had caused so much trouble. By the time the Tolkeenites withdraw, it is the same old story: the Coalition gained a little more ground and lost a lot of people. Conversely, Tolkeen gave up what it considers a lot of ground but lost very few people. Not that they could live with this. Tolkeen is so small that every scrap of territory it loses to the Coalition is like another nail in its coffin.

The Price of Treachery

Hook: The word is out that Quetcher, that miserable rogue, is the one who opened the city up to the Coalition. King Creed went into a rage when he discovered this and in the heat of the moment issued the order for all Tolkeenites to find Quetcher and bring him to justice. For the average mob member, this means slaughtering Quetcher and dismembering him like livestock.

Line: The problem is that certain Tolkeen officers want to catch Quetcher, not kill him. This worm has no resolve and will spill the beans to whomever is pressuring him. He must have learned some interesting info from the Coalition, and if Tolkeenite agents can capture the turncoat before the mobs of the city tear him limb from limb, then some valuable intelligence can be gained.

Sinker: Quetcher is no fool, and is already working on an out for himself. He is heading straight through town towards the Coalition invasion area in the hopes that when he gets there, he can surrender to their custody and spare himself the wrath of his fellow countrymen. The problem with this idea is that the Coalition troops know nothing of his acts, and will shoot him on site for being the Tolkeenite menace that he appears to be. Furthermore, there are even Tolkeenite agents who know what kind of intel value Quetcher might be but want him dead anyway, and will even interfere with Tolkeenite capture parties to make sure the turncoat dies a terrible death.

Sealing the Breach, Pt. II

Hook: Just as with the Outer Wall, Tolkeen's finest have thrown everything they have at bottlenecking the Traitorous

Gate in the Inner Wall, too. Only this time, things are harder because the Coalition not only controls the Outer Wall, but they control the buffer zone of buildings between the walls as well. Here, they can build up large forces, blow even larger holes in the wall, and press inward with huge masses of troops, armor and vehicles. If Tolkeen is going to hold the line, they had better think of something quick.

Line: That something comes in the form of controlled demolition. Sensing that the Coalition has willingly trapped large amounts of its forces between the Walls, Tolkeenite engineers have decided to lay demo charges along the Inner Wall and get it to collapse outward, crushing the amassed Coalition forces to a pulp. That will teach them!

Sinker: The problem, of course, is that the wall itself is very difficult to blow and will take Tolkeen's entire store of leftover mechanics. Of course, the war is practically lost, so what is there to lose? The wall itself will rebuild, and there is something undeniably attractive to Tolkeen's engineers about smashing so many Coalition troops like they were ants. For the Tolkeenite defenders stuck in the middle still (there are a few), time is of the essence. If they do not get out of the buffer zone or find sanctuary underground, when the wall comes tumbling down, they will be just another casualty. There is a major downside to this, though, and that is wherever the wall comes down, the Coalition gains access to the center city. Since that is a foregone conclusion, Tolkeenite engineers will proceed with their plan. It is just that letting the enemy in like this seems to run contrary to all the efforts Tolkeen has gone to in slowing down the invaders' progress. But even now there comes a time when the old strategy can go by the wayside in favor of some good old-fashioned gratuitous payback.

Operation Sore Loser

The Walls are breached. The city lies captured. The Tower has fallen. For Tolkeen, all is lost. The Coalition has captured most of the capital city and is fast on the way to covering the few remaining enclaves. Simply put: it's becoming a bad day to hail from Tolkeen. Word has it that King Creed is looking for a way to abdicate his throne and get out of Dodge. Same goes for the Circle of Twelve. What unity the group might have once had, evaporated when the King's Tower fell to the Dead Boys. The very heart and soul of the Kingdom of Tolkeen has finally dissolved, and nobody feels it more than Warlord Corin Scard. Long considered the prime motivator among Tolkeen's militants, Scard is a hater and uber-patriot of the worst order. His hatred for the Coalition knows no bounds, and for the last decade he has subsisted on dreams of one day leading an army onto the field against the Coalition and riding away in victory. Now that those dreams have been dashed, Scard is coming apart at the seams. While always a somewhat unhinged individual, the self-styled Warlord of Tolkeen has really fallen off the deep end. His every thought concerns how to turn the nation's defeat into the harshest kind of victory. The best way to do that, he has decided, is a little plan he calls *Operation Spoilsport*, the opening of as many Rifts within the confines of the city as possible. With luck, the Rifts will bring a host of new monsters, demons and other nasties into play against the CS invaders. They might also provide escape hatches for those willing to leave. And maybe, just maybe, the pure surge of energies caused by multiple Rifts opening up will produce some new and unforeseen ef-

fects. At one point, Tolkeen was crawling with masters of ley line energy. If some of those masters still have some fight left in them, they might be able to turn a massive surge in Rifting energies into a super-weapon to punish the Coalition for what they have done.

For one such as Scard, creating a number of Rifts within central Tolkeen is no big deal. Sure, it might be P.P.E. intensive, but Scard himself is a master spell caster working in a P.P.E. rich area. He also owns numerous magic items which both enhance his own considerable personal P.P.E. store as well as reduce the P.P.E. cost of any spells he might cast. No, the real sticky thing about Scard creating Rifts at will is the possible side effects it could cause. Those who craft a Rift often do so with some forethought. They also tend not to do it in a place as rich with magical energy as Tolkeen during a time of war. Aside from the ley line nexuses in the area, the number of deaths nearby make Rifts an even more unstable phenomenon. And on top of all that, there is a little-known prophecy once spoken by the oracular artifact *Poor Yorick*, which speaks of "he who opens the Doors of Doom during the Realm's darkest hour." Add it all up and it does not take a genius to see that what Scard has in mind might indeed put the screws to the Dead Boys swarming all over Tolkeen. It might also crack a hole in the world, introduce a plague of demons the likes of which the world has never seen, or something even worse than that. That there are even *Tolkeenites* on the lookout for Scard so that they might stop him, speaks to the potential severity of the situation.

The Surge

Hook: The first Rift Warlord Scard opens up has played havoc with the surging ley line energies that run through Tolkeen. The nature of this Rift is somewhat strange, since it is less a doorway to elsewhere in the Megaverse as it is a massive and constant spike in ley line energy that is rippling its way through the ley line network surrounding the Twin Cities. The end result is a Ley Line Storm that is sending destructive tendrils of ley line energy whipping about the entire city, like an out of control fire hose.

Line: Scard has lost control of this thing, and unless something is done about it, the storm will spread to other ley lines in Minnesota and perhaps beyond. The sheer damage this would cause might obliterate the entire Coalition assault force, but it would also take care of all Tolkeen, too. Any hero worth his salt, Tolkeen or Coalition, knows that this phenomenon must be stopped if any life in Tolkeen is to be spared.

Sinker: Problems like this do not crop up every day, so chances are, the heroes are ill-equipped to address the surging ley lines with confidence. Theories abound as to how something like this might be deactivated. Most involve channeling incredible amounts of destructive energy into the center of the storm (the Rift Scard created) in the hopes that the thing will overload and spark out. A nuclear warhead would sure do it, as would a volley of Annihilate spells. However the players address this is up to them, and the degree to which they succeed is left to the G.M. Would it make for a cooler campaign if this storm remained as a permanent fixture in Rifts Earth? Would it be cooler if the heroes teamed up with their enemies to put this problem to rest? Would it be cooler if the heroes single-handedly negated the storm and were considered one of the few true heroes of the entire war?

The Swarm

Hook: Another Rift of Warlord Scard's is more true to what Rifts typically are: doorways to some other place in space and time. Often, creatures of unpleasant disposition live on the other side of these doorways, and they use the opportunity to come to Rifts Earth and spread mayhem. Such is the case here, in a city that needs a monster problem like it needs an asteroid strike.

Line: From the Rift created by Lord Scard have come *dozens* of demons from an as-yet-unnamed dimension. The characteristics of these creatures can be determined by consulting the Random Monster Tables at the back of the **Rifts® RPG** book. Whatever these creatures are, they are tough, evil, and have a gluttonous appetite for destruction. It is almost as if by being immersed in the war zone of Tolkeen, these creatures become stronger, faster and meaner. Unless reigned in somehow, this plague of demons might never be fully routed out of the Tolkeen area.

Sinker: The best way to contain the menace is to close the Rift first. After that, the combined forces of Tolkeenite and Coalition soldiers stand a decent chance of exterminating the monsters that came through. However, the chances are that one or more of these demons got away. And since they replicate asexually, one demon can turn into many over the years. Unless the heroes are super careful about containing these monsters, they might have a new demon problem across North America.



The Walking Dead

Hook: The third dimensional portal Warlord Scard created opened for just a second, long enough for a doorway to a bizarre dimension of pure energy to appear. Through the portal, gray beams of energy soaked the entire city, seeping into the ground as if the energy was a kind of mist sprayed forth by some spectral force. At first, nothing happened. Then one by one, everyone who had ever died on Tolkeen's soil rose from the dead, punching through the city's soil and floors, bent on taking their

revenge on the living. One minute Tolkeen is a modern war zone. The next moment, it is a vast ruin populated by thousands upon thousands of freshly unearthed skeletons and zombies with one thought on their undead minds: kill everything.

Line: Like the Rift mentioned above, this is a problem that affects Tolkeen and the Coalition equally. Surrounded by thousands of undead, soldiers on either side will need no excuse to open fire, rocking and rolling themselves to any kind of safe haven. During the fighting, former enemies are likely to make a temporary alliance that may or may not hold once the battle and war is over.

Sinker: This Rift shows the dangers of tapping the unknown energies of the Megaverse. For Coalition characters, things like this only justify their fear and mistrust of ley lines and the various schools of wizardry. The fresh undead are way too numerous for the heroes to blast all of them back into submission, but without any weapons of mass destruction, the heroes will be hard pressed to come up with anything that could negate the army of living dead that has suddenly taken over Tolkeen. Of course, not all will want to save the city. If it has already fallen, why not keep it a bastion of undead trouble and make the Coalition's colonization program that much less likely to succeed?

For King and Country

In light of the Coalition victory throughout most of the city, Tolkeen's citizens have stopped fighting for the most part in favor of a more sensible solution: getting out of town. For a lot of Tolkeenites, escaping the Coalition is a simple matter. Many individuals use a Teleportation spell to jump to safety, while large numbers of citizens go through a Magic Portal or a teleportation circle together. In fact, this was one of the reasons why so many held on for so long at King's Tower — to give the rest of the city enough time to seek shelter outside the city. The plan worked, too. Of the nearly 300,000 people left in the city by the Battle of King's Tower, only 5,000 are left. The remainder have fled through instant transportation magicks and are now safely outside the Coalition's immediate reach. For the CS assault force, this is bad news. Those escapees were Tolkeen's best and brightest. These are the folks who will scatter to the wind and bide their time before renewing the war on the Coalition, guerrilla style. These are the people High Command desperately wanted to eliminate during its destruction of Tolkeen. Now, even though the CS will take the city, it missed out on the 25,000 or so Tolkeenites it really needs to kill in order to claim legitimate victory. For without these recently escaped Tolkeenites on the death list, the Coalition can never rest easy in Minnesota. Indeed, the CS may control the whole state, but somewhere in its midst could be one of these Tolkeen heavy hitters planning some kind of trouble. A bomb, a sneak attack, a spell effect without warning — all these and more are what's to be expected. For years the CS waged a guerrilla war against Tolkeen on the borders of the Kingdom. Now that Tolkeen's finest have escaped and vow to continue the war on their own terms, things have come full circle. The CS will inherit a newly made guerrilla battleground that will prove almost too expensive to make holding it worthwhile.

But this is a look into the possible future after Tolkeen falls. For the time being, this mass evacuation is still going on. But more than that, there are a number of folks who are still evacuat-

ing the hard way — on the surface, on foot or in a vehicle. There are numerous reasons why these brave (suicidal?) folks have decided to face down a world of hurt on the way to escape. Most do so because they have no access to teleportation magicks and are cut off from those who do. A few simply have a death wish and want to fight it out one last time by meeting the enemy head on as they blast their way to freedom. Either way, escape by ground or air will require a small miracle to pull off. The entire city is swarming with Coalition units. The exit points are all road blocked. The skies are thick with patrolling interceptors. And the Minnesota countryside is so thick with vigilant Skelebots that it would be nearly impossible for one to pass through without meeting capture or death.

Those who do make it out of the city face a hostile countryside to deal with. The best bet for some will be to head east into Wisconsin, taking their chances with the dangers that lie therein. Others (especially those with a taste for subterfuge) may disguise themselves and just walk out of the zone through the largest Coalition camps. Rumor is, three of the Circle of Twelve concealed themselves thus and broke free by commandeering a Coalition recon plane and flying to safety. They were long gone before the CS realized what had just slipped through its fingers. Still others will try going north, threading the thin line between Tolkeen's northern border and the southernmost reaches of the Xiticix Hivelands. If CS commander Jericho Holmes could bring an entire army through the Hivelands, then perhaps so can smaller groups of refugees. The trick is figuring out what Holmes did to save his units. The secret of course, is that he ordered his men to not fight at all, no matter what the Xiticix did to them. The end result was the insectoids saw no threat in them and let them go (after a good number of Coalition casualties). Tolkeenite escapees could use the same tactic. After that, all a group must do is walk all the way to the barren Dakotas and the freedom of the New West.

The Atonement or Self-Pity?

Hook: There is a rumor spreading like wildfire that King Creed is still alive and well and in the city limits of Tolkeen! For some reason, the King can not teleport or use any other kind of instant movement magicks to leave the embattled metropolis. But now that his position is coming out, the King has very little time left to live. As the heroes learn of this, Coalition units are swarming to the south-central sector of the city, where the King was rumored to be in hiding. The Coalition soldier who bags the King will also net a *one million credit* bounty from High Command. With such an incentive, Coalition units are racing against each other to get first crack at the King. So much so that any teamwork between CS units has disintegrated. Meanwhile, the few Tolkeenite units in town are also redlining it to King Creed's hiding spot so they can perform one last act of patriotism: escorting their sovereign to safety before the Coalition tears him to pieces.

Line: The reason why King Creed can not teleport out of harm's way is because he is exhausted, deeply depressed and in shock, which prevents him from recovering more than one third of his P.P.E. This happened only after he saved thousands of civilians from Tolkeen during which he was something of a fearless dynamo. However, after Tolkeen completely fell, so did the spirit and purpose the King. He realizes that it was the



hate-mongering he fostered, the dishonorable carnage and torture of the Sorcerers' Revenge and the proud celebration afterward that sealed his kingdom's fate. As the noose tightens on Creed, he is beginning to think that maybe he deserves whatever fate the Coalition subjects him to. Maybe he deserves to be captured, tortured and executed.

Sinker: The King is holed up in a large sanctum building that resembles a curious mix of fortress and library. This place

had been a major institute of learning during Tolkeen's glory days. Now it houses the King and his six remaining bodyguards. The defensive position here is not so good, and the group needs more fighters if they are to hold out once the Coalition arrives. That is where the heroes come in. Tolkeenite heroes can either stick it out with the King and try fighting off the CS, or they can get the monarch to join them on a mad dash out of the city. (G.M.s, feel free to spice things up by making the King unwilling to escape the town. Imagine what stress it will place on the heroes to try to convince the King to run!) Coalition heroes might arrive ahead of the pack and get a chance to nail the King once and for all. All that stands between them and destiny are a few measly bodyguards and the King himself. What will it be? Tolkeenites can not afford to let their King die. If he lives on, then so will the fighting spirit of the otherwise broken nation. Likewise, the Coalition can not afford to let him live or escape, since it would deprive them of a critical claim to victory.

Running with the Xiticix

Hook: To the north of the city, refugees (along with a large number of assorted Tolkeenite VIPs) have decided to take their chances and run away along the Xiticix Hivelands. After all, if General Holmes could run an entire army through the area, then a bunch of ragtag runaways from Tolkeen can do the same, right? The leaders of this group (who might be the player characters, or the characters might just be along for the ride) have figured out that the Xiticix can be dealt with just by not threatening them. If one does not make any hostile moves toward the weird buglings, then the Xiticix will not fire back. Oddly enough, it is possible to share space with the Xiticix on a temporary basis. If only Tolkeen knew this before, they might have staged military operations from the Hivelands in such a way that would not trip off the Xiticix but would make the Coalition fearful to insert their own troops to counterattack.

Line: Along the route through the Hivelands (known as the *Highway X*), the Coalition has stationed numerous Special Forces units with orders to stop the Tolkeenite refugees from escaping. Among the refugees are a lot of high-profile characters who the High Command would love to get their hands on. The trick is for the commandos to engage the Tolkeenites in such a way that does not activate the Xiticix aggressor reflex. This is for real, too. As the Tolkeenites enter the Hivelands, a swarm of Xiticix Warriors descend on the group, buzzing them closely and checking them out. A few refugees are grabbed and taken away (and presumed killed), but if the group can just keep its cool, they will get through this alive and safe.

Sinker: Sooner or later the CS commandos will have to make their move, Xiticix or not. The commander of the CS group, *Lt. Tricia Sogelvie*, has decided that if she has to pick a fight with the Xiticix in order to zero those refugees, then so be it. The Tolkeenite heroes can figure this out (what Coalition group would let them go without at least trying to capture or kill them?) and must come up with some kind of contingency plan. If the Tolkeenites can spur the Xiticix to leave or to attack the Coalition soldiers, the refugees stand an excellent chance of escape. If the Xiticix can not be scattered, then the refugees' only option might be to take whatever punishment the Coalition dishes out so the Xiticix can do their counterattacking for them.

Final Reckoning

V-Day plus three: It has been three days since the Coalition officially declared victory in Tolkeen. Although much of the capital city has regenerated from whatever damage it suffered in the fighting, the Minnesota countryside is a cratered wasteland. The massive Coalition armies that occupy it have descended like locusts on every town, village and settlement, killing anybody who resists them. While the victorious CS stops just short of committing genocide upon the vanquished Tolkeen citizenry, only half of the total population are left unmolested. The other half (picked out arbitrarily) are considered troublemakers and potential insurgents and are either executed on the spot or led away to live the rest of their lives in internment camps. CS Cyber-Docs are working overtime to attach cybernetics on anybody showing magic skill or potential. And just about every male between the ages of 14 and 80 is fitted with homing beacons so their location can be fixed any time, anywhere.

The messy first phase of civilizing Minnesota has been accomplished. Now the second and more difficult phase — colonization — must take root. Already, a veritable army of settlers from the lowest levels of Chi-Town, the 'Burbs and elsewhere are assembling for a major drive out to Minnesota, where the land is free for the taking. For the Coalition, colonizing Minnesota is imperative to keeping it locked down. There is so much magic potential in the land that it must be populated with technology-loving Coalition citizens if it is to cease being a hotbed of mystic resistance. The Propaganda Division is doing everything it can to paint a pretty picture of the conflict area, airing reports of a complete absence of Tolkeenite guerrillas, a plentitude of Coalition peacekeepers, and the promise of a new, better life for all who make the journey. As part of this PR blitz, the High Command and Emperor Prosek will make separate appearances at "morale rallies" in Tolkeen city to commemorate the conquering of the land and the expansion of the Coalition States. These rallies will be attended by the hundreds of thousands of military personnel in Tolkeen as well as any Tolkeenite who can be trusted. Security at the events will be as tight as can be, to thwart the inevitable assassination attempts Tolkeenite insurgents will make upon these top figures of the Coalition Hierarchy. In an ironic twist, part of these public appearances is to draw out remaining Tolkeenite hostiles and use them to learn where their friends are hiding. It is a risky gamble the Coalition leadership is taking, but the CS has never been one to turn down good opportunities to crush its opposition and to make a good public appearance. To do both at once is just too much of a great opportunity to turn down. And so the stage is set for the last big crisis of the Siege on Tolkeen, a bizarre opportunity for Tolkeen to kill the very leaders who orchestrated the destruction of their homeland.

Neither the High Command nor Emperor Prosek would actually expose themselves to danger if they really thought there was a chance they would get hurt. Killing any CS top brass would give Tolkeen the scrap of encouragement it needs to maintain its fighting spirit, so why take the chance? The reason why the High Command and Prosek feel there is not threat comes from a mixture of arrogance and post-victory exuberation. The simple fact is that Tolkeen's most able agents have all either died or fled. Any would-be assassins left over are rank amateurs who would never get past the security cordon surrounding

each of the rallies. Moreover, both the High Command and Prosek actually believe their own propaganda and think that the Tolkeenites who have been spared welcome their occupiers. With that kind of outlook, they see no reason why anyone would want to harm them.

But there are those with murderous intent lurking in the crowds. Some of them are not just angry civilians, but hard-bitten adventurers and mercenaries who sharpened their killing expertise in the final Siege on Tolkeen. These professionals actually stand a chance at sneaking through security and getting a chance to do the unthinkable — kill one or more of the Coalition's top leaders. Should they succeed in this, Tolkeen's assassins will strike a blow more meaningful than any of the resistance offered during the defense of Tolkeen city. They will have sent a message to the entire Coalition that Tolkeen is not defeated, and that it can strike wherever, whenever, and whoever it likes. Nobody in the Coalition is safe, not even its mightiest leaders. Tolkeen understands that even if it destroyed the entire High Command and Emperor Prosek, it would not cripple the Coalition. The leadership is too redundant, and new leaders would be appointed immediately. There would be some upheaval, of course, but in the end, the CS would continue much as it had in the past. Only then, there would be a new element in the hearts of every CS citizen, something they had never felt before. Fear.

The CS's policy of hatred stems from fear, of course, but it is a different kind of fear, a low, background kind of apprehension that inspires anger and hostility, not shakiness and dread. If Tolkeen can make the Coalition's people feel that, then the assassins will have completed their mission, which was nothing more than a blow to morale. There is the risk that any assassinations will backfire and harden the CS resolve to destroy all of its enemies, however, and the assassins should be aware of that. If any High Command member or Prosek dies, the Coalition propaganda machine will swing into action, martyr the fallen and use the incident to further demonize the enemies of the state. If anything, the public confidence in their society will increase. The assassins accept this, because they know that whatever the average civilian thinks, the average soldier will have a somewhat different view. That they might have taken Tolkeen, but they had to lose their leadership to do it. It is a lasting message for them to take wherever the Coalition will campaign next: *You might gain victory but it will always cost you dearly.*

Heads of State

Hook: The High Command has decided to make its appearance at a victory rally in the central plaza of Tolkeen, now renamed *Victory Court*. The Court is a huge, open area that can accommodate well over 100,000 people. Although security is as tight as it can be, Coalition Special Forces (responsible for the High Command's safety) fears that any Tolkeenite who wants to take a shot at the High Command will have a great opportunity to do so. They stand little chance of escaping once they strike, but for those enemies with little to no self-preservation instincts, a suicide attack might do all the damage it needs to.

Line: The High Command is positioned on an armored dais in the center of the court. The dais itself is covered by a dome of transparent Mega-Damage alloy, providing the top brass with adequate protection from snipers. The dome itself has 1,000

M.D.C. and should be able to soak up whatever damage a sneak attack can throw at the High Command. Mages who could get inside the dome can ace the commanders without difficulty, and that is what the security folks are most worried about. That, or area effect magicks that sidestep the dome's protection. Or some kind of psychic assault, or any one of a hundred different ways combat mages could defeat the measures used to strike at the High Command.

Sinker: The real defense, however, is that the High Command is not really the High Command. They are a corps of brainwashed Auto-Gs who stand in whenever the High Command makes a public appearance. Aside from viewing the dead bodies, there will be no way for this group's assailants to know that their targets are anything but the genuine article. The whole situation is a trap, though, designed to do one thing: draw out the Tolkeenites who still have the guts to assault the Coalition's top officers. Once the assault goes down, a virtual army of bodyguards will descend upon the Victory Court, locking it down and sparing no effort to apprehend the assailants. Multiple cameras will be on the body doubles during the attacks so a clear visual ID of the attackers can be made. After that, it is up to the attackers (and whatever Coalition heroes might be pursuing them) to decide what to do. Escaping the city might be easy for those with the magic means to do so, but that is not the point. They are now marked for death by the Coalition, and if they are to keep fighting the CS, they will have to live and work in areas where their mug is plastered everywhere on public enemy posters. Not a very safe way to live. On the flip side, any Coalition hero responsible for bagging the assailants will become an instant hero, decorated personally by Emperor Prosek himself. This too has its downside, since the CS heroes will now become a prime target for other Tolkeenite assassins.

Immortal, Invincible

Hook: The High Command might be afraid to appear in public, but Emperor Prosek is not. The supreme commander of the Coalition States is a fearless and shrewd individual who is basking fully in the glory of his recent victory. At long last, Tolkeen is dead, and the Coalition has proven that its course of conquest throughout North America is a feasible one. Now, after this mighty display of military power, nations with less resolve to fight (such as Lazlo) will back down before the Coalition advance. Or so Prosek thinks, anyway. The point is, Prosek currently believes the Coalition is invincible, and is that way because of the will of its people. The war in Tolkeen was not won by superior weapons or even material strength. It was won because the will of the Coalition was stronger than the will of Tolkeen. So long as the people's will remains solid and strong, then there is nothing the Coalition can not do. That is why he has orchestrated this, his most daring plot ever, one that he could not walk away from, no matter how hard he tried.

Line: Prosek's separate victory rally is at the base of the King's Tower, where he will address a huge crowd of soldiers and supporters. There, he will wear no armor, hide behind no shield, take no undue precautions. No, instead of physical protection, the Emperor employs a kind of psychological armor. Any Tolkeenite with a weapon could blow his head off, but what would that accomplish? Prosek already has an able heir in place as well as a competent High Command to orchestrate military actions well into the future. Plus, killing Prosek on live telecast would only transform him into a martyr in the eyes of the Coalition citizenry. After that, there would be nothing the people of the CS would not do to see their beloved fallen leader's vision of a purely human, purely technological North America come to be. For the peoples opposing the Coalition, the death of



Emperor Prosek might be the worst thing that could happen to them, and Prosek himself knows it. That is why he is doing it. Either way, he wins. If nobody takes a shot at him, then he will have defied an obvious danger to himself and shown to his enemies that he and his people fear no one. That the Coalition States are as immortal and invincible as its beloved leader. Of course, if Prosek dies, he wins also, since the tragedy of it will transform his current image into a godlike version of itself. It will fulfill Prosek's greatest dream, to become a force greater than any human could ever be; he would in death embody the very ideals of the Coalition and become his society's guiding spirit forever. No defeat, no decline could ever take that away. Assassinating Emperor Prosek would, in essence, turn him into a god in the eyes of his people. And there is nothing more in the world that Prosek wants than that.

Sinker: Knowing all of this, would the Tolkeenite heroes still pop the Emperor if they have a chance at it? Would they do it if it meant sure death at the hands of Coalition security? Likewise, would the Coalition heroes intervene and prevent the death of their beloved Emperor? And if the only way they could do it was to take the shot for Prosek himself, to die defending their leader, would they do it? Before the heroes are the largest decisions of their lives. Whether or not they take the unique opportunities presented to them shall remain to be seen. But whatever the result, whether Prosek lives or dies, the heroes will have participated in a critical juncture in history. They will have had the power to determine if Emperor Prosek lived or died, and all of the consequences that entails. One way or another, the heroes will have changed the world. Whether or not that becomes a choice they can live with is something that may take the rest of their lives to figure out.

And now for something completely different

By Kevin Siembieda

The characters are caught in a swirl of temporal or magic energy, or go through a dimensional Rift. When a few moments of distortion pass, they find themselves back on solid ground. They are in a small city. D-Bees are everywhere and there are mages too. Newcomers are welcomed and there is both a certain energy and innocence in the air.

A beautiful young woman in her mid-twenties stops to eyeball the group. Looking over the battle worn team and their plethora of guns and combat equipment, she muses to herself aloud. "You don't look like Coalition soldiers. And they wouldn't be so obvious to come into town all decked out like you. Mercenaries or Bounty Hunters. That's my guess." She says with confidence. "Which is it?" she asks.

If somebody in the player group responds yes, no or something else, she will respond saying something like. "Oh, well, you seem so tense and confused. You needn't worry. I'm told that Tolkeen is one of the most peaceful and enlightened places on Earth."

That's right, the group has gone back in time some 40 years into the past. The woman is herself a first time visitor, only just arrived. And it won't be her last. Erin Tarn will visit often. Yes, this is a young Erin Tarn, even more full of spirit and curiosity than she exhibits as the matriach of history and reason 40 some years in the future.

This can open up a lot of adventure opportunities with and without a young Erin Tarn.

Is the group stuck in the past?

Can they get back to the future? Do they want to?

Can they change the future? Not likely in a big way. They can not stop the war nor change the outcome, but they *might* be able to change little things, perhaps.

If desired, the player characters can enjoy the many classic storylines of the past. Such as encouraging Erin Tarn to write her books. Or perhaps saving her (or some other key figure) from certain death (suggesting that the characters were destined to come to the past and that their presence is what helped to shape the future they know).

They might even meet and inadvertently rescue somebody who will later become a villain; i.e. Emperor Karl Prosek, General Droque, Desmond Bradford, Alistair Dunscon, etc.

Of course, they can go on to adventure, explore and perhaps shape the future in the rest of this olden day Rifts Earth. When things get stale, dull or boring, the Game Master can create some event that brings them back to the future, or perhaps whatever temporal anomaly that brought them here finally, after days, weeks, months or even decades, snaps them back to moment they were whisked away!

This approach is a lot of work for the Game Master, but can be super-fun.



The Hammer of the Forge



By James M.G. Cannon

Chapter Sixteen

Crucible of Fire II

The Kreet system, hidden in one of the spindle arms of the Corkscrew galaxy, was once inhabited by a race of intelligent tree-like beings who lived in harmony with the world around them. Gifted mystics, the tree beings built their civilization utilizing biotechnology, maintaining a symbiotic relationship with their very planet. Just as that civilization began to peak and reach out to the stars, it was laid to waste. Six billion sentient lives were snuffed out in one twenty-four hour period.

The Ronan system, near the central cluster of the Anvil, was even further along than the Kreet, establishing orbital colonies on its closest satellites and preparing to explore the universe beyond its star's light. But the first Consortium starships to enter the Ronan system found only lifeless worlds and the shattered artifacts of the Ronan species.

In the Thundercloud, a ragtag fleet of battered ships migrates from system to system, a race of beings known as Zanolics at their helms. The Zanolics originated on a world that no longer appears on star charts, a world swallowed by its sun two billion years before the sun's life cycle would have driven it to nova. The Zanolics are a downtrodden people, with failing technology and little hope for the future.

These are three disparate systems in three widely separated segments of the Three Galaxies, united not because their worlds and civilizations proved vulnerable to the inexorable pull of one of the universe's greatest forces — entropy — but because their worlds and civilizations were deliberately snuffed out by the greatest scourge the Three Galaxies have ever known.

Dominators.

— preface to a lecture by Captain Hiram Starling,
Consortium Armed Forces Fleet Command

“Slowly but surely,” Siv Yurilak said sarcastically. The Noro starpilot sat at the helm of the Orion class Comet, tapping his fingers against the smooth surface of the control panel.

“Relax,” Caleb Vulcan told him sharply from his own seat at the co-pilot's chair. The Cosmo-Knight gestured at the viewing

port before them. A queue of starships lined up ahead of the Comet, each one awaiting a trip through the Svartleheim Rift. The Rift was a naturally occurring tear in time and space that operated as a major source of revenue for the Dock Alfar system, serving the entirety of the United Worlds of Warlock as a quick route to the center of the Three Galaxies. Hundreds of ships passed through the Rift daily, ferrying passengers and goods through to the other end, which opened up just light years from Phase World itself.

As a result, the space around the Comet was packed tightly with ships. A pair of Arcane Mark II patrol ships orbited the Rift, their presence a sign that the Rift itself was important enough for the loose alliance of the UWW to maintain a presence here. In counterpoint orbited the ships of the Dock Alfar themselves, which looked to Caleb's inexperienced eye like Viking longships, whose masts were replaced with domes. Brackets of oars still jutted from the ships' flanks, proud dragonheads curved up over each prow, and the whole of the ships' surface appeared to be fashioned of wood.

The Dock Alfar ships were not the most remarkable, either.

The starships of Alfheim looked more like sculptures than ships, fashioned from a substance Abbot referred to as a “wizard-glass,” a kind of enchanted crystal that the Elves could shape into a variety of designs. Weird, fluted projections were common, as were delicate looking wings, giving the Elven ships the appearance of glass insects or anemones, but some took on the appearance of whales, trees, or other natural shapes. In contrast, the Dwarven Iron Ships were narrow craft of cold black iron. Bullet shaped, the Dwarven ships were covered with metal plates, each plate covered with rivets that sealed in the enchantments of the Dwarven Rune Wizards. Weapons bristled along the ships' expanse. The Dwarven ships were clunky, blocky, and crude looking. Somehow, though, they glided through the vacuum of space with ease. The Draconid ships swooped like metallic dragons, while Naruni craft, coal black and with rounded edges, hovered quietly but menacingly, and two Flotilla class Oni starcruisers jockeyed for a spot ahead of the Naruni. Dozens of other runner and merchant craft, virtually interchangeable with the Comet itself, floated around the larger ships. Most of them would reach the Rift before the Comet, which meant that Siv, Caleb, and the rest of the crew were forced to wait. Already, hours had passed since Caleb and his friends had arrived at the Svartleheim Rift, and though a hundred starships had passed through the Rift, another hundred would make it through before the Comet got anywhere.

Yurilak sighed again, his leather jacket creaking as he leaned back in his chair. “I'm not good at patience,” the Noro admitted.

“Practice,” Caleb started to say, but he was cut off. He felt a sudden surge within his chest, and his eyes rolled back in his head as he heard a strong, feminine voice echo within his mind.

Caleb, you are needed. A vision of a small, blue-green planet appeared within Caleb's mind, complete with spatial coordinates and the fastest route to reach the world.

Caleb slumped forward in his seat, slamming his forehead against the control panel. He felt Yurilak grab his elbow and pull him into a sitting position. "What in blazes just happened?" Yurilak demanded.



Caleb shrugged, loosing himself from Yurilak's grip. "I just received a message from the Forge." He hopped up onto the upper deck of the U-shaped bridge. "Keep an eye on the Rift," Caleb told Yurilak. "I'm going to talk to Abbot."

He found the enigmatic wizard in the galley, with the rest of the crew. Doctor Abbot sat at the table, a leather-bound book in one hand and a cup of tea in the other. His fedora and trenchcoat looked rumpled, though his shadowy body, featureless but for the twin orange lights of his eyes, betrayed no sign of the weariness Abbot must have felt. Abbot was an orphan, a being believed to be unique in all the Three Galaxies. Since adolescence, Abbot had searched for his origins, but only now was he nearing the end of his quest. He had detected another Shadowbeing like himself for the first time in centuries, and had exhausted himself pinning down the Shadowbeing's current location.

Kassiopaeia Acherean, the Atlantean Undead Slayer, made dinner at the abbreviated kitchen station. Tall and beautiful, Kassy had hair the color of midnight and eyes of cobalt blue. She always left her arms bare, showcasing the arcane blue and white glyphs that were the key to her powers. Beside her stood the group's newest charge, a young woman named Arwen Griffin. Arwen appeared human-like, but the green cast to her flesh and the shock of bright blue hair on her head cast her as an alien. She too was an orphan, and her monk's cloak and tunic hinted at her isolated upbringing. Arwen had never before been

on a starship, nor had she ever cooked a meal. Kassy, a talented chef in her own right, was more than willing to show Arwen around the galley, glad for the help. Kassy looked up as Caleb entered the room, offering him a dazzling smile.

Caleb felt a twinge of guilt for not pitching in himself, but the core of energy granted him by the Cosmic Forge ensured he no longer required physical sustenance and he often found himself forgetting others ate. He made a mental note to do the dishes.

"Caleb, is something wrong?" Abbot's dry, British tones snapped Caleb back to the matters at hand. "You look like you've seen a ghost."

"Not exactly," Caleb admitted. "But I did receive a message from the Forge." Kassy stepped around the counter, wiping her hands on a towel. Arwen, serving tasting duty, looked over the rim of her spoon at the Cosmo-Knight. "There's a small world only a few light years away that is in serious trouble."

Abbot's orange eyes narrowed, his version of a frown. "I suppose Phase World can wait," he said, folding his book closed.

"Actually," Caleb said, "I can handle it myself. I'll just have to catch up to you guys when I'm done." He forced a chuckle. "Heck, I'll probably be back before the ship reaches the Rift, anyway."

Abbot blinked, but his expression didn't soften. "Nonsense, my lad. If the Forge itself thinks this world is in danger, then you shall need our help."

"Of course," Kassy agreed. "We're not going to let you fly into danger on your own."

Caleb shook his head. He couldn't pull Abbot away from his quest, not at this stage. Not when the wizard was so close. Caleb may have failed Lothar, but he was not about to fail Abbot. "The Forge asked for me. I can get out there and back in no time at all, and we won't have to lose our place in line." He paused, noting Kassy's raised eyebrow and Abbot's rapid blinking. "End of discussion."

"You've certainly absorbed some of Lothar's less endearing traits," Abbot said sharply.

Kassy cocked her head, examining Caleb closely. For a long moment, Caleb thought she would give him a lecture, but all she did was put a hand on his shoulder and say, "Hurry back."

Caleb grinned fiercely at her. Kassy understood.

"You're not serious?" Abbot asked.

Kassy turned to the wizard. "He's not an apprentice anymore, Doc. He's a Knight." She looked at Caleb again. "And he has to do what he has to do."

Maybe she understood too well. "Thanks," Caleb whispered to her. "I'll be back in no time," he told the others. Then he was gone.

* * *

A crimson bolt of light blasted through the cold void of space, and Caleb Vulcan materialized in orbit over the planet. Clad in his centurion themed metallic red armor, he surveyed the scene and noted several points of concern. A network of Naruni defense satellites orbited the planet, operating in clusters

of three. Yet all of the satellites appeared to be offline, their running lights dark and their weapon systems pointing at nothing in particular. Caleb could see small bursts of light in the planet's upper atmosphere as satellites whose orbits had decayed fell towards the planet. Strangely, those were the only lights visible, despite the fact that Caleb had arrived on the world's nightside. A planet advanced enough to run a network of defense satellites must have had cities or other technology, visible from space. But there was nothing in sight.

Caleb's eyes narrowed behind his visor. Though a relative newcomer to the Three Galaxies, Caleb felt alarm bells ringing. He took a moment to regret not asking Abbot and Kassy along, and then reached out with his cosmic awareness to see if he could sense anything strange occurring.

Nothing terribly alarming came to light. The planet had three moons, two of them larger than the third. Much larger, Caleb thought. Perhaps it was worth taking a look at the little moon. He circled the planet at top speed. His eyes automatically adjusted to the brightness of the planet's sun as he reached the dayside, so he didn't even blink as the moons came into view. The two larger ones bobbed in a high orbit, each one easily measuring about half the size of Earth's moon. Between them floated an artificial construct of some kind.

Caleb moved in for a closer look. The construct was massive, larger than any man-made object Caleb had ever seen, larger than the Statue of Liberty, spacestation Xerxes, or the city of Center on Phase World. The construct, at least, was not malfunctioning. Indeed, its surface was lit up like a Christmas tree, and as Caleb drew closer he saw cannons and missile batteries projecting all over, each of them tracking Caleb's movements. He drew to a halt, eyeing the thing and wondering what it could mean. It was stationed further away from the planet than the satellites and could presumably have been outside the range of whatever effect had put them out of commission. But something told Caleb that the construct didn't escape the problem. It was the problem.

Caleb moved closer, but just as a dozen cannons of various calibers homed in on him, he caught a bright blue light appear at the edge of his vision. Caleb backed off from the construct, and glided towards the blue light. The light solidified, materializing into a human sized figure clad in metallic blue armor. The armor was bulky and baroque, with an intricate design winding around its surface and a pair of huge horns erupting from the helm, which, though open-faced, appeared featureless.

Two Knights? Caleb thought. *I definitely should have brought Abbot and Kassy.*

The Knight saw Caleb and maneuvered to meet him. "Greetings," he said as he approached. Caleb couldn't hear him, not exactly, but the Knight's voice reached him nonetheless. The link they shared to the Cosmic Forge allowed them to communicate with one another, even through the vacuum of space. "I am Vyking," he added. "What's going on here?"

"Caleb Vulcan," Caleb introduced himself. "And I'm not exactly sure. The Forge summoned me here, but I have no idea what the trouble is. Your arrival has me more than a bit concerned, though."

"Vulcan?" Vyking asked. "Weren't you with Lothar of Motherhome?"

Caleb was about to explain when they were both distracted by a silver light. Another Knight arrived, this one nearly twice as tall as Caleb or Vyking, clad in shining silver that resembled Greek hoplite armor. Her armor was so bright that Caleb could see himself reflected in it. "Ariel," she said by way of introduction. "I'm guessing we have serious trouble."

"Our assumption as well, Titan," Vyking agreed. He opened his hand and a bar of blue light formed there, forming a metallic blue longsword.

There was something familiar about that sword, Caleb thought. The silver giantess gave him a sense of *deja vu* as well. "Was the Forge as vague with you as she was with me?" Caleb asked.

"Indeed," Ariel agreed. She looked over Caleb's shoulder, noting the massive construct near the moons. "Shivok!" she swore suddenly. Caleb whirled, his own hammer materializing within his hands. All he saw was the strange artificial moon, and beyond that, empty space.

"Do you recognize it?" Caleb asked.

"Yes," Ariel hissed. "It's a Dominator craft."

Vyking whistled low, a sound that echoed strangely in Caleb's mind. "We should wait for reinforcements, then, shouldn't we?"

"Reinforcements?" Caleb echoed. "Three Knights of the Forge aren't enough?"

"You are a rookie, aren't you?" Vyking said. "Any Dominator who isn't afflicted with a terminal illness would eat three of us for breakfast."

"Regardless," Ariel interjected. "We cannot assume the Forge has summoned more of our compatriots. There are people on the surface who will need our help."

"Unless the Dominator is still sitting pretty in his ship," Vyking pointed out.

The three of them were silent for a moment. "Then you check the ship," Caleb said. "And we'll check the surface. But we'll have to move quickly."

Vyking touched the blade of his sword to his helmet in salute. "So be it, then. Happy hunting." The blue Cosmo-Knight flew towards the Dominator ship without another word, his sword held loose but ready in his hand.

Caleb followed suit, tucking his hammer against his chest and angling towards the planet. He dropped through the atmosphere like a rock, feeling the air burst into flames at his passage and lick along the edges of his armor. A blur of silver and orange in his peripheral vision told him that Ariel was right beside him.

The two Knights burst into the lower atmosphere, their armor still smoking and sparking in places, but completely unmarked. A cloud evaporated as they flew through it, coating both of them with dew. The surface of the planet spread out beneath them, a patchwork of cultivated fields and forests, dotted here and there with tiny outposts of technology. In the distance, they could just make out the metallic hump of an arcology or city. As Caleb and Ariel buzzed low over the fields, they saw farming 'bots, grav-sleds, and other machinery lying in disarray. Fur-covered humanoids milled about in pockets, some of them injured, all of them confused and alarmed.

"The satellites were not an isolated case, it seems," Ariel said, slowing.

Caleb checked himself, matching the Titan's speed. "Those people down there need help," he pointed out.

Ariel nodded. "I'm concerned about the Dominator as well," she said. "Perhaps the ship —" she began to say, but was cut off by a flash of light from the direction of the arcology. A spiral of smoke rose into the air, black and heavy. "On the other hand," Ariel said, "maybe we should check the city."

Ariel took off at top speed, leaving a sonic boom in her wake. The furry humanoids on the ground below pointed and chattered at one another in their native tongue. Caleb offered what he hoped looked like a reassuring wave, then rocketed off after Ariel. He caught up with her as they reached the outskirts of the city. It was laid out in a spiral pattern, like a nautilus shell, and the buildings grew larger and more elaborate as the spiral tightened, eventually reaching a central tower that climbed hundreds of feet into the air. Small fires grew in pockets throughout the city where aerial craft had crashed to the earth. The natives thronged the streets, trying to force their way to safety, trying desperately to reach the outskirts of the city. Some brave souls were trying to get hydro units working to put out the fires, but as with everything else on the planet, the technology simply didn't work. None of it was operating.

Except, that is, for the huge grav-sled orbiting the city's central tower. Sitting atop the sled was a gigantic humanoid, easily thirty or forty feet tall, clad in a full suit of arcane seeming armor. Its head was large, round, and extremely pale, with stunted ears, a pug nose, and large black eyes. The giant held a wicked looking axe in its hands, a weapon that looked large even in its massive paws. The black eyes regarded the Knights as they approached, examining them coldly.

Caleb could also see some aerial craft floating through the air. Each of the tiny ships had the same arcane design as the Dominator's armor, a strange blend of futuristic and ancient looks. Some of the craft were landing on the city's streets, disgorging metallic figures that began to round up the natives and throw them inside the craft. "All this chaos to kidnap people? To what end?" Caleb asked aloud. Ariel didn't answer, instead summoning her cosmic weapon, a silver two-handed sword that was scaled for her frame. "Okay, how about this one," Caleb said, changing his tack. "How is it nothing on this planet is working except the bad guys?"

Ariel focused on Caleb at last. "A computer virus, an artifact, some strange ray? Who knows. Are you ready for battle?"

"Shouldn't we try negotiation first?" Caleb asked. Ariel laughed.

"Gnats of the Forge!" the Dominator bellowed, half rising from its sitting position on its grav-sled. "Come, taste my blade and perish in the service of your accursed master!" The axe shifted in the giant's hands. It pointed the jeweled crest at the two Knights, the heavy blade of the weapon aimed at the ground. The jewels flashed, and a scarlet beam of light flashed through the atmosphere to slam into Caleb and Ariel as they hung in the air. Caleb felt it as a warm breeze, irritating but harmless.

"A poor attempt, shivok-eater," Ariel shouted. "Let's go," she added in Caleb's direction. Without waiting for confirma-

tion, Ariel launched herself towards the Dominator, her eyes flashing with silver light. Her energy beams slammed into the Dominator, but sizzled as they struck some kind of personal force field that shimmered bright blue in response to the attack.

The Dominator laughed, a horrendous sound that grated on Caleb's nerves. He burst into his own assault in response, pulling his arm back and throwing his hammer with all the strength the Forge had given him. Caleb's hammer struck the Dominator's grav-sled with a thunderous crash, rending metal and electronics. The grav-sled vented flame and sent shards of metal falling to the ground. It tilted dangerously, alarming the Dominator who fought to keep its balance. As the sled aimed towards the ground, the hammer wrenched itself free of the frame and flew back to Caleb's welcoming hand.

As the Dominator fought to maintain control of the listing vehicle, Ariel closed in with a tremendous cry, slashing wildly with her sword. The blade skittered against the edge of the force-field, sparking blue light but unable to cut through. The Dominator lashed out with a wild swing of his axe, but Ariel was quick, and the axe cut nothing but air. But Ariel proved enough of a distraction; the grav-sled slammed into the earth with a muffled "whump." The Dominator spilled from his seat and crashed to the ground. Caleb threw his hammer in an effort to keep the Dominator off balance, but the force-field remained in place. All Caleb managed to do was create more blue sparks.

The Dominator began to get up as the grav-sled exploded in a ball of flame behind it. "Amusing," it growled. "But futile."

Caleb landed lightly on the ground, barely a hundred yards from the giant. Ariel remained in the air, sending the occasional burst of silver energy to spatter harmlessly against the Dominator's shield. Caleb surveyed the situation; the three of them were in the heart of the city, surrounded by towering skyscrapers and empty streets. Chunks of flaming grav-sled rained down upon the streets, smashing through windows and crushing stalled cars.

The Dominator rose to its feet, an even more impressive sight from Caleb's vantage. The monster was immense, towering over thirty feet high. The blade of the great axe in his hands measured ten feet in width, and it looked sharp enough and heavy enough to split Caleb in two quite easily. He reminded himself that, though the Forge kept him immune to energy attacks, he was all too vulnerable to simple, physical force.

The Dominator bellowed, gripping its axe in two hands, and slashed at Ariel. The Dominator's size didn't seem to affect its speed at all, an Ariel barely managed to evade the attack. The mass of the axe and the strength of the blow spun the Dominator around, and rather than bisect the airborne Cosmo-Knight, the Dominator's axe cut into a skyscraper, shattering stone and steel and slashing the building in half. Caleb watched in horror as the building buckled, and the masonry shattered like glass. The sky darkened as the building came crashing down. Caleb took to the air, a red bolt that circled the Dominator as the building came down upon it. Caleb heard a rumble like distant thunder, and then the skyscraper crashed down upon the giant, and the world quaked. Other buildings shuddered as well, and shards of rock and glass rained down upon the square. Dust filled the air, obscuring Caleb's vision.

He saw Ariel poised above the cloud, sword at the ready as she surveyed the damage. Caleb hefted his hammer in his hand and grimaced beneath his helm. Was the battle over before it truly began?

The dust cleared slowly, and it revealed the Dominator standing, unharmed, its force-field flickering blue light. Just beneath the roaring in his ears, Caleb heard the low, infuriating chuckle of the Dominator. Ariel shouted another alien curse and launched a whirlwind attack, her silver sword flashing and slashing again and again. Blue sparks erupted wherever she struck, but the Dominator merely stood and laughed. With one swipe of its massive fist, it knocked Ariel from the sky. She crashed to the ground with a metallic clang, but Caleb didn't see. He was already in motion, flying full speed at the Dominator. He impacted with all the force of a runaway train, and though his world turned blue and his head rang with the force of his crash, he succeeded in staggering the giant. The Dominator lurched backward two steps, crunching rubble beneath its titanic boots.

The Dominator roared with indignation. "You will pay for that, flea," it growled.

"Bring it on, fathead," Caleb shouted to ensure the monster heard him. Caleb braced himself against the Dominator's force-field with his feet and used his hammer like a sledge to wear away at the energy field. It flickered with each blow, growing less and less bright with each strike.

The Dominator shifted, trying to knock Caleb away, but the young Knight was ready and easily dodged the Dominator's clumsy attack by leaping into the air. At the same time, Caleb loosed a flash of crimson energy from his visor. Still the force-field held.

"By the Forge!" Caleb cried. "You will fall!"

"Better men than you have tried, flea," the Dominator rumbled. The axe whistled through the air, cutting dangerously close; Caleb actually felt the edge of the weapon scrape against the protective layer of armor guarding his stomach.

Caleb retreated out of the Dominator's immediate range, peppering the giant with energy blasts as he did so. The Dominator advanced, grinning and swinging its axe in lazy arcs before it. Caleb saw dark shapes appear in the sky behind the Dominator. He recognized them with a sinking feeling in his stomach. Apparently the Dominator's automated servants were through kidnaping innocents. Caleb saw a dozen cannons from as many ships train their barrels upon his small metallic red form.

Caleb forced a smile beneath his helm. He had survived a supernova, an ancient alien artifact, and a psychotic Elf with superpowers. He could handle this.

The Dominator leaned forward and the axe swept towards Caleb with preternatural speed. Caleb dodged, flying around the axe and darting towards the Dominator. The axe connected with the street, burying its head deep within the ground. Caleb slammed into the Dominator, hammer first, and once more the giant was staggered. It lost its grip on its axe and took another half-step backwards. The blue shimmer of the force-field lessened a fraction.

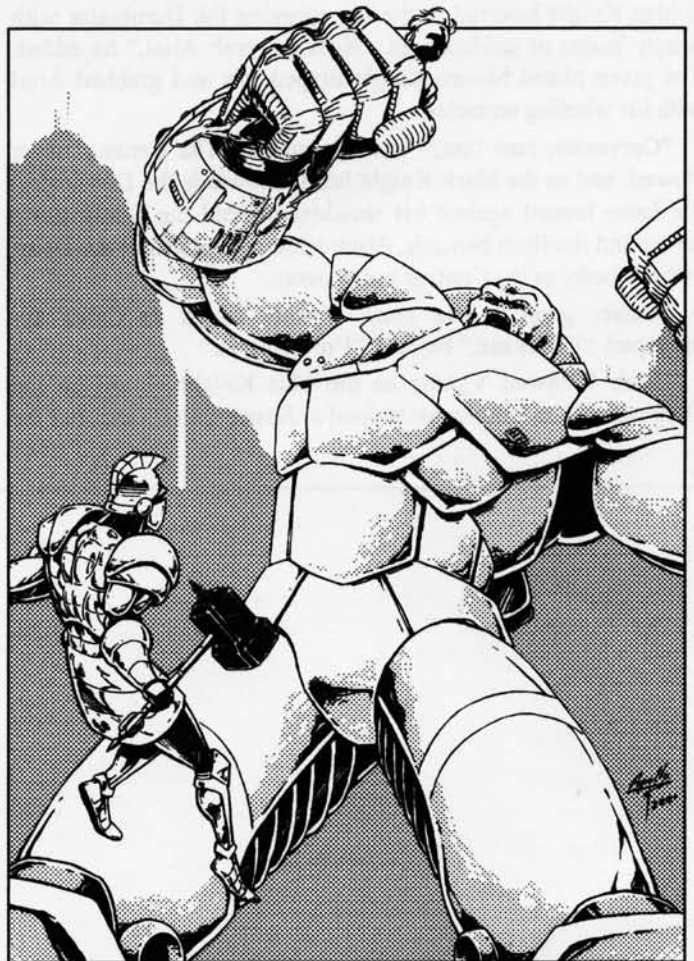
A silver flash appeared in the sky above Caleb. Ariel, recovered, rejoined the fray. She directed her attacks at the Dominator's automated craft, her Titan-sized two-handed sword slicing through engine parts, wings, and bulkheads. The smoking craft spiraled towards the ground, impacting with a sickening crunch. The Dominator roared, and the flat of the immense axe caught Caleb unawares. Caleb, hammered, felt his armor bend under

the force of the blow, and then he sailed through the air and shattered through the wall of a skyscraper, only slowing after he tore through three inner walls.

Caleb groaned and lurched to his feet, still clutching his hammer. He pressed his empty palm against the flattened forehead of his helm, wondering if he had ever been hit so hard. He couldn't recall. He didn't remember the Dominator recovering its axe, either.

The dull roar of an explosion reached him deep within the building, and reminded Caleb that he still had work to do. He took to the air once more, blasting from the ruin at top speed.

The Dominator stood in the middle of the square, surrounded by rubble and flaming ships. It held its arms aloft in triumph, one hand holding the axe proudly, while the other held Ariel tightly, squeezing the life out of her. The valiant Knight struggled, but the Dominator had her pinned. Four of the Dominator's ships remained, and the way they oriented on Caleb suggested their radar had picked him up quickly.



"Where are Kassy and Abbot when I need them?" Caleb mumbled. He tightened his grip on his hammer and prepared for the fight of his life.

One of the ships suddenly dissolved in a burst of golden light. Blue and green energy bolts found two of the others, and the last one exploded as a ray of black light pierced it. Caleb looked up, alarmed.

"Yahoo!" Vykling roared as he exploded out of the sky. Three more Cosmo-Knights flew beside him, armor glinting in the

sunlight and weapons bared menacingly. The one in gold looked human enough, and the twin pistols in his hands combined with the odd shape of his helmet made him look more like a cowboy than a Knight. The black Knight had the upper body of a man and the lower body of a horse. Sheathed in reflectionless black armor, the Centaur held a lance beneath the crook of his arm. The movement of his legs gave the impression that he ran across the sky rather than flew. The fourth Knight had a massive mouth, a cyclopean eye, and a quadrepedal body. All four of its tentacles held a double-headed battle axe which sent sickle shaped bolts of green energy at the Dominator.

The Dominator roared in surprise and anger. It threw Ariel to the ground and braced itself, gripping its massive axe in two hands. As the four Cosmo-Knights closed in, Caleb joined them, grinning beneath his ruined helmet. He added his own red energy bolts to theirs, and in moments the Dominator's force-field finally flickered and died. A stricken look appeared on the Dominator's face, its arrogant features twisting into fear.

"Jasper, keep him buttoned down," Vyking ordered. The golden Knight hovered in the air, spraying the Dominator with deadly bursts of golden light. "Kolkvet, grab Ariel," he added. The green plated Monro Knight dipped low and grabbed Ariel with his winding tentacles.

"Cervantes, ram 'em," Vyking ordered. The Centaur never slowed, and as the black Knight hurtled towards the Dominator, the lance braced against his shoulder pierced the Dominator's armor and the flesh beneath. Black ichor sprayed from the Dominator's body as the Centaur broke away.

"Caleb, good to see you," Vyking added as Caleb approached. "Cover me," he said. "I'm going in."

Caleb followed Vyking as the blue Knight closed on the Dominator. The Dominator swiped at Jasper with its axe, but the

Knight was out of range. Caleb saw Cervantes begin to turn for another assault. Kolkvet cradled Ariel in his tentacles and glided towards the roof of a nearby building.

"We're going for a one-two finish, kid," Vyking told Caleb rapidly. "Follow my lead." Vyking held his longsword out before him with both hands, forming a triangle with a deadly point. Jasper and Cervantes kept the Dominator distracted for a moment longer, just long enough for Vyking to slip in past the swinging axe. The Dominator's massive, pasty face loomed before them, its dead black eyes showing shock and fear. Vyking aimed his sword between the Dominator's eyes, and the giant couldn't move quickly enough to evade the Knight's attack. The sword pierced the white flesh, burying itself deeply. Vyking let go and skimmed the surface of the Dominator's forehead, looping up and around.

The Dominator blinked and looked cross-eyed at the tiny blue sword jammed between its eyes. Caleb screeched to a halt, swinging his body around in midair so he could plant his feet on the Dominator's cheeks. He raised his hammer over his shoulder. Stunned for a moment more, the Dominator made no move to impede him. Caleb let the hammer fall, and felt the shock travel up through his shoulders as the hammer struck the hilt of Vyking's sword. The impact drove the weapon deeper into the Dominator's skull.

The big black eyes rolled back and the Dominator fell backwards. Caleb leapt back into the air as the Dominator crashed to the earth once more, never to rise again. Vyking looped back and gave Caleb a light punch in the shoulder. "Nice job, Cal," Vyking said. "Now let's check on the survivors." Vyking flew off again, a blue blur.

Caleb looked at the corpse of the Dominator for a long moment, and then followed the other Knight.



One Chance in a Million



Part Two

By Paul Sillanpää

Most people can shake off a touch from a neural mace in a couple of minutes. Not me, though. I had some vague recollections of being dragged through the line and being thrown into the back of a police wagon. I also remember the riot raging outside for nearly an hour before a combination of tear gas and beatings re-established order. The wagon was quickly filled up then, and we were all driven down to the 53rd Precinct (Level 5) to be processed. My first clear memories started once I was inside a large holding cell along with at least fifty other people. Some looked like gang members, others appeared to be ordinary citizens. None of them looked as though they could have been in the Midnight Bazaar.

For a jail cell, it was actually quite comfortable. The walls were plain concrete and the bars didn't have a speck of rust. The

sink and toilet were clean (if Spartan) and the whole place smelled of the disinfectant that was regularly used to wash out the cells. Best of all, since all of my cell mates were innocent, they were too busy venting their outrage on the guards to assault me. Out of all the jails I'd been in, I think the holding cell in the 53rd Precinct (Level 5) was the most pleasant. If I hadn't been worried about my altered aura failing within the next few hours, I would have been quite happy.

But the clock was ticking, and in addition to several human soldiers there was a huge, snarling Dog Boy watching over us. Renewing my false aura would have been a difficult proposition at best, so I decided that it was time to make some friends. With as humble an expression as possible, I made my way to the bars and called out to the guard pacing back and forth outside.

"Excuse me officer," I said. Never mind that the man was a Private. "I was wondering, if you could tell me what's going on here?" The Spector glared at me, trying to see if I was being sarcastic. I held up my hands in supplication. "I don't mean any

disrespect, sir. It's just that I've been dragged in here and I kind of wanted to know why. Out in the street I heard a bunch of people shouting something about a mage and then I got maced. Now I'm in here and none of my cell mates have been very helpful..."

I glanced over to one of the more colourful residents in my cell and the guard followed my gaze. The man, noticing the guard's attention, gave him the finger and bellowed, "Sit on this and spin, Pig!"

The guard's lip curled up in disgust and I shrugged helplessly. "As you can see," I said. "I'm somewhat at a loss."

The guard mulled this over for a while, then sauntered over to my cell and answered. "Net Set ran a terrorist mage down in the Midnight Bazaar and he messed 'em up pretty bad. We think the club owners might have been accomplices but they managed to bail out in the confusion. So they had us sweep the area."

So the 'Borg had been warning Jack about the raid, I thought. "A mage?" I said, trying to sound surprised. "That's unbelievable. A mage here in Chi-Town? You got him though, right?"

The guard nodded proudly. "We got him alright." Never mind that Net Set had born the brunt of the damage. "Practically needed a mop and bucket to gather up his remains." I told him how relieved I was to hear that, and then, sensing that this was a source of particular pride for him, I started him talking about his job.



He went on for nearly half an hour, telling stories about his time on the force, patrols he'd run in the 'Burbs, and so on. I listened politely and when the conversation seemed in danger of dying I'd jump in with an anecdote of my own. His name was John Lowry and by the time he'd launched himself into his fourth story he and I were friends for life. I waited until I was

sure of this, then asked him, almost as an afterthought, if he knew how long before I'd be released.

"Well, they haven't started processing yet, but once that gets started it shouldn't be too long. You didn't put up any kind of fight, did you?" I shook my head and he nodded approvingly. "Right then, that's no problem. You should be out of here by seven or eight at the latest."

I glanced over at the clock. It was just after two. I tactfully hinted that maybe he could put in a good word for me and speed things along. Of course this was so I wouldn't be late for work. My family needed me. But he just shrugged, told me how he wished there was something he could do, then began telling me about the time his squad had raided a brothel in the 'Burbs where a group of Crazies had been staying. I sighed inwardly but forced myself to listen politely, just in case.

The hours ticked by and I was getting desperate. I'd just resolved myself to renewing my disguise as soon as the Dog Boy was distracted by something, when the door opened and two men walked into the holding area. One of them was a man I'd never seen before. He was wearing an expensive suit and glared at the guards with an air of arrogant defiance. The other man was Rocky.

The two men spoke for a moment with the cell block commander, who didn't seem to be too pleased with what he heard. Angry, he stomped over to the comm unit over by the guards' station. Another low conversation followed as the officer spoke to someone (his superior, I guessed). Finally he returned to Rocky and the suit, his posture as subdued as theirs were self-satisfied. Sighing, he snatched up a set of key cards from a hook by the consol and marched down the isle with Rocky in tow, stopping in front of the first cell.

Casually, Rocky stepped forward and scanned the faces inside the cell. "Those two," he snapped, pointing at two gang members. The officer grudgingly unlocked the cell and the two men stepped out, sharing grins with their simian liberator. The party moved on to the next cell.

I stood staring as the process was repeated and another prisoner was released, I knew exactly what I was seeing and I couldn't help but feel shocked. None of the men being released looked like they had been in the Bazaar that night, so I guessed they must have been local thugs who'd had the bad luck to get caught in the sweep. All that effort, all that pain and violence, and it was all being undone by a corrupt Spector somewhere who was willing to take a bribe and look the other way while the real criminals were released. It was deplorable.

It was my ticket out of there.

By this time Rocky and the suit had made it to my cell. As he stepped forward to look for his people, I leaned in close and whispered to him.

"Could use a friend," I said.

He glared at me. "I'm sure," he replied.

"If Jack's offer's still open..."

"You turned it down."

"I could make it worth his while...."

"Doubt it."

I groaned inwardly and took the plunge. "If he were to offer me his friendship, I would be eternally grateful."

Rocky nodded to the suit, then gestured at me with a flick of his wrist. "Him too." He said, and the cage door swung open and I was free.

I'd also signed my life over to Black Eye Jack.

* * *

"Ezekiel!" Anita had been waiting tables when I staggered into the Chugg an hour later. Seeing me she almost dropped her tray in surprise.

I managed a weak smile (I felt a little sympathy wouldn't be out of place, considering what I'd just been through), then slumped down in a booth next to the windows. Anita quickly finished passing out the bowls of soup from her tray before hurrying over to me.

"What happened to you?" she asked, her voice heavy with concern. "I heard about the raid on the Bazaar and I was so worried. Oh geez, look at your head. Did you get beaten up or something?" She reached out and touched the large bruise forming from where the neural mace hit me.

"Maced," I replied in my best "world weary traveller" voice. "One of the Sectors got a bit too eager with his neural mace during the riot. Jerk couldn't see I was trying to give myself up."

Anita swore. "Yeah, they get like that when something goes wrong. Uncle Freddy's always saying how they should have to do a stint in the army before they can join up. That way they'll learn what real trouble is and they won't always be going crazy every time someone flips them off. Hang on a sec, I'm going to get the first aid kit."

I looked over at Fred Holtz working over the stove, both legs and one arm made of steel. Yes, there were things much worse than an angry crowd of your own people. Anita returned with the first aid kit.

"They're saying on the news that there was a magic user there," she said, running an RMK over my bruise. As she did this she was leaning in close to me and I could feel the warmth coming off of her body. I remember thinking that I should get beaten up more often. "Is it true?" she asked.

"Yes," I replied. "There was a mage all right."

"Did they get him?" she asked hopefully.

I felt a shiver go down my spine, though I shouldn't have been surprised. Anita was after all a Coalition Citizen. "Yeah, they got him, in the end."

"Good," she said with a vehemence that made me wince. "Always popping up out of nowhere and killing people. It's about time one of those freaks got a taste of his own medicine."

"Terrorists," I muttered, and shrugged. "Who can understand them."

"I hear you," she said. "And you just know the boys upstairs are going to use this as an excuse to go burn some villages out west again." She finished with the RMK and returned it to the kit. "And then the Tolkeenites are going to send more mages and more people will get killed and... well... We'll be the ones who get hurt."

This last comment caught me by surprise. "Some might say we have a duty to stop the magic users before they get too powerful."

Anita sniffed in disgust. "Please. Daddy and Uncle Freddy have been out there and they told me the score. Half the people we're fighting only turned against us because we attacked them first."

I was dumbfounded. I'd never had her pegged as a radical. "So you don't believe what they say about magic corrupting your mind and all that?"

Anita laughed. I don't think she was ever as beautiful as she was at that moment. "They say the same thing about those all-night rant parties I go to." She settled down next to me, sitting a lot closer than usual. "Want to order some breakfast?" she asked. I nodded.

She went on talking even as we ate. "I got to agree with the government on one thing though," she said eventually. "Any magic user that comes here is trouble."

I thought about my deal with Jack and frowned inwardly. "Yeah, they're probably right on that count," I said. "So when's your next gig at Howlers?"

* * *

I spent the next few days hanging around the Chugg, playing endless games of gin rummy with Anita and her uncle, and waiting for Jack to call me and say that I was needed. They were some of the best times I'd had since I'd come to Chi-Town, and they were made all the better by the fact that they hadn't found Samantha yet.

This latest development had left me stunned. I'd warned Jack's people that their Michigan contact's pet was hiding somewhere in the access tunnels near the Bazaar, only to learn that the whole area was crawling with Sectors, Net Set, and the RCSG. And since her "owner" had died in the raid, there was nothing that could (or would) be done. For two days I was glued to the Chugg's TV set every time the news came on, waiting for the report of her death. But those two days went by and Net Set shut down their operation and left, and there still was no sign of her. The next morning Jack's people confirmed it: The sewers had been swept, and Psi-Stalkers had prowled over every inch of the club and its surrounding buildings, but Samantha had not been found.

Not long after they told me this, Jack's people called me up again and told me my services were required.

* * *

The place was a club up on Level 9. It was the kind of place that law-abiding Lofties go to when they want to slum it without risk: It looked dangerous, but a gang of beggars from Ciudad Juarez could have stripped it to its foundations in half an hour. I'd been given an expensive suit, and just over a quarter of a million credits as a stake. Walking through the door, I forced my face into the most intimidating poker mask I could manage. This was a war I was about to join, a war of luck and numbers and credits, but a war nonetheless. Reluctant mercenary that I was, it was nevertheless time to psych myself up for the coming battle. When the doorman approached me, I didn't even look at him.

"I'm here for the game," I snapped.

He seemed unfazed at first. "Game ain't open," he said. "You got an invite?"

I tossed him the card I'd been given at the doorman. He almost fumbled the catch. "Name's Chance. I'm expected."

At the name Chance, the doorman snapped to attention and motioned towards the far end of the club. "It's the door at the back, sir," he said, then added. "You have a good evening now."

I was already moving by the time he finished.

Across the room to a large steel door that was in turn guarded by a second doorman. He nodded to me and opened the door with a key on his belt. I stepped through into a small oak-paneled room dominated by a large mahogany card table in the middle. The three other players and the dealer were already seated, and as I pulled up my seat the dealer introduced me.

Boswell was on my left. He was a bright, cheerful man with an open, expressive face. Normally I would have put a man like him down as an easy mark, but he seemed completely at ease, and the way he rolled a couple of chips across his knuckles suggested that he might be more proficient than his appearance suggested. The dealer was on my immediate right, and just past him was Moore, an entrepreneur from Level 5 who stared at me with naked suspicion. Unlike Boswell, Moore looked deadly serious, and I suspected he would be a tough nut to crack. But it was the man directly across from me that I was interested in: My primary target, so to speak. A large, muscular man whose cunning features and slicked back hair had the odd effect of making him appear small and snake-like. A Lieutenant-Colonel in the Coalition armed forces and manager of dozens of illegal operations on all levels of the fortress city and the 'Burbs, he was the man who would later become known as the Prince of the Streets and was the man who robbed me the day I came here: Thaddius Lyboc.

That night's work was going to be fun.

* * *

"Lyboc is your main target," Black Eye had told me, just before I'd left for the club. "Clean out the others if you can, but make sure you take Lyboc for all he's worth."

"Take Lyboc for all he's worth, gotcha," I'd said. *What kind of yokel did they think I was?*

"That's right," Jack said.

"Do I get to know why Lyboc's the priority?" I asked.

Jack gave me a withering stare. "All you need to know is that he's the one and that I'd like it to be handled discreetly. If you do well, I'll remember it."

"Don't worry, Mr. Kavanagh," I told him confidently. "You're looking at the man who brought down the Rumble House twice in one week and lived to tell about it."

My comment was met by a blank stare. *Who's the yokel now?* I thought.

* * *

You might be thinking that just because I can manipulate the cards to show whatever I want and stack the deck just by looking at it, that the game would be over in a matter of minutes. All

I would have to do was play long enough to magically mark some of the cards, then conjure up a hand that could beat them all. Well, it's not that easy. You see, while I could beat any hand they could come up with, it's an entirely different matter to come up with a winning hand that's plausible. When there's over a million credits on the table, cheating is frowned upon, and the man who comes up with three royal flushes in a row had better be a fast runner. Then there was also the question of manipulating my distinguished opponents properly. At a glance, most of them appeared to be fairly perceptive men, so it was unlikely that they would bet all their money on a single hand. That would require some coaxing, and it is in such manipulation that we separate the professionals from the amateurs. Magic is an advantage that can easily become a crutch.

I played the first few hands very conservatively. I magically marked every card that I got a chance to see (the marks were visible only to me) and tried not to lose more than a few thousand credits. Then, once I felt that enough cards were marked, I got down to business.

Taking out Boswell was almost laughably easy. The first few hands marked him as an experienced gambler, but prone to sudden bouts of recklessness. Had the game been honest, this wouldn't have been such a bad thing, as his chaotic impulses injected an element of uncertainty into the game. But with the game rigged in my favor, he was a pigeon waiting to be plucked.

I started off by giving him a number of losses, nothing big, really, but many of them. I alternated between Moore, Lyboc and myself as to who won, in order to allay any suspicions and to keep anyone from getting too far ahead. Then, once I'd whittled away Boswell's reserves, I *arranged* for him to get a good hand, four sixes. Immediately he raised the stakes by fifty thousand, and Moore folded without missing a beat (he had nothing). Lyboc, who was showing two eights, matched Boswell and raised another forty. He was bluffing, and I didn't need the marks to know that. No one bets like that except to scare. Then it was my turn.

I anted up, then raised one hundred thousand.

It was more than half my stake right there on the table, but to meet it would take virtually everything Boswell had. The blood drained from Lyboc's face and he folded almost immediately, leaving more than ninety thousand on the table, but Boswell remained calm. He stared at me for quite some time, and I tried to read in his face the thoughts racing through his head. It was a huge sum that I'd just wagered, one that was likely to be a bluff. But if it wasn't, then he was out of the game. Sure he could have backed down and kept part of his stake, but then anybody at the table (me especially) would have the funds to muscle him out of any hand that came up. That was something he could not accept. He was the type who'd rather go out with a bang than a whimper, but he didn't want to be the first one to leave the table either. For nearly a minute he stared at me, looking for some sign as to how he should proceed, so I gave him one.

Almost imperceptibly, I blinked and shifted slightly in my seat. Most people wouldn't even have noticed, but suddenly Boswell's eyes lit up in triumph and without another moment's hesitation he pushed a pile of chips into the center of the table and laid out his four sixes.



My face still impassive, I muttered the necessary words, and let my cards fall to the table, face up. Four nines.

I've seen all kinds of people lose, and their reactions have varied from cries of outrage (coupled with the reaching for firearms) to quiet dignity, but Boswell's response surprised even me. No sooner had my cards hit the table top than he threw his head back and laughed out loud. It was a carefree kind of laugh, and as I stared at him in disbelief he picked up his last two chips (worth about a thousand credits) and added them to my pile of winnings.

"That's not necessary..." I started to say, but he simply shook his head and clasped my hand in his.

"It was a good game," he said, still smiling. Then he turned to the others. "Watch yourself around this guy, he's a shark."

He pushed his chair back from the table, I couldn't help but be impressed. It takes a man of exceptional character to be able to handle defeat that well. If it hadn't been for my employers, I would have bought him a drink after the game and talked to him for a while; he seemed to be a man after my own heart.

But business was business, and I reluctantly turned my attention back to the game. As I did, I happened to look across the table and caught a glimpse of Lyboc with his poker face down. It

was just a flicker of emotion, but I instantly recognized it for what it was: Outrage. I realized suddenly that he'd intended to drive Boswell out himself and that I'd called his bluff with my extravagant bet. For a brief moment Lyboc had let his guard down and allowed the hatred inside him to surface. I pretended not to have noticed, but inside I was smiling. He was a vindictive man, and it would be his downfall.

However, I still had to eliminate Moore, and so far he'd proved to be a very cautious gambler. He was always careful with his bets, never betting too high or low, and had a poker face made of stone. Several hands later, our respective cash levels were largely unchanged, and I was starting to worry that the duration of my magical marks might elapse before the game ended. I could have used the same trick that I'd used to clobber Boswell, but that would have looked suspicious.

Then it occurred to me; it was brutally simple, and so incredible that it could not help but be accepted. Come the next hand, I noticed a slight flutter of excitement coming from each man. Then the betting started. Lyboc raised thirty grand. Moore and I met him and Moore raised forty. At this point I feigned discomfort and backed out, saying that I'd been bluffing. Neither man paid any attention to me. Each remained focused on the other. Lyboc raised fifty grand, Moore raised it by seventy, then Lyboc

raised it by seventy five. Moore didn't hesitate to see him. It was like watching a car crash in slow motion.

Moore was showing a four, five and six of Hearts, and Lyboc was showing a nine, ten, and Jack of Spades, straight flushes each. Clearly, if Lyboc had the complete straight, then his was the better hand, but everyone knows the odds of two men coming up with such similar hands are astronomical. Therefore Moore *knew* that Lyboc *must* be bluffing. So the bets kept going up and up until Moore finally got tired of Lyboc's bluffing and pushed his entire stake onto the table, fully expecting Lyboc to back down. Lyboc gave him a cold smile, then pushed his stake into the table to match. The last cards were revealed and there was an awed silence at the table. Moore looked as though he'd just swallowed a stone and Boswell let out a low whistle (no doubt this would be a night he would talk about until his dying day). I acted appropriately surprised and no one was the wiser. After all, I'd lost fifty thousand credits on that one hand.

Lyboc was feeling good about himself, and in all honesty he had a right to. He'd knocked another player out of the game, taken nearly fifty thousand credits from me, and gone a long way to assuaging his wounded pride. I knew that now was the time to strike, and pay him back for robbing me.

From across the table I launched a full blown magical assault against my opponent and there was nothing at the table that I didn't control. At any given time I had a dozen tiny illusions running simultaneously, all the while keeping track of my marks, stacking the deck, determining what would be a plausible hand for each of us to have, and maintaining my poker face. Some people stand in awe of Shifters playing with Rifts, of Temporal Wizards folding space and time into their pockets, or Warlocks raising volcanos out of level plains, but not one of them can split their attention in twenty different directions without exploding from the strain. Humble though my craft may be, I am a master of magic.

And with this mastery, I gave us both useless hands. That's right, for nearly a dozen hands I saw to it that neither of us had more than a pair, and for a dozen hands I watched the pressure build. Of course the majority of my hands were better, but only just barely, so as to further aggravate the situation. Nothing is more infuriating to the arrogant than mediocrity.

Sometimes the difference would be little more than the cards' suit, sometimes I would bluff him with absolutely nothing. Sometimes he tried to bluff me but I always either called his bluff, or folded early. In the end the few hands I let him win couldn't alter the fact that I was slowly grinding him down. I could see that he was growing angrier by the minute, and I played to that by making the hands as telling as possible. Try to imagine how you'd feel if your opponent called your bluff, and beat your pair of threes with a pair of fours.

After fifteen minutes, Lyboc was looking a bit flushed and had loosened his tie. After thirty minutes he looked positively apoplectic. Slowly but surely, he was being nicked and dined to death, and he couldn't stand it. Not after his triumph over Moore. Once I had him good and mad, I laid the trap.

The next hand was dealt, and Lyboc almost shot out of his seat. There in his hand were three Aces and an Eight and a Seven. With trembling hands he traded in the seven and low and behold, he received another Eight (I'm not without a sense of history). It was the best hand he'd had in a long time, and I

could tell from the look on his face that he was going to make the most of it.

So I threw in my entire stake. More than eight hundred thousand credits.

Lyboc went livid as the dealer announced that if nobody could lend the Colonel the money to proceed, then we'd have to turn over our cards right then and there. There was a moment of uncomfortable silence at the table, then I magnanimously offered to front the six hundred thousand that Lyboc needed to proceed... unless he felt that was more than he could afford?

Lyboc's face crinkled with concern. To be sure, the man was rich and could probably afford to lose one and a half million credits, but that didn't mean he wanted to. I could see by his eyes that he was going to accept defeat, so I flashed the most arrogant, smarmy grin I could manage. Lyboc's pupils dilated and I was almost certain that I could hear the capillaries popping in his head. Boswell caught the look and gasped, but he knew better and kept his mouth shut. It was settled, and the colonel gave a slight nod of assent.

Three guesses as to who won that last hand.

I remained seated as my opponents and the dealer filed out. Boswell insisted on shaking my hand one more time, while Moore was trembling slightly, and looked as though he was going to be sick. Lyboc didn't even glance in my direction, he just stormed out in a black rage. Closely followed by the dealer, who was insisting that the game was not rigged. For some time afterwards all I did was shuffle the cards and spin the chips like coins across the table top. I was thoroughly exhausted now that the game was over, and gradually my body was filling up with that delicious numbness that comes from a hard day's work. Then I heard the door open behind me, and one of Jack's people (who'd been waiting outside) entered the room. His face was pale.

"One point five million," he said, shaking his head as though he still couldn't believe it. "You took him for one and a half million credits!"

I allowed myself a slight smile. "Is Mr. Kavanagh satisfied with my performance?" I asked.

"You're darned right he is," the Marketeer blurted out. "I just got off the phone with him and he said if you can keep this up your obligations will be over in a month!"

"Good," I snapped in a show of bravado. "I want to get back to some challenging work."

* * *

Bravado aside, I couldn't have been happier to hear that Jack was pleased. It meant that I wouldn't have to skip out on him. Actually, it meant that this little expedition into Chi-Town was actually going to be profitable. Make a little money, forge a few links with the Black Market (something that can always come in handy), and tweak the nose of the Coalition all at once. Now if I could just bring Anita around, things would be perfect.

Until I received my next job, I decided that this would be the subject of all my energies. So as you can imagine, I was in rare form when I glided in through the front door of the Chugging Skull. Jack had rewarded my service with a ten thousand credit advance, which I'd put to good use. I'd got a new set of clothes

(stylish, but not expensive enough to get me mugged) and picked up a little something for Anita: A beautiful gold chain that some guy had sold me from out of the trunk of his car. It was simple but elegant, and I knew she'd love it provided I gave it to her at the right time.

But no sooner had I crossed the Chugg's threshold than I stopped in my tracks and stared in surprise. The Chugging Skull, which should normally have been filled with people having lunch, was empty. Anita, who looked as though she'd gone all night without sleep, was manning the counter. From somewhere in the back came the sound of an argument, and I recognized one of the voices as being Anita's uncle.

"What going on?" I asked, approaching the counter.

Anita looked up at me with red-rimmed eyes. *Had she been crying?* "Ezekiel, where've you been? she said. "I tried to call you last night but you weren't in and... Oh god!" She came around the counter and hugged me tight. "I'm glad your finally here."

It's strange how uneasy you can get when your wishes come true. There she was with her arms around me, as vulnerable as she was ever likely to be, and all I wanted to know was: "Anita, what's wrong? What happened here?" I waved at the room around us. "I know I missed my morning performance but I really didn't think it would hurt business this badly."

She straightened up and blinked in surprise. "What? No. No, that's not it at all." She gave a weak laugh and ran her fingers through her dyed hair. "Well you see, my father and my uncle got this place by cashing in their army pension for the down payment then borrowing the rest. But because they didn't want to do anything illegal, we haven't made much of a profit. So when Dad died, we still owed a lot of money. Uncle Freddy did a lot to pay it down, and overall we've been doing okay. But then he got a call last night saying the owner sold the place to the Market to pay a gambling debt... I mean just completely out of the blue he calls and tells us it's over. There's no way we'll ever get out from under the Market! Once they get their hooks in you you're theirs forever." She shook her head hopelessly and jerked a thumb towards the back room where the argument was growing heated. "Uncle Freddy's trying to talk some sense into him."

Just then something on the grill caught fire. Anita swore and hurried over to put it out, leaving me with my mind spinning. Believe or not I hadn't drawn the conclusions that I'm sure all of you have. I was still high on my success and I actually thought that I might be able to use my connections with Jack to help. I also knew Anita'd be eternally grateful if I did. By then the fire was out and Anita had returned, muttering something about leaving her breakfast on the grill.

"You know," I began tactfully. "I might be able to help. I made a couple of friends recently and I could pull a few strings..."

She shook her head. "It all depends on whether Moore will agree to let us buy out our debts. Uncle Fredy'll sell some of his implants if he has to, but none of it will matter if Moore won't deal."

At the mention of the name *Moore* I felt my stomach turn over. She couldn't mean... "Anita... is there somewhere we can talk about this in private?"

Anita gave me a puzzled look. "Sure... as soon as Freddy's back. I have to watch the front counter..."

The voices in the back room were getting closer. Suddenly the door burst open, and in marched Moore, with Fred Holtz close behind. If Anita looked stressed, then Moore looked terrible; just one night of being in debt to Jack had left him pale and haggard, his eyes were red, and unless I was mistaken, he was wearing the same suit he'd worn to the game last night.

I casually turned away, hoping he wouldn't notice me. It didn't work. There was little enough room behind the counter and as he passed by he couldn't help but bump into me, which caused him to look up. In his state I suspect he wouldn't have recognized his own mother, but he had no trouble in recognizing me.

"You!" He shouted, stopping dead in his tracks. "What are you doing here?!"

Don't panic! I thought. *Keep your cool!* "Mr. Moore," I said, nodding politely.

I could see right away that it probably wouldn't work. Moore was apoplectic with rage as he backed me up against the counter. For a moment I thought he meant to attack me.

"You son of a..." he snarled, jabbing his finger at my chest. For a moment he just stared at me, his mouth working as he tried to find words to express his rage. In the end all he could manage was to sputter angrily and grab me by the lapels of my jacket.

Fred Holtz may not have known what was going on, but he knew that a fight was going to break out and that, at least, he could act upon. Stepping forward he clamped one huge bionic hand down on Moore's shoulder and spun the man around to face him.

"What do you think you're doing?" he snapped.

Moore's jaw fell open as he realized that he'd overstepped himself. Frantically he gestured towards me and babbled incoherently. "But... that's Chance... he's the one that did it!"

"I don't care what he did," Holtz said. "So long as this is my establishment I won't have any fighting for any reason."

Moore tried to break free of Holtz's grip. "But... the game... the bar..." he stammered.

"What are you talking about?" Holtz snapped.

Anita was looking bewildered. "You two know each other?" she asked.

I have to admit I was shaken by Moore's outburst, so Anita's question caught me off guard. "We met last night," I blurted out.

Moore exploded.

"Met last night?" he practically shrieked. "Nice way to put it! You got that right we met last night! We met last night and we played cards last night and you ripped me off!" Finally breaking free of Holtz's grip he again leveled an accusing finger at me. "You want someone to blame for me losing your restaurant? There's your man!"

As if realizing the enormity of what he'd just said, Moore had fallen silent. He, Anita and Fred Holtz just stared at me, and for once in my life I found my mind paralyzed. If I'd put on a brave face and tried to bluff my way out of it, I think I might have been able to get out of there in one piece. I could have easily put the blame on Lyboc, and perhaps even emerged as some-

thing of a hero for being the one that finally defeated him. But a shattered euphoria makes for a clouded brain, and there was something about the way Anita was looking at me that caused my brain to lock up. In retrospect it might have been better to remain silent than to say what I did.

"Hey don't blame me! You're the idiot who couldn't cover his debts!"

Holtz looked like he'd been hit in the face with a brick. "You mean he's the guy..."

Moore nodded almost proudly. "I would have cleaned them out if it hadn't been for him."

By now my mental paralysis was wearing off, and I started saying the things I should have said before. "First off," I said, raising my voice so everybody could hear. "You lost to Lyboc, not me!" At the mention of the name Lyboc another metaphorical brick struck Holtz. "Second of all, who says you would have won anyway? You were betting like an old lady all the way through the game and the only time you took a risk was when you lost your shirt!"

"What's Lyboc got to do with this?" Holtz asked, trying to keep up. Judging from the expression on his niece's face Anita was having no such trouble.

I ignored both and pressed on. "You were playing at a high stakes game against some serious heavyweights. Don't start blaming me if you weren't up for the job."

Moore wasn't backing down. "Oh yeah, and I'm supposed to believe that you were? Hah! I'm supposed to believe that it's just a coincidence that in a Black Market card game the Black Market ringer just happens to clean everybody out! I'm supposed to believe that it's normal for two people to draw straight flushes in one hand? Yeah, you were pretty good that night Chance!"

If I'd had a gun I would have killed that miserable wretch right then and there. Of all the underhanded stunts I've seen in my time, Moore's accusing me of cheating there in front of Fred and Anita was one of the worst. The fact that I'd actually been cheating was irrelevant; he had no way of knowing what I'd done. For all he knew it was Lyboc who'd rigged that particular hand.

Underhanded though it was, his last outburst had hit home. Holtz turned to stare at Moore. "Two straight flushes in one hand?" he asked incredulously.

Moore nodded. "That's what finally cleaned me out."

Fred Holtz had probably seen a lot of terrible things in his life. Obviously the implants were a dead giveaway of this, but even if he'd been without so much as a scar I would have understood the depths of his experience in the way he looked at me just then. In my days as a con artist I've found that you can learn a lot about a mark by the way they react when they realize they've been taken. Naive people always get this look of disbelief on their faces as they struggle to comprehend the enormity of what has just happened. In Holtz's face, on the other hand, there was understanding and sadness as if to say: *Oh. You're one of those people.*

Anita, unfortunately, was not so forgiving. Realization hit home and a moment later tears welled up in her eyes. "How could you?" she whispered.

"Anita, I didn't..." before I could finish she'd stepped in and slapped me hard across the face. I stood there, the side of my face stinging. I tried to speak again but before I could she'd slapped me a second time. Then, as if a dam had burst she launched herself at me, beating at me with her fists.

"You creep!" she screamed. She wasn't particularly strong, but what she lacked in strength she made up for with fury, our weeks of playful flirtation now fueling a fiery rage such that I was again driven back against the counter. I tried to catch hold of her arms, and prayed that she wouldn't remember the neural mace hanging from her belt. Before either thought could be realized, however, Fred Holtz had stepped in to break us up.

Wrapping one huge bionic arm around her waist, Holtz easily lifted his niece up off her feet and carried her over to the far side of the counter where he held her against the wall easily with one hand. "Stop it Anita," he pleaded, trying to hold her there without hurting her. "We don't need any more trouble with them right now."

Anita made one last attempt to break free of her uncle's hold, then went limp, allowing her mace to fall to the floor. Tears streamed down her face as she allowed herself to be pulled to her uncle who hugged her tightly. "It's okay, sweetie," he whispered. "We'll figure something out. We always have."

"He did it," Anita sobbed into his chest. "You know he did."

Holtz nodded. "I know, sweetie. I know."

Moore looked almost proud. "You know, Chance, you could at least have the decency to admit what you've done..."

"Mr. Moore," Holtz's voice had a sudden icy calm that sent chills down my spine. "You said that you weren't interested in letting us buy out our debts. Is that decision final?" Moore nodded cautiously. Holtz's expression hardened. "Well then allow me to say that if you don't shut up and leave my establishment right now I'm going to kick your teeth down your throat." He said it without menace, but the implied threat was clear and Moore made a hasty exit.

Holtz waited until Moore was long gone before telling Anita in a gentle voice to go wait in the office. She left without even glancing in my direction. Holtz stood staring after her, quietly flexing his cybernetic fist. I found that without the buzz of conversation as a cover I could actually hear the soft whine of the servo mechanisms for the first time ever. It was not a reassuring sound.

Finally Holtz spoke. "What happened?" he asked.

I gave up any hope of trying to persuade him. "I didn't have any choice. I was arrested outside the Bazaar and I couldn't afford to have them do a background check on me. Jack offered to get me out in exchange for rigging a game of cards. I had no idea Moore owned this place. He wasn't even the guy we were after."

Holtz mulled over this. "I believe you," he said. "You can go now. But don't ever come back."

I hurried out the front door. As I glanced back over my shoulder I saw that Holtz had already followed his niece into the back and the Chugg was empty.

* * *

I was called in to meet Jack the next day. This time the meeting was to be held his headquarters, an apartment building on Level 5 that provided all his key people with living spaces and offices from which they could direct operations.

Rocky led me to a lounge on the third floor where I was told to wait for Jack to arrive. The place was expensively decorated, but done so in a manner that was almost sickening in its lack of style. I had settled myself down into an elegant armchair that, from the looks of it, was a restored pre-Rifts antique. But this graceful piece of furniture was flanked on either side by a pair of ultra modern end tables made of steel and glass, and before me stood a coffee table made of polished stone that could have come from any age (or dimension, for that matter). At the table's center was an ornate cast-iron tray on which a variety of cigars and cigarettes had been laid out for guests.

Idly I picked up a couple of cigarettes and began running through one of my routines. I found myself thinking of Anita and Samantha, and how they'd both loved my tricks. If I hadn't been such a rational man I would have actually felt guilty about what had happened; it would have been easy. But it wasn't my fault that Net Set had driven Samantha into the sewers, and Moore would have probably lost the Chugging Skull anyway. Eventually. In fact, in Samantha's case I was probably responsible for her being alive at all, and Anita... well... she was a tough girl. She could look after herself.

At worst all I did was hasten the inevitable. Moore probably would have lost the game without my cheating.

I was so engrossed in my thoughts that I didn't notice the door open, or the half naked woman walk in. I didn't even look up until she strolled over and flopped down on the couch across from me. That was when I looked and to be honest I was impressed. She was a study in ivory, flawless skin and a magnificent shape. A perfect ten, as my old dorm-mate Bruce would say. It was all fake though. Nobody could have breasts that big and a waist that small without major surgery.

I looked into her face and was instantly disappointed. From a purely aesthetic point of view she was quite beautiful, with deep blue eyes, long blonde hair, and luscious red lips, but it was a boring face. It was the face of a person whose life's story could be fit into a pamphlet, with none of Anita's lively kindness, or Samantha's childish exuberance. Under other circumstances I doubted that we could have maintained a conversation for more than ten minutes.

Not wanting to be bothered, I dropped my gaze and went back to my routine. *Cigarette starts in right hand. Make a show of placing it in left hand, but palm it instead. Left hand closes on nothing. Tap left hand twice, say "magic words" (I just muttered these), open left hand. Low and behold, the cigarette is gone. Wait for applause. Make great show of trying to find cigarette, get flash of inspiration. Reach into ear with right hand, and retrieve palmed cigarette. Wait for applause. Use applause to retrieve second cigarette with left hand. Get mischievous look on face. Appear to reinsert cigarette into ear, but palm it in right hand. Bring left hand up to left ear, and retrieve palmed cigarette from left hand. While audience is watching left hand, right hand disposes of its cigarette. Hold up empty right hand and cigarette in left. Wait for applause.*

The blonde suddenly interrupted me with a chuckle. "Hey," she said. "That's a pretty neat trick. But there was a guy here

last week who could do way cooler stuff with these lights that flew around in the air."

"That's because he was using real magic," I replied curtly. "This is just a sleight of hand act."

The blonde seemed unperturbed. "Yeah, well, it was way cooler the way he did it," she said.

I gritted my teeth. "The fact that he was using real magic is also why Net Set killed him," I said. I switched from cigarettes to a deck of cards and started working through one of my more complex shuffling routines. *One handed cut, rifle shuffle with a waterfall finish, spread, flip, gather, and repeat.*

Apparently the blonde hadn't noticed how annoyed I was. "Yeah I saw the wizard when he gave a performance here at the house," she said. "I heard his act at the Bazaar was even better. Wish I could've seen it."

I thought of bodies charred beyond recognition by Ball Lightning. "Yeah, it was pretty unforgettable," I said.

She didn't seem to really be listening. "But I guess if I'd been at the Bazaar I would've been caught in the raid," she mused. She seemed to contemplate this downside for a moment, then declared, "That would've stunk."

"No kidding," I said dryly. *Fan deck, present single card. Wait for laughter.*

The blonde had no answer to this, and so we sat in silence for the next couple of minutes. Finally she couldn't stand it any more.

"You got a hit of Glaze?" she asked.

"I never touch the stuff," I muttered. *Go away!* I thought.

"Aw come on," she said, leaning forward and placing a hand on my thigh. "I'm only asking for something to hold me for the afternoon. You gotta have at least one hit?" She cocked her head to one side and smiled seductively at me. "I'll be your best friend..."

The cards were spread out on the table when she said it. With an almost violent motion I swept them into my hand, then gave her a look of such vehemence that she cringed.

"Listen," I said very slowly. "I am only going to say this once. I. Don't. Have. Any. Glaze. And I. Don't. Want. You. As. A. Friend." I'm not sure what I had been about to do, but it was then that I could feel magical energies surging inside me, pushing dangerously at my false aura.

The blonde had retreated to the end of the couch farthest away from me, and was visibly shaking. Seeing such vivid emotion on her once blank face made me pause in surprise. At the same time that I realized this, I noticed that I'd fanned the deck out and my hand was drawn back in a throwing position. *Just what spell was I about to cast?* I didn't want to think too hard about the answer to that question.

Quickly I squared the deck and returned it to my pocket. "Sorry," I muttered.

The blonde had no idea just how close she'd been to death, but she'd recognized my anger easily enough. "Hey, don't worry about it," she said quickly. "I get kinda edgy whenever I need a hit..."

I cut her off with a gesture. It's failed to impress me as to just how willingly such women will tolerate abuse. "No," I said firmly. "It's my fault. I've been having a bad day and I took it out

on you. I'm sorry." She seemed surprised at this, and there was a moment of awkward silence which I finally had to brake. "So why do you have to ask me for Glaze? I'd have thought there'd be plenty of it in a place like this."

She shrugged. "Bobby usually handles the details around here, but he was at the Bazaar when it was raided..." She trailed off for a moment, then blurted out, "It's not that I'm hooked, it's just that I'm bored."

"Read a book," I suggested, half seriously.

"Those things ruin your eyes!" she gasped.

I didn't feel like arguing the point. "Then watch a movie," I said. "Or listen to music. Or... what do you do here anyway?"

The blonde just shrugged her shoulders. "I guess I just party a lot with the guys. But now that the Bazaar's gone... well... Hey, can I have one of those?" she nodded towards the cigarette case.

"Sure," I said, and passed her the box. She selected a Lorenzo extra light and then, out of habit, I offered her a light using one of the matchbooks from the center of the tray. As she took a drag on the cigarette, I suddenly realized why I was so angry. It was stupid really, a completely irrational fear that couldn't possibly be realized, I told myself. Anita was a tough girl. Her uncle could chew raw iron. Even if Anita couldn't look after herself then surely Fred Holtz could keep her safe. Right?

A few years back I'd had the misfortune to spend some time in the company of a Splugorth High Lord. He was pure evil, of course, perhaps the single most malevolent creature I have ever encountered in my travels. His rule saw the commission of some of the most heinous atrocities ever witnessed, the sort of thing that would make most Marketeers faint in horror. But in a way I think I respected that monster more than I ever would respect Jack. When the High Lord butchered innocent civilians and enslaved the survivors, it was for the greater glory of the Splugorth empire. As widespread as the destruction of the old was the creation of the new. The High Lord would have killed without a second thought, but at least there was a purpose to the destruction. Jack was simply a parasite who took whatever he could and left nothing but misery in his wake.

By the time the blonde had exhaled a stream of cigarette smoke, I had decided that I would destroy Jack. It was then also that I noticed the logo on the matchbook that I held, and realized just how valuable it was.

"Are you okay?" the blonde asked.

I realized that I was grinning, and that it was probably not a very nice grin. Standing up, I walked over to her, and planted a kiss on her cheek.

She drew back in confusion and fear. "What was that for?" she asked.

"It's a secret," I said. I couldn't stop grinning.

Just then the door behind us opened and I heard Rocky's voice announce: "Mr. Kavanagh will see you now."

Forcing on my poker face, I took the blonde's hand in mine and bowed slightly. "It was a pleasure meeting you," I said. Then before she could reply I turned to follow Rocky out of the lounge, pocketing the matchbook as I went.

It's only now, years later that I realized I never asked for her name.

* * *

Having made my decision and chosen my side, I was still faced with the problem of how, exactly, I was going to stop Jack. The easiest way would have been to kill him (and before you ask; no, I am not above such things as cold-blooded murder), but that would have had the unfortunate consequence of ending my life as well. Another possibility was to try and sell him out to the police, but that was a dicey option at best as I didn't know which Spectors were on the take and which ones weren't. And at the time I had no idea as to how I could get in touch with Net Set without having to answer a lot of awkward questions. In the end I decided to go along with Jack's plans for me, and wait for an opportunity to present itself.

In the meantime, Jack's plans were moving forward, and I had received my latest marching orders. It seemed that for some time he and Lyboc had been competing with one another for control of Level 5, and Jack had decided finally to put an end to matter. His plan wasn't terribly creative, but it did have that brutal simplicity that characterized the author: Over the next several months his people would begin moving in on Lyboc's organization. It would be kept civilized for the most part (blackmail and extortion) but if things got ugly, Black Eye was more than willing to kill anyone who didn't cooperate. In the meantime various secondary operatives would launch their own assault to drain the good Colonel of his financial resources, making it that much harder for the Colonel to retaliate. Among these secondary operatives were con men, counterfeiters, fraudulent businessmen, and me. My extravagant winnings had sped up the timetable by several weeks, and Black Eye was pleased.

"A couple more jobs like that and we'll be squared," he declared, his corpse-eyes still brutally unreadable. "Right now I need you to collect on your bill. Now, he's going to try and offer you a share of one of his operations, probably the Iron Man Body Chop Shop; it's a huge operation. You turn it down..."

"...and insist on cash," I finished for him. "After all I'm supposed to be a travelling card shark who's moving on soon."

There was a slight hint of a snarl on Jack's lips. "That's right," he said, handing me a slip of paper. "These are the account numbers. The money is to be transferred there by the end of the week."

I took the slip of paper and nodded. "No problem," I told him. "I'll call you when it's done."

* * *

I met Lyboc at a very high class restaurant called Santini's up on Level 15. It's around the fifteenth level that the stories of utopia and safe havens start to come true. The police are more effective, the food and housing are better, and magic users seldom show up. To get to Santini's I had to pass by several military and policemen's clubs (including one place called the Kennel, where Dog Boys hung out), so by the time I arrived I was thoroughly nervous. However, I kept my poker face on and sat down across from Lyboc with an air of complete nonchalance. This time Lyboc was in full uniform, though somehow this only served to increase his snake-like attributes. I offered him my hand, but he refused to take it and instead stared intently at something behind me. Finally he spoke.

"Mr. Chance, you are probably the luckiest man I've ever met."

My face neutral, I nodded and shrugged slightly.

He waited a moment to see if I would add anything, then he went on. "I was going to have you killed at first, you know that?" he smiled, and I felt my skin crawl. "I was certain that you'd cheated me somehow. It wasn't until I carried out a... 'personal investigation' at the club that I could finally accept what happened. The last phase of that investigation happened just now, when you came in." He motioned towards the bar where a small, balding man waved at us. "He's a registered psychic and one of the best Aural Readers that I've ever worked with. Believe me, if he'd detected even a hint of something supernatural, we wouldn't be having this conversation."

So that was why he'd wanted to meet near the Kennel. I silently thanked every god I'd I knew of for my false aura. "So you're satisfied that I'm on the up and up," I said calmly. "I'm flattered. So I can expect payment?"

Lyboc's eyes narrowed and he seemed to grow just a little bit more tense. I could see that he wasn't happy with the way his investigation had turned out. I didn't blame him. "Well of course you know that most of my funds are tied up in various enterprises at the moment..."

"If you can't liquidate it then you shouldn't have gambled with it," I said.

His eyes flashed deadly anger at me. "Mr. Chance, let's cut to the chase. We're both men of the world here. We both know how lucrative my businesses are. Let me tell you, you're wasting your time playing poker in back rooms on Level 9. What's one and a half million credits? You could make five times as much in just six months..."

That was when I saw my salvation.

Lyboc was carrying on about his organization and the potential a man like me had within it. I had been readying myself to execute a near suicidal plan that might very well have killed me as well as Jack. By all rights I should never have survived those months I spent in Chi-Town had it not been for one lucky coincidence. The first lucky break that I was to catch in that place: I had taken a sip from a glass of water and glanced out the window, and that's when I saw her. As I mentioned, the restaurant was just down the street from a place called the Kennel, an army club for Dog Boys. Just as I glanced towards it, the front door swung open and a whole knot of them staggered out into the parking lot, all of them wearing Net Set uniforms. Within that mass of hulking mutant canines I spotted her almost immediately. A flash of tawney fur and black spots, she was no longer shrinking away timidly but lurched along with her comrades, talking freely and taking an occasional swig from a bottle that was being passed around.

It was Samantha, and she was in a Net Set uniform.

I've always prided myself on being resistant to shock. Back when I was studying in the Academy in Lazlo, I'd spent much of my free time developing my poker face. To this end, I'd asked my dorm-mate (a Techno-Wizard named Bruce) to try to scare me into flinching. Every time he succeeded, I'd buy him a drink. These attempts ranged from jumping out and yelling "Boo!" to that one night when we'd won the house championship and he rolled a homemade concussion grenade into the bathroom while I was throwing up. By the time of my expulsion (midway through my first year) I'd developed nerves of steel.

Deep down inside, some base, primitive part of me wanted to leap to my feet and yell. Or at least choke on the glass of water I'd been sipping. But on the outside I was as calm as ever.

Cutting off Lyboc with a gesture, I furrowed my brows and motioned towards the Dog Pack who at this point were sitting on the curb talking together.

"What is *that*?" I said in pretend disgust, doing my best to imitate the looks most Coalition citizens get when they see their mutant protectors. You know what I'm talking about: As though someone just waved a dead rat in their face.

Lyboc blinked in surprise at my outburst, then turned around in his seat to look at the Pack. "Her? She's one of the new Mutant Feline prototypes they cooked up at Lone Star."

"Prototypes?" I asked, my mind racing.

Lyboc nodded. "Yeah, the geeks in lab coats have been fooling around with all kinds of animals, trying to create new soldiers for the army. They just started field trials for the Felines. About two hundred of them have been placed in different branches of the service to see how they perform. The cats are supposed to be more independent, better at working without supervision. Although why that's a good thing is beyond me. Hear that they're good at recon work though, pretty good undercover operatives too."

Undercover operatives. Of course, it all made sense. That was how Net Set had found out about Jack's party. They'd had someone on the inside. And what better cover than as a D-Bee companion? Everyone knew that the Coalition would never work with anything that came out of a Rift, just as they knew that the only mutants serving in the army were mutant dogs. Her very nature would have granted her instant acceptance.

And to think I almost told her what I was.

Somewhere in the darker recesses of my Id, in that foul corner of my soul where all of my most vicious plans are hatched, an idea started to germinate. Even before it was fully formed I could see how it connected to my earlier plan I'd thought up in Jack's office, so I dove in.

Lyboc was about to launch into his recruitment pitch again when I cut him off as rudely as possible. "Look," I said in as patronizing a tone as possible. "I'm not interested in what I can make six months from now. Most of the time I don't plan out what I'm going to do six days from now. What I do know is that I'm going to leave here by Saturday, and one bird in the hand's worth two in the bush. You know what I saying?" I extracted the slip of paper Jack had given me and slid it over to the Colonel. "All the information's right there. I expect the credits to be in my account by Friday at the latest." I fished out my pack of cigarettes and lit one up. "I think neither of us wants me to sell your debts."

Lyboc had been growing increasingly angry as I spoke, but at the mention of the sale of debts his eyes suddenly focused on the book of matches that I was using to light up and his face went pale. For I was holding the matchbook that I'd taken from Jack's office, and emblazoned across the cover was the unmistakable logo of the Midnight Bazaar. He sat there for the longest time and just stared. I could almost hear the wheels turning in his head. Then realization dawned on him and his face went completely slack and unreadable, a poker face even I was envious of. Don't misunderstand me, I still think he was a colossal

jerk and my conclusions then would eventually be borne out by that disaster he caused at Newtown. But he was an intelligent man, and he knew how to read the writing on the wall. I honestly think that he would eventually have won the war against Jack without my help.

"I'm sorry Mr. Chance," he said. "I don't believe we'll be able to do business after all. I think it'd be best if you left now. While you still can."

I blinked in mock surprise. "What did you just say?"

"You heard me. Go back to Jack and tell him where he can go."

"I don't know what you're talking about," I said as unconvincingly as possible. "But I do know that it would be a very big mistake for you to not pay me..."

Lyboc motioned for the waiter. "I'm sure," he said.

Two waiters arrived and told me I'd have to leave. I was on my feet by then, livid with fake rage. "I seriously think you should reconsider..."

"Get him out of here," Lyboc said.

"Lyboc, you'd better not..." the two waiters seized me and started dragging me towards the door. "Let go of me!" I shouted. "I can walk! Lyboc you son of a... I said let go!" We were nearing the door by then, and just as I was pushed through I shouted at the top of my lungs. "You just made a big mistake, Colonel!" Then I was outside and storming off down the street.

I kept my eyes down at first. Once I was well clear of the restaurant I risked a glance at the reflection in a plate glass window. Across the street Samantha had gone rigid, her ears up and her jaw hanging open as she stared at my back. *She recognized me!* I thought gleefully. Then just as I reached the corner I saw her gaze shift to the restaurant and where only one man was wearing a Colonel's uniform. As I disappeared around the cor-

ner I saw them rise to chase after me, but by then it was too late. The moment I was out of sight I broke out into a run, and practically dove into a taxi cab that was parked nearby.

* * *

I was shaking a bit when I caught a cab at the corner and directed the driver to take me home. It's not everyday that you get to play with forces that powerful. Some of you might be wondering what good it would have done to set Net Set onto Lyboc. After all, he was a respected Colonel in the army's intelligence service; surely he would be above reproach. Well, you don't know that much about Net Set. They are fanatics, and they have incredibly broad powers when it comes to investigating supernatural disturbances. Legally any Dog Pack has the authority to enter any home at any time so long as they have "just cause." And since they are psychics, "just cause" can include anything from a recognizable magical aura emanating from the building in question to a "gut feeling" that something is wrong. This authority covers all but the highest ranking members of Coalition society: If Net Set suspects something, they *will* investigate.

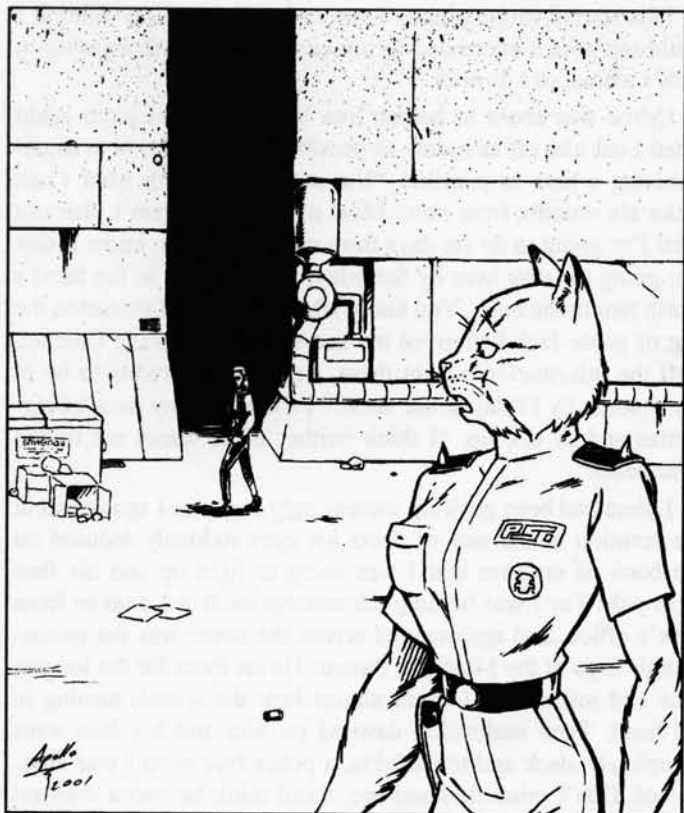
Now consider the following scenario:

1. One Ezekiel Chance is observed by a Net Set soldier in the company of a dangerous magic user.
2. Mr. Chance is observed displaying openly anti-Coalition sentiments by helping a mutant escape arrest.
3. Mr. Chance mysteriously disappears from police custody.
4. Mr. Chance is then seen meeting with a highly placed member of the Coalition military.

Given these circumstances there was only one solution: They would launch an investigation. That would in turn light a fire under Lyboc and force him to do something rash in order to protect himself. Since I was a potential proof of his illegal activities, he would have to kill me before Net Set managed to track me down. And since (according to the matchbook and my poor "attempts" at lying) I was one of Jack's men, he would have to kill Jack as a preemptive strike. Besides, he was a vindictive maniac and wouldn't want to let anyone get away with ripping him off. Needless to say, I didn't plan on dying, so I quickly made my way back to my apartment to pack my belongings.

This was where fate began conspiring against me. The Taxi I caught ended up breaking down at one of the ramps between Levels 7 and 6, blocking traffic and causing quite a scene. Not wanting to run into the police, I paid my fare and headed off on foot, hoping to catch another ride the rest of the way. However, I forgot that most mass transit services were shut off by nine in the evening down there. That's the problem with seat-of-your-pants plans: You always have unexpected loose ends to pick up.

All things considered, I made it quite far before I was forced to seek shelter. I avoided making eye contact with a couple of Motor-Headz gang members and talked my way past two junkies and a crazy man who accosted me, asking for handouts. But when I noticed a fierce looking character in a blue trench coat watching me from down the street, I decided that I'd pushed my luck as far as it would go and ducked into an all night diner to wait out the wildlife.



I didn't feel safe moving again until six a.m., but by then it was too late. When I finally rounded the corner on my street, I spotted a car parked across from my apartment building, with two dangerous looking characters inside. I ducked into a nearby doorway and studied them cautiously. There was no indication as to whether they were Black Market or some of Lyboc's boys, but they were clearly watching my building. I weighed the risks of simply walking up to them and trying to take them out with a spell, but I decided against it. Turning up the collar of my jacket I stepped out onto the sidewalk and made my way back up the street away from my building. This was not going to be easy.

Two blocks up the street stood an abandoned apartment building that had been taken over by squatters. The front door had been ripped off its hinges, then repaired with duct tape and wire. Easing it open, I stepped over the inevitable derelicts who lay slumbering in the hallway and made my way to the staircase. The first two floors didn't seem particularly promising, but on the third floor I came upon an apartment from which I could hear the wail of a baby on the other side.

A knock on the door brought a rush of activity from the other side. I heard someone approach the other side of the door, then a tentative male voice called out.

"Who is it?" he said.

"Your new best friend," I answered. "It's in your interest to open the door."

There was a moment's pause, then slowly the door opened a crack. A haggard looking man peered at me past the security chain. "Who are you?" he asked fearfully.

I held up a fifty credit chit for him to see. "I'll give you this if you let me come inside and tell you." His eyes narrowed in suspicion. He was uncertain. "Fine," I said. "I'll talk to your neighbors instead."

I turned as if to go, but before I could the man hissed at me to wait. He shut the door and I heard the scrape of the safety chain unlocking. Then the door swung open and he ushered me inside.

I tossed him the chit, then surveyed my surroundings. The apartment was actually more spacious than mine, and included four rooms and a bathroom. Had there been only one family living there I would have envied their situation. But from the looks of things there were at least three families present, including two or three individuals who might have been grandparents. A baby's wail mixed with the coughs and snores to make a cacophony of poverty. The air was heavy with the smell of sweat, soiled diapers, and untold edibles boiling in a pot by the stove. The man had locked the door behind me. He studied me with a wary but intelligent eye.

"All right," he said. "I let you in. What do you want?"

I held up a one hundred credit chit for him to see. "I want a chair, and two square feet of space next to that window over there." I pointed to a window at the far corner of the living room. "Give me that, and my privacy, and you'll get one of these every day."

The man glanced over at the window, and I saw a light come on in his eyes. "That window over there?" he said. I nodded. "The window that looks out onto the street?" Again I nodded. "This wouldn't happen to have anything to do with a those two men parked in the car down the street?"

I allowed myself a slight smile. "Why yes, it would," I said. "And to anticipate your next question, yes, those two men would pay handsomely for information about my whereabouts." A look of shock crossed his face, but I didn't give him a chance to say anything. "However, I'm not an easy man to kill. And if cornered I would put up one heck of a fight." I allowed my gaze to wander over the people around me. "I promise you, there would be a lot of... collateral damage. Now, do you want the money or not?"

The man had gone pale at the threat. But the word *money* snapped him out of it, and with barely a glance at his family for confirmation, he held out his hand and accepted the second chit. Desperation had made him vulnerable to my offer, and fear for his family would keep him from betraying me.



I dragged a chair over to the window and made myself comfortable. From my pocket I removed a deck of cards which I proceeded to shuffle, slowly and rhythmically. Within a few seconds, I began to feel the trance come over me. Five minutes later I was completely submerged, my mind only one step removed from REM sleep, just aware enough for me to pay attention to the car down the street. I knew from experience that I could maintain this state for hours on end, and that I would not need actual sleep for days. It was more than could be said for the men in the car.

If these were Lyboc's people, then they would be professionals. Probably rogue Spectors. There would be shift changes every few hours, and I would stand no chance at getting in unseen. But if these were Marketeers, they would have little if any real training. They would get bored easily and the shifts would probably be long ones. I would have a chance if they were Marketeers.

I came out of the trance three times during that day. Once to use the bathroom (really just a bucket of water in the closet), a second time to accept a bowl of what looked like porridge from

one of the squatters. It tasted like chalk. The third time was the most important one, though. That was the time when a second car parked itself behind the first one, and the original watchers drove away. I glanced at my watch, it had been more than eight hours. They were Marketeers.

By my estimate, there would be at least one more shift change before morning, so I tossed my host another hundred credit chit and told him I would be staying the night. Then I asked him if he had a spare coat I could buy. I'd planned to go in at around nine or ten in the morning. The streets would be safer then, the coat would make me look like a local, and the next shift would have had enough time to get bored. But unbeknownst to me at the time, the events that I'd set into motion were already heating up. They came to a boil at exactly six forty-three a.m.

I had been deep in my trance, my mind soothed by the rhythm of the cards and the sights and sounds of the street that by this point had become commonplace to me. But at six forty two a.m. I became aware of something out of place on the street below. As I emerged from the trance I saw a battered old convertible cruise slowly down the street. Too slowly. Something was wrong. No one drove that slowly.

Then as the convertible drew abreast of the Marketeers' car, I saw a gang member rise up from the back seat, a submachine-gun at the ready, and I understood.

There was an eruption of movement inside the Marketeers' car as the occupants realized what was happening, but it was too late. The submachine-gun shrieked as the shooter sent a stream of armor piercing ramjet rounds into the neighboring vehicle. The car windows exploded inwards and the two Marketeers convulsed horribly as they were literally torn apart by the barrage. The gang member in the passenger seat then rose up and leveled a massive shotgun at the disintegrating car. It must have been loaded with explosive rounds, because the first shot blew the passenger side door off the Marketeers' car, and the second one nearly sheared the front end of the roof off. By then the Marketeers were dead, and the driver was accelerating to get away. As he did, the shotgunner sent one last round into the ruined vehicle, this time blowing the hood open and causing the engine to burst into flames.

The entire attack had taken less than twenty seconds, and then they were gone. From somewhere behind me I heard one of the squatters shout "Crap! It's the Motor-Headz!" But by then I was already on my feet, running for the door. Halfway down the stairs I remembered that the Motor-Headz were a street gang that had close ties with one of Lyboc's businesses.

The scene on the street was one of utter chaos with local residents either running away or coming closer to investigate. They ignored me, though, and I sprinted up the street towards my apartment. As I passed the car, I saw a couple of derelicts trying frantically to strip the two bodies of their valuables before the fire under the hood got too serious. I guessed that I would have five minutes at the most before the ISS arrived.

I burst through the front doors and ran up the stairs, taking them three at a time. In the distance I could hear sirens, but I knew that there would be time. The Sectors couldn't possibly throw up a cordon in less than ten minutes, and that would be enough. It had to be. I reached the door of my apartment, and like the fool that I was spent nearly thirty seconds fumbling with

the keys. Finally I threw open the door and raced inside, only to find myself staring down the barrel of an NG-57 ion pistol.

"Mr. Chance," Rocky snarled. "So nice to see you again."

I tried to say something, tried to cast a spell, but before I could Rocky had stepped forward and smashed me across the face with the butt of his gun. Then the floor was rushing up to meet my face.

I vaguely remember hearing the car explode out on the street before I lost consciousness.

After the Bomb® Sneak Preview Part Two

One of the new features Erick has added to our little mix of mutants is what he calls the "Chimera." A *chimera* is either a genetic experiment with some seemingly unnatural or other animal ability or a *throwback*. In the latter case, that means some strange recessive gene that goes back into the animal's ancestry, such as a mutant Velociraptor from a *chicken*.

The following is one such mixed breed mutant. The Spider-Goats are a product of genetic manipulation.

Spider-Goats (Genetic Chimera)

Description: In an attempt to produce large quantities of the same incredibly strong substance found in spider webs, goats were extensively modified as early as the year 2000. At the time of the Crash, the herds of transgenetic goats numbered in the tens of thousands, and they'd been modified severely. Among the modifications were reduced size, and the ability of males to also produce the web-enriched milk. **Note:** If you think I'm making this up, try searching the web for "spider goats."

Spider-Goats have been amazingly successful in the world of *After the Bomb*, and small communities can be found anywhere in eastern North America where there are heavy forests capped with dense canopies of treetops. Easy going and humorous (they like to joke around with those who get trapped in their webs), they are a friendly, social people who believe in sharing with strangers and helping those in need.

On the other hand, those in the Empire of Humanity (along with many other humans) have a pathological hatred of Spider-Goats. Never enslaved when captured, they are usually executed immediately. Their treetop villages, when detected, are often viciously attacked with napalm or explosives. Spider-Goat player characters will inevitably have lost close relatives and friends to Empire of Humanity raids.

Special Skill: Spider Silk Processing. The main industry of the Spider-Goat communities is the production of their special 'silk' products. From early childhood they learn to test, process, spool and package different kinds of spider thread, cord and rope. At the age of eight they are taught how to identify and collect different plants, roots and minerals, and how to brew different colors and shades of dye. Later, as teenagers, they learn the techniques of dyeing and printing patterns on spider cloth material, as well as how to sew the cloth into garments. **Base Skill:** 40% + 4% per level of experience.

Size Level: 7 (Minimum 5, Maximum 9). **Build:** Short.

Mutant Changes & Costs

Total BIO-E (for Psionics, Spider Powers and Size Level Only!): 25

Attribute Bonuses: +2 M.A. +3 P.S.

Human Features

Hands: Partial Biped: Partial Speech: Partial

Looks: None. The goat-like body is covered with short, thick hair, usually white or cream colored with black, brown or red markings on the head, tail, arms and legs. The head has a long, wide muzzle with a huge black nose, eyes that are placed far apart on the sides of the head, and prominent floppy ears. Cloven hooves are found on all limbs, so the character can easily run on all fours (or all limbs, if more than four). The hooves on the feet can also be used as 'pincers' for easy climbing and grasping of bark, tree limbs, etc. The cloven hooves on the hands are flexible and are used along with a hoof-like 'thumb' sprouting from the wrist.

Natural Weapons: Cloven hooves and teeth are rather fragile and worthless as weapons.

Mutant Spider Powers:

10 BIO-E for Web Spinnerets. Concealed at the base of each hoof part is a cluster of tiny spinnerets, each capable of exuding six different kinds of spider silk. There are a maximum of eight (8) of these Web Spinneret Clusters, usually placed three to each hand, and one on each foot.

1. *Silk Binding.* Works far better than ropes, chain or conventional tape, easily binding creatures of Brute Strength of up to P.S. 22 or, if deliberately reinforced, can bind creatures of Beastly Strength of up to P.S. 30, which lasts for up to twelve (12) hours. Takes one melee round to wrap up a Size Level 4 or smaller character, and one additional melee round for each additional Size Level.

2. *Silk Armor.* Protects whatever is wrapped in the eight layers of this light, silky material from blades, bullets or arrows (no protection against impact, energy weapons or falling), with a 15 A.R. and an S.D.C. of 50, which lasts for up to twenty-four (24) hours. Takes a full minute to wrap a Size Level 4 character, with an additional minute for each additional Size Level, and two additional minutes for each Size Level beyond 14.

3. *Silk Tape.* The character can weave a super-strong band of tape, sticky on one or both sides (if one-sided, the sticky side won't stick to the non-sticky side), from 1" to 6" wide (2.5-15 cm), which can be used for repairs or glue that sticks with the equivalent of 100 S.D.C. and resistant to a Beastly Strength of up to P.S. 25, which lasts for up to forty-eight (48) hours. It takes one melee round for every square foot of tape generated, so in one melee round a character could make a 12 foot (3.7 m) long strip that's 1 inch wide, or a 2 foot (0.6 m) long strip that's 6 inches wide.

4. *Silk Structures.* The character weaves lightweight hollow structures that take on rigid, solid form, such as waterproof shells and walls, dummy characters, balls, etc., and which are A.R. 11 with 25 S.D.C. and last for up to two weeks.

5. *Silk Thread.* Weaving together hundreds of tiny strands, the character can produce incredibly tough, soft and flexible lightweight thread, cord or rope, each of which lasts for at least a year. Thread can be produced at 1 foot (0.3 m) per melee round, cord at 1 foot per minute (4 melee rounds), and rope at 1 foot every five minutes. The different kinds can be made three times as fast if the character doesn't bother making them water-

proof, but then the thread, cord or rope will fall apart when exposed to water or moisture, and even when dry, only lasts for up to a week.

Spider Silk Thread: 1,500 pound (675 kg) test and 12,000 feet (3658 m) weighs just one pound.

Spider Silk Cord: 5,000 pound (2250 kg) test and 1,000 feet (305 m) weighs just one pound.

Spider Silk Rope: 20,000 pound (9000 kg) test and 250 feet (76 m) weighs just one pound.

6. *Silk Cloth.* By far the most valuable commodity produced by the Spider-Goats, the silk cloth is as soft, sensuous and flexible as the finest silk, and has the added benefit of having a natural resistance to bullets, blades and punctures (A.R. 12, 15 S.D.C. per yard/meter). Spider-Goats can weave plain silk cloth at a rate of one square yard (3' by 3') every fifteen minutes. Weaving with a pattern takes twice as long, and with white-on-white texture takes four times as long.

While all spider silk cloth always comes out pure glistening white, Spider-Goats can change the color of the silk by dipping their Web Spinneret Clusters in different dyes.

10 BIO-E for Web Shooters. Eight (8) powered clusters of Web-Producing Spinnerets are located on the body, each capable of shooting out web material up to 30 feet away (60 feet for those located in the mouth). Usually the Web Shooters are located on the shoulders, calves, mouth and forearms, but a player character can choose to be born with them located in different places. Each of the eight Web Shooters contains 240 feet (73 m) of translucent webbing. The webbing can be released in any of the following four (4) ways:

1. *Silk Travel Line.* The character can attach one of the Web Shooters to an object and then 'play out' the line, by dropping down, moving away, or just standing still, if the object is moving away from the character. The player controls the speed of the release, just like a fisherman controls the line coming out of a reel.

2. *Silk Grapple Line—Smooth.* The line is shot out of the Web Shooter at high speed, with a small glob of sticky stuff at the end. Once stuck to the other end, the character can pull the line taut, or just reel himself towards the other end.

3. *Silk Grapple Line—Sticky.* Can be used like a smooth grapple line, but the web will be coated in a substance that will stick to just about anything, with an S.D.C. of at least 40. Also, the character can shoot it out 'loosely,' so it will drape and loop around a target. If shot at a living creature, it's almost certain to entangle them (they can Save vs Entangle), creating a binding that's resistant to Brute Strength of up to P.S. 20.

4. *Silk Webs.* The character can create a spider web, in any shape or pattern, either with smooth lines, sticky lines, or alternating lines. Smooth line webs can be constructed as bridges, platforms or sleeping hammocks. Sticky line webs can be used as traps for various creatures. Within five minutes the character can create a web capable of ensnaring and binding a creature of up to Size Level 7, with a Brute Strength of P.S. 25. Each additional fifteen minutes spent enlarging and fortifying the web can increase the maximum creature an additional two Size Levels, and another 3 points of P.S. The maximum web strength can still be broken by a Crushing Strength of P.S. 35 or more.

5 BIO-E for Web Hooks. Located at the tip of each finger and hoof part (no matter how many), as well as at the wrists, an-

kles, elbows, knees and shoulders, are tiny pincers, designed for gripping strands of webbing. Any one hook is strong enough to hold the whole character, and the character can move swiftly and acrobatically along webs. The character can even travel along sticky webs, placing the hooks in between the sticky spots.

5 BIO-E for Natural Body Armor. The Spider-Goat naturally grows a kind of white 'web-hair' that's even more resistant than Kevlar. Protects against blades, arrows and bullets, but does nothing to protect against impact damage (clubs, hammers, punches and kicks), fire or energy weapons. Confers an A.R.: 15 and +60 S.D.C.

10 BIO-E for Spider Adhesion Pads. Characters with this power are able to attach parts of their body, usually hands and feet, to any other surface. This means that the character can walk on walls or ceilings, can climb any surface effortlessly and is terrific at catching fly balls. The only limit to this power is the character's own strength. Attempting adhesion to something while carrying too heavy a load for the character's P.S. will mean that the character will fall off. Characters need to also worry about things like loose rocks and cracking plaster that may break off. A thick layer of oil or other slippery substance will prevent the character from adhering to the surface. The character will have a maximum of sixteen (16) Adhesion Pads, and it's up to the character to decide where they appear on the body.

10 BIO-E for Extra Pairs of Spider Eyes. The character has six extra eyes, for a total of eight. Each pair of eyes must be one of the following three:

1. *Normal Human Eyes.* The sight through these eyes is just like what a normal eye sees, with good perception of color and detail. Unless the eyes are 'fixed' in place, so they can't be moved separately, they can't be used in a binocular way to accurately judge distances.

2. *Limited Nightvision Eyes.* At most the eyes can see 25 feet (7.6 m), and then only in dark or very dim lighting. The eyes will be blinded by sunlight or in well-lit rooms. If corrective lenses, with tinted glass (basically prescription sunglasses) and worn, then the character can see out of the eyes during daylight conditions.

3. *Telescopic Eyes.* The eyes are designed for far vision (far sighted), can't be used for reading or detail, don't see in color, but are excellent at picking out moving objects at a distance (up to two miles/3.2 km away). Arranging a pair of telescopic eyes along with the character's main eyes gives a +2 bonus to aim with projectile weapons, and +25% accuracy when estimating distances.

While the eyes can be placed anywhere on the character's body, they have to be arranged symmetrically, so if an eye is placed on the wrist of the (upper) right arm, it will have to be matched with another eye on the left arm's wrist, or if one eye is to be placed on the back of the head, it will have to be paired with another. All the extra eyes have lids that, when closed, will keep them from being noticed.

5 BIO-E for an Extra Set of Arms. The character will have another two additional arms, identical and just below the first set. They come with no extra spinnerets, web shooters, or adhesion pads, but the character can choose to rearrange them, assigning some to the extra arms.

5 BIO-E for an Extra Set of Legs. The character has an additional set of legs, with the torso extended to compensate. Effectively the character can run at full speed on the back four legs. As with extra arms, characters can choose to place other spider organs on the extra legs.

10 BIO-E for Spider Venom Glands. Four pairs of glands located on the roof of the Spider-Goat's mouth are used to excrete different venomous chemicals. Only one kind of formula can be created every hour, with up to six doses. Since Spider-Goat teeth are pretty much worthless as weapons, the venom is usually licked on webs, knife or arrow points, or thorns used in traps. Spider-Goats mix their venom in their mouths, swishing around the chemicals until they recognize the taste of any of the following three (3) formulas:

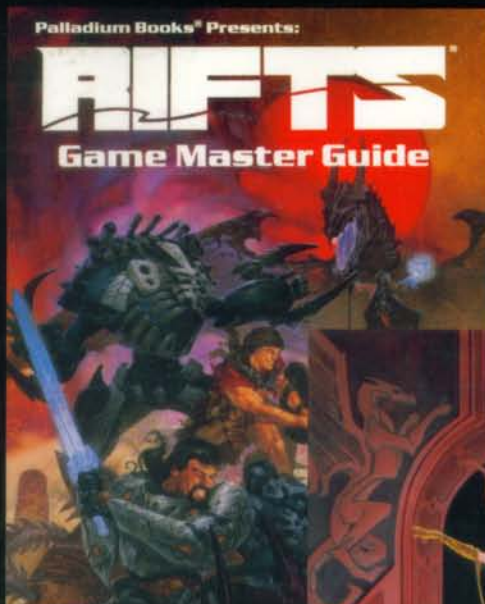
1. *Numbing Venom.* Often spread on webbing, leaves, door-knobs, or objects that the victim is likely to touch. Unprotected areas of the body, when touched by this compound, will slowly, over a full melee round, become totally numb. Once numbed, the character will be unable to feel anything with that part of the body. Affected fingers or hands will become clumsy, so characters will be -4 with any weapons or tools, and -40% on skills requiring manual dexterity. Feet or legs affected will cause victims to have trouble with maintaining their balance. A character simply won't feel any sensation of touch, including injections or cuts, made on numbed areas. Sensation will return in 4D6 minutes, first with a tingling sensation, and then normal feeling. Any successful Save vs Poison means the character will be unaffected.

2. *Paralytic Venom.* When injected into the body, via a point or a blade, victims who fail to Save vs Poison (use P.E. bonus) will be paralyzed for 2D6 Melee Rounds. Large characters have a special bonus to save, equal to their Size Level -10 (so a Size Level 16 character has an additional +6 to Save). Paralytic Venom, if ingested, is even more effective, paralyzing the victim for up to 3D6 hours. It tastes very sweet, so it's easy to slip into many foods, but once a character has tasted it once, they'll never be fooled again.

3. *Neural Venom.* This venom, which must be injected in a decent quantity (it must be delivered with at least 3 points of damage with a puncture, or 5 points of damage from a cut), directly attacks the victim's central nervous system. Victims instantly take 1D8 damage, direct to Hit Points. The first chance to Save vs Poison comes during the next Melee Round, when the character's body attempts to fight off the further effects. Each Melee Round the venom does another 1D6 of damage, direct to Hit Points, but the victim can attempt to Save vs Poison every time. If the victim fails to save three times, then he is hit with severe abdominal cramps, doubles over, and passes out. After losing consciousness, the character will continue to lose one Hit Point every minute.

Venoms only last for about twenty minutes in the air, and will be dissolved by rain, water or other liquids. If placed in a sealed, airtight container, they can keep their potency for 2D6 days.

Spider-Goat Characters with Spider Venom Glands can also attempt to mix a variety of other compounds, including beneficial pharmaceuticals, anti-bacterial drugs, sedatives, anti-toxins good for curing a variety of poisons, and pain medications. **Base Chance for Cure:** 20%+3% per level of experience.



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